



Summary :

Clergyman and author. Asterios of Amaseia is included amongst the Fathers of the Church. He lived in the second half of the 4th and early 5th century and was a contemporary of the great Fathers of Cappadocia. During 380-390 he served as bishop of Amaseia. He wrote a series of orations. His oeuvre is characterized by an archaic and elegant style.

Other Names

Date and Place of Birth

Between 330 and 335 AD, Cappadocia

Date and Place of Death

Between 420 and 425 AD.

Main Role

clergyman, scholar

1. Biographical information

Asterios¹ came from [Cappadocia](#). He was born between 330 and 335² and died between 420 and 425. Initially, according to his own words, he studied alongside a Scythian, i.e. Goth, who had been sold as a prisoner in Antioch, but had, thanks to his knowledge, elevated himself to teacher of Greek, Latin and Law. During his studies, Asterios diligently read the works of ancient philosophers and orators and especially Demosthenes. Later, probably for a short period, he worked as a *scholastikos* (lawyer). During the period 380-390 he served as bishop of [Amaseia](#) in Pontus, succeeding Eulalios. He became known among ecclesiastical scholars for his spontaneous piety and distinguished himself as author of sermons and discourses. Indeed, the patriarch Photius singles him out for his qualities and underlines the orthodox spirit of his works. Asterios' sermons are characterized by their rhetorical style. With eloquence and religious vigor he deliberated on issues of faith, defending with cogency the positions of the orthodox faith. He produced a series of sermons and discourses, while an encomium to Basil, bishop of Amaseia, has also been attributed to him. His work, although small in volume was greatly appreciated by subsequent scholars.

2. Sermons

Sixteen sermons by Asterios have survived, while Photius in codex 271 of his *Bibliotheca* mentions a further four. Some of his sermons were translated into Slav, Georgian and Latin. Characteristic of his work is the polemic against pagans and heretics. Of particular interest is his Sermon IV, *Λόγος κατηγορικός της εορτής των Καλανδών* ("On the festival of the Calends"), which Asterios delivered on the 1st of January 400 against [Libanius](#) and the pagan beliefs connected to the celebration of the New Year. Sermon XI, *Ἐκφρασις εἰς τὴν ἁγίαν Εὐφημίαν τὴν μάρτυρα* ("Ekphrasis to the martyr St. Euphemia") is a rare example of the description of the decoration of a church, of the martyrdom of Aghia Euphimia in [Chalcedon](#).³ This speech was used in its entirety during the [Seventh Ecumenical Council](#) in Nicaea (787) by the iconodules in support of their views, and was later translated by Athanasios Bibliothecarius into Latin. Asterios' oeuvre is distinguished by its archaic and elegant style while he seems at ease with the use of rhetorical ways and shapes. While exploring ecclesiastical and religious issues, Asterios' sermons also provide valuable historical information.

1. Asterios of Amaseia must not be confused with Asterios Sophistes or Kappadokes, one of the first followers of the Arian sect who lived during



the first half of the 4th century; he was a prolific author, and distinguished himself for his modest stance within the Arian movement.

2. M. Bauer assumes that Asterios was born in Antioch where he also gained his education; see Bauer, M., *Asterios, Bischof von Amaseia: Sein Leben und seine Werke* (Würzburg 1911), p. 25ff.

3. This speech was addressed to the inhabitants of Chalcedon. According to C. Mango, Asterios lived in this city for some time; see Mango, C., *The Art of the Byzantine Empire 312-1453: Sources and Documents* (New Jersey 1972), p. 38.

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Sources

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Quotations

Excerpt from a homily of Gregory the Theologian

Τίς δέ κεν Ἀστερίοιο σαοφρονέων λελάθοιτο,
Ἦδὲ κασιγνήτων τῆς ἱερῆς τριάδος,
Οἷς ξυνὴ σοφίη, ξυνὸς βίος, εἰς ἓν ἄγεσθην
Ἐλπωρὴ μούνη σαρκὶ μεριζόμενοι,
(Σιγήσω Φιλάδελφον, ἐμὸν κέαρ, εὐγενὲς αἷμα·)
Μακροβίου δ', ἐπὶ τοῖς, θρέμματος ἡμετέρου,
Θρέμματος ἡμετέροιο, φίλον δ' ἐμόν, ὄν πτερούγεσιν
Εὐμενέων Χριστὸς ἀμφὶς ἔχει μεγάλαις,
.....

Ομιλίες, «Εγκώμιο του Βασιλείου επισκόπου Αμασειάς» (*Carmina quae spectant ad alios*, PG 37, col. 1451-1577)