

THE PSEUDO-AMPHILOCHIAN *VITA BASILII:*

AN APOCRYPHAL *LIFE* OF SAINT BASIL THE GREAT

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At a time when the scholarly world is commemorating the sixteenth-hundredth anniversary of the death of Saint Basil the Great (ob. 1st January 379), it might not be impertinent to recall to westerners that for almost a millennium the real Saint Basil was virtually unknown to a large segment of Christendom, and that in his stead was honoured a largely fictitious saint of the same name and purlieu whose supposed deeds rendered him well deserving of the popular acclaim which he widely received.

The greatness of the genuine Saint Basil is of course beyond dispute for a variety of reasons which need hardly be rehearsed in this article. In the famous encomium delivered by Gregory of Nazianzus within three years of the saint's death he is already referred to without any explanation or defence as ὁ μέγας Βασίλειος, Basil the Great, to which title Gregory seems to be able to assume universal consent. Basil's greatness was later reinforced by his association with the two other "hierarchs" in popular devotion: the above mentioned Gregory, "the Theologian" as he is known to the Orthodox, and Saint John Chrysostom; and from the tenth century his greatness served the additional purpose of distinguishing him from the once spectacular but now obscure Saint Basil-the-less.¹ There is yet another aspect of Basil's greatness which is none of his making: of Basil it is possible to know more and to know it more surely,

than it is of any other person, with the possible exception of Julian the Apostate, who lived in the first millennium A.D. The physical relics may have disappeared, but the literary remains constitute a remarkable dossier of high historical value. In ascending order of importance, the main items are as follows: first, an encomium supposedly by Ephraim the Syrian, but probably in fact the work of a contemporary Greek, as Ephraim pre-deceased Basil and it appears increasingly unlikely that the two ever met each other.² Then there is a second encomium, written by Basil's brother, Gregory of Nyssa,³ and a third one already referred to, by Gregory of Nazianzus.⁴ Of even greater importance than the encomia are Basil's own letters, of which three hundred and sixty-five have survived. Modern scholarship has made significant progress detecting the order and circumstances in which they were produced, and the authenticity of all but a few of them remains undisputed.⁵

Caesar Baronius constructed a serviceable biography of Saint Basil for the *Annales Ecclesiastici* using this material, but his work was by no means exhaustive. It was left to the Bollandists in the following century to exploit those resources to the full. For the second June volume of *Acta Sanctorum* (1698) Francis Baert composed a magisterial and by no means uncritical "synthetic" *Vita* of four hundred and fifty paragraphs, in which he contrived to incorporate most of the extant material. It is a document which may still be used with profit and remains the official *Life* of Saint Basil in the West.⁶ Yet the question inevitably arises of why, with such material to hand, it was not until comparatively recent times that anybody took the matter in hand of providing Saint Basil with a *vita*.

Apart from the fact that until the revival of Greek studies in the later middle ages this material was totally inaccessible to western scholars, there are two other answers to this question. The first is this: that whilst the authentic material yields for modern tastes a very convincing and largely satisfactory picture of Basil, particularly as Archbishop of Caesarea, it is nevertheless a picture singularly lacking in those elements which mediaeval hagiographers preferred, and, in truth, of which their work often largely consisted. The historical Basil performs no spectacular miracles, is involved in no supernatural interventions,

accomplishes no mind-boggling feats. In brief, he seems to have been almost devoid of those marks by which a saint was known, and this, incidentally, may in a large measure explain the Constantinopolitans' lack of enthusiasm for his cult.

The second answer leads us to the heart of the matter: from at least the ninth century, there already existed a *Life* which adequately supplied that which was not to be found in the authentic material, the Pseudo-Amphilochian *Vita*. It is not a strange document; there are many others like it, and in common with many other such documents, it draws freely on a common tradition. It is not so much a biography as an infancy-story and a death-story with a series of unrelated anecdotes in between. But here too it conforms to the popular genre. It claims to be the work of Amphilochius of Iconium (ob. ca. 400), but this need not detain us; here too it conforms with the genre in claiming the authority of some known contemporary or near-contemporary of the saint. Rather surprisingly, François Combefis (who edited the Greek text) tried very hard to vindicate the Amphilochian authorship of at least part of the document, but in this he only succeeded in attracting the scorn of Baert. The Bollandist re-printed Combefis' Latin translation as an appendix to his own *Vita Basilii* together with a set of notes in which he ruthlessly pointed out the anachronisms and errors of fact which render the notion of Amphilochian authorship risible.⁷

Combefis' attempt was, however, not without value; it demonstrated the likelihood that the document was not composed but probably accumulated over a period of time, as legend-cycles will. It is noticeable, for instance, that in the earlier part of the document, the stories are given a certain unity by the appearance in them of the mysterious Euboulus (of whom more later), whilst towards the end there is a group of stories alleged to have come from the mouth of Helladius, Basil's successor at Caesarea. So we may not greatly err in supposing the gradual accumulation of this legend-cycle preceding a point at which it was cast in writing more or less in its present form.

