



Saint Theodore of Amasea

Saint Theodore of Amasea (Greek: Θεόδωρος) is one of the two saints called Theodore, who are venerated as Warrior Saints and Great Martyrs in the Eastern Orthodox Church. He is also known as Theodore Tyron (or Tyro or Tiron or Tiro or Teron). The other saint of the same name is Theodore Stratelates, also known as Theodore of Heraclea, but this second St Theodore may never have had a separate existence. When the epithet is omitted, the reference is usually to St Theodore of Amasea.

Nothing reliable is known about St Theodore except that he was martyred in the early 4th century (306 is the date quoted for Theodore of Amasea, but 319 for Theodore Stratelates). The stories told about his life and martyrdom are all matters of myth and legend.

The legends of Theodore of Amasea recount that he was a recruit serving in the Roman army at Amasea, which is the modern Amasya in Northern Turkey, about 30 miles (48 km) south of the Black Sea coast at Sinope and Samsun. (Another version says that he was not a recruit but was called "Tyro" because he served in the Cohors Tyronum. When he refused to join his fellow soldiers in pagan rites of worship, he was arrested, but then (perhaps on account of his youth) set free after a warning. However, he again protested paganism by setting fire to the temple of Cybele (the local mother-goddess) at Amasea. He was then condemned to death and, after tortures, was executed by being thrown into a furnace.

His remains were said to have been obtained by a woman from Eusebia and interred at Euchaita, where he had been born. This was a Byzantine city which no longer exists but is thought to correspond to the modern Avkhat, which is about 30 miles from Amasea. A shrine was erected there, which became an important place of pilgrimage.

Gregory of Nyssa preached in honour of St Theodore in his sanctuary in the late 4th century, and this is the earliest source for any information about him. He said nothing about St Theodore's life beyond the basic legend as given above, but he told how he could influence the lives of his hearers and specifically mentioned that he could intervene in battles. This became a particularly important attribute of St Theodore. He was adopted by crusaders as their patron.

The sanctuary of the saint was established at Euchaita, possibly his birthplace, and legends of his life and martyrdom have been developed by hagiographers over the years. Later additions to the story, between the 8th and 10th centuries, told of a dragon who was terrorising the district round Amasea, which he was able to vanquish with the aid of a cross. Amasea was by then in a district liable to attacks by marauding barbarians, against whom the saint was said to have interceded. His sanctuary continued to be visited until around 1100, although the district was by then occupied by the Arabs.

In Western Christianity, he is usually called 'Theodore of Amasea' from the ancient city in Pontus where he suffered martyrdom. Sometimes he is called 'Theodore Euchaita', from the place where he was possibly born and to which his body had been carried, and where his shrine was erected later. In Eastern Christianity, he is more often known as Theodore Teron, "Theodore the Recruit".

There is much confusion between him and St Theodore Stratelates of Heraclea, who is also sometimes said to have had a shrine at Euchaita, but the shrine of the latter was in fact at Euchaneia. His "lives" are listed in *Bibliotheca Hagiographica Graeca* 1760-1773.