But where and when did this process take place? The language of the original gives a clue here, but a puzzling one. The language is Greek, and there is ample evidence in the document of an awareness of the Greek

hagiographical tradition of the seventh and eighth centuries, so one turns expectantly to the great metropolis of the Greek-speaking mediaeval world. The *Synaxarium Ecclesiae Constantinopolitanae*⁸ is, amongst other things, an invaluable directory to the vast mound of hagiographical writing circulating within the patriarchates of the East. It may reasonably be supposed that any legend-cycle which had gained any degree of credibility within the Empire (and even in some cases beyond its borders) would find at least an echo, and probably even a précis, within the pages of the *Synaxarium*. Yet of this Pseudo-Amphilochian there is not even the merest trace in the *Synaxarium*; on the contrary, there is only the slightest notice of Saint Basil against his death-date (1st January),⁹ which seems accurately to reflect the Greeks' apparent lack of enthusiasm for this saint in earlier times. They never, for instance, brought his bones to their capital, though this honour was certainly given to the other two "hierarchs;" John Chrysostom was brought "home" in the fifth century, Gregory "the Theologian" in the tenth, each to be interred in the Church of the Holy Apostles, where Constantine the Great and all his successors awaited the final resurrection.¹⁰

Is it then possible to discern a Greek-speaking milieu beyond the effective borders of the Empire in which an independent cult of Saint Basil might have emerged? Italy of course would seem to be the answer, and it is probably the right one. Not perhaps southern Italy, because by the annexation of the "Illyrian dioceses" to the Patriarchate of Constantinople and certain other measures taken in the second quarter of the eighth century, the Emperor Leo III probably succeeded in bringing that Greek-speaking part of Italy more firmly under Byzantine control than it had been since the time of Justinian the Great.¹¹ But if we look to Italy north of Naples, and a little later in the century, a very different picture emerges. We see an area in which the last remnants of imperial authority have been virtually eliminated, by the Lombard conquest of Ravenna (with the consequent expulsion of the Exarch) and by the Pope's transfer of his allegiance from Constantinople to Ponthieu, from the "equal-of-the-apostles" to a Frankish Mayor of the Palace-become-king.

Meanwhile, at Constantinople another emperor had arisen, Constantine V Copronymus, another iconoclast, more terrible than his father, and he

effectively declared war on the monks of the capital and the surrounding area. Many fled, most of them to Italy, especially to the area around Rome, where they were received, and began to found new convents, some of which are there to this day.¹² So from the later eighth century onwards, there were two different kinds of monachism implanted in Italy north of Naples: Latin (Benedictine) and Greek (still referred to sometimes as Basilian). They did not greatly resemble each other, but one thing they certainly had in common: a reverence for Saint Basil of Caesarea, whose *Asceticon parvum* (a conflation of the Longer and Shorter Rules) they had long known in the West in the Latin translation of Rufinus of Aquileia (ob. ca. 410).¹³ Also it can be inferred from the fact that there is a different date for the feast of Saint Basil (14th June, the alleged anniversary of his episcopal ordination) that there was already a well-established cult of that saint in the West before the Greeks arrived; as Hippolyte Delehaye pointed out, the date is often the oldest datum pertaining to any cult after the name itself. What the western monks had not got was a *vita* of the saint, no *logos* for his festival as the Greeks would say, which has the nice ambiguity of suggesting both a narrative and an apologia.

It is doubtful whether the Greek monks were in any position to provide any authentic data even if that would have been acceptable; "Pseudo-Amphilochius" claims in his opening paragraph that the object of his exercise is to supplement the three *encomia*, and he goes on to name their authors correctly, so he obviously knew of their existence.¹⁴ But, as Baert relentlessly points out in his notes, it is doubtful whether he had actually read them. If he had, then when faced with a conflict between their statements and those of the legend-cycle he had to hand, he preferred his own material over theirs. Of the *Letters* there is no suggestion that he was even aware of their existence.

So somewhere perhaps around 800, plus or minus twenty-five years, "Pseudo-Amphilochius" gathered the extant Basil legends into a conventional *vita*-form. On the whole, he succeeded in assembling a collection of stories which are of more and, in two cases, much more than ordinary interest, and it must be added that he gave his work an allure which would have eluded a mere hack writer. He also presented us with some curious

instances of the influence of Latin practices on Greek thought, which will be noted below. If that were all there was to be said for his work, it would not be very much, for it never made much of an impression on the Greek-speaking world. But there is much more to say.

Towards the end of the ninth century, the Pseudo-Amphilochian cycle was accorded a privilege which very few documents indeed, and even fewer hagiographical documents, received in those dark ages: it was translated into Latin. Exactly who the translator was is not clear; probably Ursus, subdeacon of the Roman Church, or it may have been the great Librarian Anastasius, the translator of Theophanes, or they may have worked on it together. Certainly the translation was made at Rome, probably before 886.¹⁵ Which meant that it was now injected into the blood-stream of the western Church which, unlike the eastern Church, was largely denied access to those documents which might have cast doubt on the statements of Pseudo-Amphilochius. Disseminated from the nerve-centre of the West and commended by its own liveliness, it circulated unchallenged and unchecked as the authentic *Life* of Saint Basil, and it did so for a surprisingly long time, and over a very wide area. (It should be added that though the West knew none of the biographical *Basiliana*, both the *Rules* and the *Hexameron* -- Bede had access to a Latin translation of this last work¹⁶ -- were widely known, and this too must have stimulated interest in the Pseudo-Amphilochian *Vita*.)

As the Middle Ages advanced, evidence of the influence of the Pseudo-Amphilochian *Vita* began to appear in some unexpected and widely distributed areas. It would be tedious to list them all; let three of the more striking examples suffice. About the year 1000 Hroswitha, a lady who lived the monastic life at Gandersheim, took one of the more colourful stories of the cycle (*De Iuvene qui Christum Negaverat*) and turned it into quite passable Latin verse as a present to her abbess, Gerberga.¹⁷ A quarter of a millennium later we find Vincent of Beauvais (ob. ca. 1264) summarizing whole sections of the cycle in his great *Speculum Historiale*.¹⁸ A little later in the same century Jacobus de Voragine (1230-1298) included a truncated form of the cycle in his *Legenda Aurea*,¹⁹ which almost certainly indicates that it had already reached wide circulation in the *Legendae*. It undoubtedly means also that it was disseminated almost

throughout the Latin-speaking world, and then beyond it when popular versions of the *Legend* began to appear, such as Caxton's translation and edition (1483).²⁰ When Heribert Rosweyde published what he believed to be the complete version of Ursus' Latin translation in his epoch-making *Vitae Patrum* (Antwerp 1615),²¹ many who read it must have felt that they were having an old friend returned to them. But before the century was out, Baert the Bollandist would have dealt it such a blow that it would lie in the dust from his day to ours; a nice illustration of the axiom that saints are made in Rome and unmade in Brussels.

Now to the heart of the matter: what does the Pseudo-Amphilochius have to say, and what is its interest? As previously indicated, he presents us with a series of episodes in each of which the great Saint Basil takes some part, though not always the leading role. There is a colourful medley of participants, some of them "historical" personages (including two emperors, Julian and Valens) many, though not all, of whom are carefully named. There are women, rather more of them than would be expected, perhaps, clergy, youths, officials, but, rather surprisingly, no monks. They form as motley a company as Chaucer's pilgrims, though the characters are nowhere nearly so well delineated. At least in one instance there is a character who seems to be a pure figment of the hagiographer's imagination, which is rather surprising because on the whole hagiographers do not tend to be particularly imaginative; it is that Euboulus already mentioned above.²² Basil first met him during his fifteen-year studenthood at Athens where he was supposedly one of the professors. Basil studied under him, became friends with him, and converted him from paganism to Christianity. From that point on the two became inseparable companions, although, as previously noted, there is no mention of that person elsewhere. Together they set off on pilgrimage to Jerusalem, and on the way they meet with an experience typical of the episodes in this cycle, except that for once it contains no miraculous element.²³

The friends come to an inn at Antioch, and there they fall into conversation with the innkeeper's son, whose name is Philoxenus, presumably a reference to his father's trade. The boy is a student under the great Libanius (who has formerly been mentioned as working in Athens), and from the great sophist he has an assignment which is beyond his capabilities,

some Homeric verses to explicate. Basil and Euboulus take the matter in hand. For some reason, the solution to the problem is written out three times. This is the first of many occurrences of the use of writing in these stories, an indication that, if nothing else, Pseudo-Amphilochius knew that Basil had lived in an age more literate than his own. The solution is delivered to Libanius, who immediately recognizes the hand of genius. Basil and Euboulus are invited to the sophist's home and to remain as part of his scholarly company, but they politely move on.²⁴

At Jerusalem both friends are baptized in the Jordan by the bishop, but as Basil comes up from the stream, a dove is seen to descend on him; the dove, in various forms, is a repeated element in this cycle, or, rather, in the earlier part of it. Passing back through Antioch, where Basil is made deacon and composes his commentary on the Book of Proverbs, the friends go directly to Caesarea.²⁵ Here is a most surprising lacuna. In general, the outline of Basil's career has been correct so far, and the chronology (if that is not too strong a word for the vague mention of a number of years here and a few months there) is not overtly irreconcilable with the *genuina*. But the complete omission of any reference whatsoever to Basil's retreat to the banks of the Iris, surely the most important stage of his life in terms of writing and of his experience of the monastic life, throws all into confusion, and here we definitely part company with the "real" Basil. The "apocryphal" Basil, together with the faithful Euboulus, is met at the gates of Caesarea by the bishop, Leontius. In fact this would have been rather difficult for the "real" Basil, as Bishop Leontius of Caesarea had been martyred by Licinius before Basil was even born;²⁶ Eusebius is the name which ought to have been written here. Leontius, however, (for we are telling Pseudo-Amphilochius' story) immediately recognizes in Basil his successor on the episcopal throne of that city, so he and Euboulus are taken into the episcopal *familia* as counsellors. Shortly afterwards, Leontius goes to his eternal reward, and Basil duly succeeds him.²⁷

There follow two stories of Basil's first celebration of the Eucharist, in which it appears that he actually composed extempore, though at the prompting of the Holy Spirit, and also wrote down at the same time the text of what was later to be known as the Liturgy of Saint Basil.

Both stories show an interest in the eucharistic species which is typical rather of the western than of the eastern Church. The first story tells how Basil divided the consecrated bread into three parts: one he consumed; the second he laid aside to be buried with him at his death; the third he set inside a golden dove which he caused to be hung above the altar (again, the dove; this one was immediately re-fashioned in pure gold).²⁸

At this same liturgy, a Jew had insinuated himself in the congregation, anxious to see the sacramental species. When the people went forward to receive communion, he went forward too, and as the new bishop approached him, the Jew saw as it were "an infant with limbs" in his hands perhaps, though the Greek is ambiguous: βρέφος μελιζόμενον could just as well mean "an infant cut up in pieces." The Latin translations opt for the latter alternative.²⁹ The Jew conveyed each of the species back home with him secretly (which seems to imply that the second interpretation of βρέφος μελιζόμενον is preferable in the context) and showed them to his wife. So great an impression did this make on the Jewish couple that both presented themselves to the new bishop next morning requesting baptism into the Christian faith.³⁰ Pascasius Radbertus knew this as a story about Saint Basil, for he inserted it in his famous *Liber de Corpore et Sanguine Domine*.³¹ Pascasius died at Corbie ca. 860, and the book in question had appeared well before then, in two editions: 831 and 844. There are three possible conclusions to be drawn from these data. Either the Pseudo-Amphilochius must have been translated into Latin and gone into circulation in the West, at least in part,³² some decades earlier than suggested above; or Pascasius must have had direct access to the Greek text, or part thereof; or perhaps the story in question was not brought from the East by the Greeks at all but was learnt from the Latin devotees of Saint Basil on their arrival in Italy. This last alternative probably has to be set aside, for although the story is much more in line with western than with eastern thinking about the Eucharist, there is at least one instance of a similar story having circulated in the East.³³ As far as the first alternative is concerned, until a complete investigation of the MS tradition of both the Latin and Greek texts of Pseudo-Amphilochius has been made and a definite time of translation established, it must remain a possibility. The second alternative is, however, probably the

most likely. That Pascasius had before him the text of the story (in one language or the other) is beyond doubt when his words and those of Pseudo-Amphilochius are set side by side. He certainly does not follow Ursus' Latin text verbatim, however, and there is one rather clear indication that he was making his own independent translation of the Greek, Pascasius being one of the very few ninth-century scholars who could read Greek. It turns upon his treatment of the word μελιζόμενον, which he does not render "membratim," *pace* Ursus/Anastasius and Combefis, but by a periphrasis which contrives to preserve something of the ambiguity of the Greek: "vidit infantem partiri in manibus Basilii." Precisely the same words occur in the narration of the identical anecdote in a tract formerly attributed to Thomas Aquinas, and certainly one which was closely associated with his circle.³⁴ This is not the only indication that by the thirteenth century the story was becoming widely known, for it has left its mark on a very different kind of writing. Muriel Whitaker has recently drawn attention to two instances in which its influence might be detected, though both Saint Basil and the Jew have fallen by the way-side. These are to be found in the thirteenth-century *La Queste del Saint Graal* and they show a remarkable affinity with this story. Both concern visions which are seen during mass, at the time of the elevation; one of "three men, two of whom were placing the youngest in the hands of the priest who raised him aloft as though he were showing him to the people," the other of "a figure like to a child . . . and he entered into the bread, which quite distinctly took on human form before the eyes of those assembled there."³⁵ It would be a worthwhile undertaking to enquire into the extent to which this image was disseminated in the Grail literature by *La Queste*.

On another occasion Basil was celebrating the liturgy, and when he came to the elevation (which in eastern usage occurs not at the "words of institution," but a little later at the words τὰ σὰ ἐκ τῶν σῶν in close association with the *epiklêsis* or invocation of the Holy Spirit) he noted that the golden dove suspended over the altar did not move in the accustomed manner. Turning round, he noted that one of the deacons whose duty it was to keep his fan moving did not have his mind on his work, for his eyes were on a woman in the gallery. Basil's reaction,

rather illogically, was to have the women's gallery curtained off and punishments prescribed for any woman who was bold enough to peep out of the curtain during service-time.³⁶

There was a long tradition in Byzantine circles, dating back to the fourth-century ecclesiastical historian Sozomen, that the news of the death of the Emperor Julian the Apostate in Persia on 26th June 363 was supernaturally communicated to certain holy persons before the messengers arrived.³⁷ In a source used both by John Malalas and by the author of the *Chronicon Paschale*³⁸ the holy man is identified as Basil, Bishop of Caesarea (seven years too early), and the means of the Apostate's slaying is described: one of the heavenly host, a mysterious "Saint Mercury," was dispatched by the Deity to perform the task. This story appears in the Pseudo-Amphilochian cycle, much worked over and expanded; it says that Julian passed through Caesarea on his way to Persia, entering into a spirited altercation with the bishop and threatening terrible things on his successful return from the war. Basil gave himself to prayer and saw in a vision the celestial court, presided over not by the Divinity but by the Holy Mother, who dispatched Mercury and for good measure handed Basil a book which, it appears, was none other than the famous *Hexaemeron*. When Basil awoke, he sent the faithful Euboulus to the chapel of Saint Mercury, and it was discovered that the saint's weapons which normally hung there were missing. Basil, therefore, felt free publicly to announce that Julian was dead, and a service of thanksgiving was held.³⁹ There is no better example of the way in which the Pseudo-Amphilochius felt free to develop pre-existent material according to his own tastes.

The stories mentioned so far have all been from the earlier part of the cycle, the "Euboulus" group of stories. As previously mentioned, the later part of the cycle consists of stories attributed to Helladius, one of Basil's intimates and his successor on the throne of Caesarea. The first of these, which in some ways is the most interesting story in the whole cycle, is the story which Hroswitha versified for her abbess. The *dramatis personae* are Proterius, a pious senator of Caesarea, his daughter, and one of his inferior servants. Proterius wants to make his daughter a nun as an offering to the Lord, and she appears to be not unwilling. The servant, however, is desperately in love with his master's daughter,

though the inequality of their stations offers him no hope of realizing his desires. He therefore consults certain magicians (φάρμακοι) who bring him into contact with the devil. The boy may have his desire, says the devil, in return for his abnegation of the Christian faith, which must be executed in his own handwriting (once again, the use of writing; are we to assume that the servant was a *notarios*?). The instrument of abnegation was prepared and delivered. At once the maiden began to swoon with passion for the servant and to declare that she would die if she could not have him. The outraged but loving father had to give in, so the morganatic marriage took place. But they did not all live happily ever after. People soon began to notice that the new husband did not go to church, or if he did, he never received the sacraments. Under questioning, he confessed all to the wife whom he truly loved. Together they went to Saint Basil, who by imprisoning and half starving the young man with much praying ("this sort goeth not out but by fasting and by prayer"), appears to have loosened the devil's hold over him. Then a great open-air service of intercession was held at which all the people lifted up their hands, and eventually the incriminating document fluttered down into Basil's hands, to be destroyed. Whether or not the servant was allowed to keep his wife we are not told.⁴⁰

The importance of this story *De Iuvene qui Christum Negaverat* is that it may have provided the West with the embryo from which the Faust legend was subsequently to develop. This hypothesis has been plausibly argued elsewhere, and need not concern us here.⁴¹ It should, however, be observed that this was no original creation of the Pseudo-Amphilochius. There has survived a much longer and more dramatic story which in basic outline is very similar to this one concerning a Saint Mary of Antioch, of whom nothing else is known. The lover in this case is an affluent Antiochene named Anthemius, who also gives a written abnegation to the devil in order to achieve his ends. But Anthemius does not succeed either in gaining the woman or in repossessing his denial. She enters a convent, and he, not before having vainly sought the intercession of a revered bishop on his behalf, goes off to a life of perpetual penitence and obscurity in an attempt to atone for his infidelity.⁴² It looks very much as though Pseudo-Amphilochius has taken a story of which he had only an imperfect

memory, and re-arranged the ending in order to enhance the reputation of the great Basil. In doing so, he has implied that in his day there might even be forgiveness for the ultimate sin of voluntary apostasy, for which the author of the Antiochene story knew no remedy; for was not this the "sin against the Holy Ghost?"

It sometimes happens that, besides adapting other men's stories to their own ends, hagiographers will inadvertently include two versions of a story in the same document. There is at least one example of this kind of thing in the Gospels, and it looks suspiciously as though there is one in the cycle under review. Both stories are concerned with the sexual continence of secular clergy, which is a further pointer to the cycle having been devised in and for a Latin milieu; in the eastern Church there was no demand for parish clergy to be celibates.

In the first story Basil sets out together with his intimate company (which includes Helladius, so this is a "we" passage) for a distant village, but without saying where they are going. The priest of that village, Anastasius, lives in perfect continence with a woman called Theognia, described in a pungent phrase as his "wife in name, but his sister in their manner of living together."⁴³ Anastasius mysteriously perceives the coming of his bishop and sends his wife-cum-sister out to meet him whilst he goes off to work in the field. Theognia, who has lived with this man for forty years and has allowed the world to imagine that she is sterile, goes off with incense and lights to meet the visitors whilst Anastasius inexplicably remains at home, contrary to his word (this is never explained). Meeting her, Basil tells her that her *brother* is at home, thus revealing that he knows all about them. Then, in Rosweyde's edition of the Latin version, Basil invites her to spread out her headshawl, and into it are cast the burning contents of the thurible, coals and all.⁴⁴ This is not found in Combefis' Greek text, nor is it further explained in Rosweyde's. But by reference to the second story, it will be seen what it was all about, if in fact this detail was ever in the Greek text. When they arrive at the priest's house, Basil repeatedly questions Anastasius about his "treasure." The man is clearly embarrassed, for he is a poor man. He has only two yoke of oxen, he says: one he works himself, whilst the other is worked by the hired man; one supports the

pilgrims he entertains (this is not explained), whilst the other pays the taxes. Nor has he any servants; his sister-cum-wife does all that is necessary for him and his guests. But Basil persists in asking about the "treasure" and finally prevails upon Theognia to conduct him round the house. There is one door which is locked, and she refuses to open it, insisting that it is only the "convenience."⁴⁵ Basil opens the door with a word (a commonplace in hagiography), and there lies the "treasure" -- a hideously ulcerated man whom the aged couple care for without anybody knowing. Basil asks to be allowed to spend the night with the patient, and by constant prayer the man is so completely restored to health that in the morning there is not even a scar to be seen on him.⁴⁶

The pair to the Anastasius story is much more directly concerned with clerical continence. It starts with a complaint to Basil from the people of Sebasteia against their bishop, who was Peter, one of Basil's brothers. They said that he failed to obey the canon which required that a man separate from his wife on elevation to the episcopate. (In fact, Peter did not accede to the throne of Sebasteia until after the death of Basil, and he was almost certainly never married.) Here too the advent of the saint is miraculously foreknown, but in this case Peter himself goes out to meet him, and Basil makes a joke. Quoting the words of Jesus in Gethsemane, he says: "Are ye come out as against a robber, with swords and staves, to take me?"⁴⁷ When they arrive at the bishop's house, Basil meets, apparently for the first time, her who is Peter's "wife in name, but his sister in their manner of living together," the identical phrase that was used of Theognia. He requests that she and Peter sleep together that night in the Church of the Forty Martyrs of Sebasteia. Then Basil and his five most intimate companions also lay down to sleep in the church. At midnight Basil rouses the five and they see angels gently fanning the blameless bed of Peter. Next morning Basil has coals of fire heaped into the garments of the two episcopal spouses, and no damage is done by the experiment whatsoever; there is not even any smell of scorching. The five now reveal what they saw in the night, and it is concluded that beyond all shadow of doubt Peter is living in continence, so Basil returns home in peace.⁴⁸

No common source for these two stories has yet been located, but in

the *Life of Saint John the Almsgiver* by Leontius of Neapolis⁴⁹ (ca. 590-668), one of the most influential of Greek hagiographers, there is a touching story which is very similar in one detail. It is the story of an *abbas* (a holy man) who redeemed a prostitute, whilst she in turn took up an abandoned infant. Tongues began to wag and to accuse the *abbas* of fathering the child. On his death bed he absolved himself of this charge by having live coals thrown into his tunic, which remained undamaged. Were it not for the existence of this story of Leontius', one might be tempted to see in Pseudo-Amphilochius' stories, written as they probably were in an area long exposed to Lombard permeation, some influence of the Germanic trial by ordeal. But, then, one should be cautious in such matters; Pliny knew of a people who exposed new-born babes to serpents in the belief that a snake-bite was only harmful to the offspring of illicit intercourse.⁵⁰

We come now, passing over a number of other interesting stories, to two anecdotes connected with Basil's death. The first of these occurs in an only slightly different form in the above mentioned work of Leontius of Neapolis, though whether he and Pseudo-Amphilochius had it from a common source or whether the latter took it from the former it would be very hard to say.⁵¹ It is the story of a woman who had so many and such terrible sins that she was ashamed to tell them. So Basil invited her to write them down and to seal the scroll. This she did, and the saint took the scroll and prayed over it at great length. When the scroll was opened, all was expunged except for one most terrible transgression down at the bottom. Basil sent her to consult with Ephraim the Syrian about this one, and he sent her back to the Bishop of Caesarea. But during her absence, Basil had died, and was being carried out in his coffin when she returned. In desperation she threw the scroll into the coffin, and when it was retrieved, it was found to be as white as snow. (It should perhaps be added that Leontius' version is more spectacular. There the bishop -- not of course Saint Basil -- rises from the tomb and presents her with the scroll in great style.)

The story of the apocryphal Basil's last days is not without a certain grim humour, which probably explains why wherever any traces of the Pseudo-Amphilochian cycle are to be found, this story is almost sure to

have survived intact, no matter what else has been omitted. There was in Caesarea a physician, Joseph the Jew; he was both Basil's doctor and also his friend, with whom he would frequently converse. Joseph enjoyed a high reputation, which largely rested on his extraordinary ability to predict with great accuracy the time of a man's death from the evidence of the pulse-rate. Now Basil had been far from well for some time, and one day Joseph announced to him that he would most surely die before the day was out. Basil would have none of it, but Joseph insisted. So Basil challenged him: was he so sure of his diagnosis that he would forsake Judaism and accept baptism if Basil were still alive in the morning? Joseph was so sure, and accepted the challenge. Next morning came, and there was Basil, very much *au vivant*. Not only that, rising from his bed he himself baptized Joseph and his family and celebrated the liturgy for the last time. He died, says Pseudo-Amphilochius, with the sacrament in his mouth, and was laid to rest amongst his predecessors; whereas the real Basil was in fact buried in the family sepulchre.⁵²

It is perhaps just a little too easy to poke fun at the Pseudo-Amphilochius and his like. They were not dishonest men who sought to deceive, nor was there any guile in their mouths. Their concern was to make a harsh and cruel world a better place by showing men the deeds of those who had striven for a nobler country. In doing so, they maintained a literary tradition of a kind that would otherwise have perished, and they passed on to posterity raw material from which men would one day form new vehicles for their highest aspirations and their deepest feelings. It is easy to acknowledge our debt to such men as Isidore of Seville, Bede of Jarrow, and Alcuin of York. But we do well to remember that there were other, humbler scholars, too, who kept open a little the door between the Greek East and the Latin West in the pit of the Dark Ages. Had there been no Pseudo-Amphilochius and no Ursus and/or Anastasius Bibliothecarius to translate his work, the West might have been a little less deceived and have come a little earlier to a knowledge of the true Basil. But it would also have been a little impoverished.

NOTES

¹ *Sancti Gregorii Theologi Funebris Oratio in Laudem Basilii Caesar-
eae in Cappadocia Episcopi (Oratio XLIII; PG 36.493-606) 1 et passim.*
It appears that Basil may even have been called "the great" in his own
lifetime. Note Migne's comment, *ibid.* 493: "non immerito censent eruditi
hanc orationem dictam fuisse post ipsius [Gregorii] e Constantinopolitana
sede abdicationem, in celeberrima Caesariensis ecclesiae concione, mense
Augusto vel Septembri anni 381." On Basil's association with the other
hierarchs, see Baert's comments in *Acta Sanctorum Junii t. 2 (Antwerp
1698) 934-36.* For the extant literature on Saint Basil junior (ob. 944
or 952) see F. Halkin, *Bibliotheca Hagiographica Graeca (BHG)* (Brussels
1957) items 263-4f, and *Auctarium Bibliothecae Hagiographicae Graecae*
(Brussels 1969), (*Auct.*) items 263-4g. The longer version of this saint's
Life contains one of the most colourful and sustained visions in the
entire hagiographical corpus.

² The so-called funeral oration of Ephraim the Syrian was probably
originally written in Greek, not in Syriac, and therefore not by Ephraim;
thus *Clavis Patrum Graecorum (CPG)*, item 3951: "est dubiae authenticit-
atis." The text is in Assemani, *Opera Sancti Ephraem Graece et Latine*
(Rome 1743) II, cols. 289-96, and in S.I. Mercati, *Sancti Ephraem Syri
Opera* (Rome 1915) I, fasc. 1, 143-78.

³ *Sancti Gregorii Nysseni Oratio Funebris qua Fratris sui Basilii
Magni Laudes et Memoriam Concelebrat* (PG 46.788-817). See also J.A.
Stein, *Encomium of St. Gregory of Nyssa on his Brother St. Basil, Patristic
Studies 17* (Washington 1928) 2-60.

⁴ See n. 1; also F. Boulanger, *Grégoire de Nazianze discours funèbres
en l'honneur de son frère Césaire et de Basile de Césarée* (Paris 1928)
58-230.

⁵ PG 32.219-1110.

⁶ *Acta Sanctorum Junii t. 2 (Antwerp 1698) 807-936.* The Greek text
of the Pseudo-Amphilochius was edited (with Latin translation and notes)
by François Combefis, *Sanctorum Patrum Amphilochii Iconiensis, Methodii
Patarensis et Andreae Cetensis Opera Omnia quae Supersunt* (Paris 1644)
155-225. Except where otherwise stated, page references will be to this,

the only Greek edition. For a detailed analysis of the text see *BHG* items 247-60. Of this *Life* G. Bardy wrote: "attribuée à saint Amphiloque d'Iconium . . . [elle] est en réalité une oeuvre du VIII^e siècle; elle n'a aucune valeur historique" (ad voc. "66. Basile in *DHGE*). He is probably correct in the first statement and certainly in the second, but neither means that the *Life* is devoid of interest, as successive commentators (Rosweyde, Combefis, Baert) have demonstrated.

⁷ "Appendix de Vita S. Basilii Apocrypha et S. Amphilochio Episcopo Iconiensi Perperam Imputata," *Acta Sanctorum Junii* t. 2 (Antwerp 1698) 936-57. The notes are ominously headed: "Annotata et Censurae F[rancisci] B[laertii]."

⁸ Hippolyte Delehaye, ed., *Propylaeum ad Acta Sanctorum Novembris* (Brussels 1902).

⁹ *Ibid.* col. 364.14 to col. 366.14. Another reason for the apparent lack of enthusiasm for Saint Basil in the East is evident from this entry; here Basil has to take second place to the important feast of the Circumcision (περιτομή) of Christ, which must inevitably have somewhat eclipsed the great Cappadocian.

¹⁰ John Chrysostom was translated on 27th January 436: Socrates, *HE* 7.45; Theodoret, *HE* 5.36. See also the *Typicon* of the Great Church (ed. J. Mateos, *Le Typicon de la Grande Eglise, Orientalia Christiana Analecta*, 2 vols. (Rome 1962) I, 212; II, 24-26, and note on p. 215; see also *Synaxarium ut supra*, col. 220.59 to col. 222.36. Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus was responsible for the translation of Gregory Theologus; *Typicon* I, 210, II, 4-10; Symeon Magister p. 755 (in *Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae*) and *Synaxarium* col. 422.21-24 (cf. 423.8-11). There is no lack of evidence of a cult in honour of Saint Basil from earliest times; it could be argued that the encomium of Gregory of Nazianzus (see n. 1 above) is precisely that, and few documents enjoyed greater popularity in monastic circles than this. Also there is strong iconographic evidence, again in monastic circles (e.g., icons from at least the seventh century at St. Catherine's monastery on Sinai, and the illuminations in Cod. Paris. Graec. 510, executed ca. 880). What is not found is evidence of popular devotion to the saint. As his appeal lay largely in his writings, and these in turn were accessible only to

those of considerably advanced learning, there was little to catch the attention of the populace, not even relics. We hear nothing of his mortal remains after their interment in the family sepulchre.

¹¹ See George Ostrogorsky, *History of the Byzantine State*, trans. J. Hussey (rev. ed., New Brunswick, N.J. 1969) 170 and n. 1; also L. Bréhier, *Vie et Mort de Byzance* (Paris 1946 and 1969) 79-80.

¹² Ostrogorsky (at n. 11) 174; R.J.H. Jenkins, *Byzantium, the Imperial Centuries, AD 610-1071* (London 1966) 89, based on Theophanes, *Chronographia*, ed. C. De Boor, 2 vols. (Leipzig 1883, 1885) I, 445-6.

¹³ Rufinus' text is in PL 103.483-554, and consists of 203 questions and answers. Rufinus gave the West a number of important translations, e.g., Eusebius' *Historia Ecclesiastica* and thirty-three *Lives* of saints of the Nitrian desert (PL 73.707-36) which were printed frequently from 1462 onwards. On the *Asceticon Parvum* see CPG item 2876.

¹⁴ Nazianzen, Nyssa, and Ephraim is the order in which they are named (p. 155).

¹⁵ The question of when the translation was made clearly rests on the identification of the translator, usually supposed to have been the Roman subdeacon Ursus, but the matter is equally complicated and far from solution. See Ursus' preface and Rosweyde's n. 3 (PL 73.294-5 and 312D-13B), and Baert's animadversions (AASS Junii II, 936-8.) The Bollandists have more recently suggested that there may have been as many as three separate translations; see *Bibliotheca Hagiographica Latina Antiquae et Mediae Aetatis, Subsidia Hagiographica* 6, (2 vols., Brussels 1898, 1901) items 1022-1024. Much work remains to be done on this problem.

¹⁶ *Hexaëmeron ab Eustathio Traductum*, see "The Library of the Venerable Bede," in C.G. Starr, ed., *The Intellectual Heritage of the Middle Ages* (Cornell 1957) 146.

¹⁷ *Hrotsuithae Monialis Gandersheimensis Historia de Conversione Desperati Adolescentis Servi Proterii per Sanctum Basilium*, PL 173.1109D-16C.

¹⁸ Vincentius Bellovacensis, *Speculum Historiale*, 14.78-80 (Paris 1624) 570-1. Vincent adds (14.81): "De libris sancti Basilii hic apud nos, tantum hos reperi in Hexaëmeron libros 10. De institutione monachorum

regulam in libro uno."

¹⁹ *Jacobi a Voragine Legenda Aurea Vulgo Historia Lombardica Dicta*, ed. Th. Graesse, (3rd ed., Leipzig 1890) 121-6, cap. xxvi, *De Sancto Basilio Episcopo*.

²⁰ The *Legend* was already translated into French in the fourteenth century (by Jean Belet). The Latin version was one of the earliest books to issue from the presses; two French versions were printed in 1476 and 1478 respectively. Before the end of the fifteenth century, printed translations into Italian, German, and even Bohemian had appeared, and Caxton had twice reprinted his English translation (1487, 1493).

²¹ *Vitae Patrum sive Historiae Eremiticae Libri Decem*. Text in PL 73.293C-312A.

²² Euboulus is a strange name not often met with in Byzantine literature. A man of this name was one of the senators whom Constantine the Great allegedly brought from Rome to Constantinople, and who gave his name to a hospice in that city where the *synaxis* of All Saints was celebrated. (*Synaxarium* col. 359.43; col. 698.22.) Two martyrs of this name are mentioned, one in conjunction with a Hadrian, martyred at Caesarea (date unknown), the other in conjunction with a Julian, martyred by the Emperor Julian (place unknown) -- *Synaxarium* col. 440.23 to col. 441.15 and col. 518.23; col. 519.27-37.

²³ Following Combefis' pagination, pp. 155-7 gives "Amphilochius'" introduction; pp. 157-9 Basil's early life and education, largely taken (says Baert) from what was available in the *menaea*; pp. 159-69 the conversion of Euboulus, preceded by Basil's visit to the Egyptian monks.

²⁴ Pp. 169-72.

²⁵ Pp. 172-4. Note, on p. 173, the apocryphal Basil enunciates an apocryphal saying of Jesus not found in any other context: "by eating and drinking to withstand the devil our antagonist."

²⁶ Baert observes (note g, p. 945E) that although the Latin translator (Ursus) perceived this error and wrote instead "Eusebius," (but then Ursus had actually read the encomium by Gregory Nazianzen and is by no means uncritical of Pseudo-Amphilochius: see *Praefatio Interpretis*, PL 73.293-96), the Greek text definitely says "Leontius," the name of a former bishop of Caesarea who suffered under Licinius and Constantine

(see the *Martyrologium Romanum* at 13th January). The Greek sources mention a Leontius, bishop of Caesarea, but not until the reign of Diocletian, and not a martyr (*Synaxarium* 808²).

²⁷ Pp. 174-5.

²⁸ Pp. 175-7.

²⁹ "Et videt infantulum membratim incidi in manibus Basilii"-- Ursus, PL 73.301D. "Videt vero in Basilii manibus puerulum velut membratim incidi"-- Combefis 177D. (The Greek phrase is: καὶ θεωρεῖ βρέφος μελιζόμενον ἐν ταῖς χερσὶ Βασιλείου -- *ibid.*)

³⁰ Pp. 177-8. The Jew converted by a miraculous experience (ranging from simple visions to bleeding and even talking icons) is of course commonplace, especially in Greek hagiography, but I know of nothing quite like this elsewhere. There follows an anecdote of a woman for whom Basil wrote out a petition to the *archón* and subsequently obtained her request by interceding with the emperor on behalf of the official (pp. 178-9).

³¹ Bede Paul, ed., *Corpus Christianorum: Continuatio Mediaevalis* 16 (Turnhout 1969) 86-7 (c. 14). On Pascasius and his alleged role as the forerunner of the doctrine of transubstantiation, see H. Peltier, "Radbert, Paschase," in *DThC* 13/2 (1937) 1628-39.

³² Note Ursus' preface ap. Rosweyde, PL 73.295: "Verum diligenter inquirens, nihil scriptum de Vita huius sancti apud Latinos inveni, nisi duo miraculorum eius . . ." It is unnecessary to assume that the entire text became available in Latin at one and the same time.

³³ ". . . vidit Saracenus Sacerdotem, manibus accipientem puerulum, et mactantem, et sanguinem ipsius fundentem in calice, et corpus eius frangentem ac ponentem in disco . . ." *Miracula Sancti Georgii* c. 5, *Acta Sanctorum* April, vol. 3 (Antwerp 1625) 144C.

³⁴ *Divi Thomae Aquinatis Doctoris Angelici Opuscula Omnia* (Venetiis, apud haeredem Hieronymi Scoti, 1587) *Opusc.* LVIII "De Venerabili Sacramento Altaris," cap. xi, pp. 576-7. Both Rosweyde (n. 36, col. 317D) and Baert (note n, p. 946D) knew this text, but the references they give are inadequate.

³⁵ Muriel Whitaker, "Christian Iconography in the Quest of the Holy Grail," *Mosaic* 12 (1979) 11-19 (Whitaker's translations).

³⁶ Pp. 183-5. This is preceded by the story of a quaestor named

Libanius (pp. 184-5) and an account of how the Emperor Valens was repaid for his infidelity. His son was ill, and he promised to join the orthodox if the child recovered; this happened, but he forgot his promise and brought it to be baptized by Arian clergy. The child died in their arms (pp. 185-8).

³⁷ See J. Wortley, "The Legendary History of Byzantium," *Canadian Historical Papers* (1977) 215-29.

³⁸ Malalas pp. 333-4; *Chronicon Paschale* p. 552 (both references are to *Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae*).

³⁹ Pp. 179-83.

⁴⁰ Pp. 188-97.

⁴¹ L. Radermacher, *Griechische Quellen zur Faustsage, Sitzungsberichte der Akademie der Wiss. in Wien* 206.4 (1927).

⁴² *Acta Sanctorum Maii* t. 7 (Antwerp 1688) 50C-58A.

⁴³ Γυναϊκὰ ὀνόματι μὲν, ἀδελφὴ δὲ τῆς χήρης, p. 198.

⁴⁴ PL 73.306B.

⁴⁵ Χρεία ἐστὶ τοῦ οἴκου (p. 200); Ursus: *necessaria est domus* (307A); Combefis: *usus est domus*. The expression is obscure.

⁴⁶ Pp. 197-202. This is followed by two stories which must be passed over here: one of the visit of Ephraim the Syrian to Caesarea (pp. 202-6), and a dramatic tale (not to be found in Ursus' text printed by Rosweyde) of how Basil opened the locked church at Nicaea, and so retrieved it from the Arians.

⁴⁷ Mark 14.48.

⁴⁸ Pp. 211-4.

⁴⁹ H. Gelzer, ed., *Leontios' von Neapolis Leben des heiligen Iohannes des barmherzigen Erzbischofs von Alexandrien, Sammlung ausgewählter kirchen- und dogmengeschichtlicher Quellenschriften* 5 (Freiburg/Leipzig 1893) 1-103; English translation (partial) in E. Dawes and N.H. Baynes, *Three Byzantine Saints* (London 1948/New York 1977) 199-270. See c.43 (pp. 86-8 ap. Gelzer). Leontius also composed a *Life of Saint Symeon the Fool*, ed. L. Rydén, *Leben des hl. Narren Symeon von Neapolis* (Uppsala 1963) 121-70, and possibly also a *Life of the Cypriote Saint Spyridon* (BHG item 1648a).

⁵⁰ *Hist. Nat.* 7.2.14.

⁵¹ Pp. 215-20; cf. *Life of Saint John the Almsgiver* c. 46, pp. 96-8
ap. Gelzer.

⁵² Pp. 220-5.