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Fatherland (πατρίς) in the writings of Basil of Caesarea

Abstract

The notion of fatherland (πατρίς) in the writings of Basil of Caesarea is not so obvious as it seems at a first glance. The term πατρίς acquires different meanings depending on whether it is used without or with the article. The textual analysis of his own writings reveals what Basil considered as his own fatherland. In the writings of certain authorship, Basil uses the noun πατρίς 72 times: without the article πατρίς means a fatherland in general, with the article πατρίς means Cappadocia for Basil. The effect of the research is of major importance for reconstructing the life of Basil and the persons whom he addresses in his letters – among them Eustathius of Sebastea, the famous ascetic of the 4th-century Asia Minor and Basil's mentor.

Keywords: Basil the Great, Eustathius of Sebastea, Gregory of Nyssa, fatherland, homeland, place of origin

The sense of the term fatherland (πατρίς) in the writings of Basil of Caesarea is of major importance for reconstructing the life of Basil himself and the persons whom he addresses in his letters – among them Eustathius of Sebastea, the famous ascetic of the 4th-century Asia Minor and Basil's mentor.

Socrates Scholasticus claims that the homeland of Basil was Caesarea in Cappadocia; Basil was “elevated to the bishopric of Caesarea in Cappadocia, which was his native country (τῆς ἑαυτοῦ πατρίδος).”¹ In other sources, there are two opposing traditions: on one hand, Basil himself points at Cappadocia as his fatherland, on the other Gregory of Nazianzus claims that Basil was from Pontus. Both versions have to be treated with due caution as they have other aims than referring what really happened. The majority of “information” on Basil's childhood and youth comes from *Oratio 43 (Funeris in laudem Basilii Magni Caesareae in Cappadocia episcopi)* by Gregory of Nazianzus. The “description” of Basil's virtues is clearly a hyperbole typical of panegyrics. Although it is certain that under the rhetorical disquisition some real events were hidden, it is very difficult to distinguish facts from literary fiction.

Gregory of Nazianzus was not so close a friend of Basil's as it is commonly assumed. The picture of the idyllic friendship was a product of Gregory's rhetoric, “it would be Gregory's own writings that contributed to the formation of this image of an ideal friendship.”² Gregory was rewriting the history of his relationship with Basil in order to regain the position in Cappadocia after he had returned from

¹ Socrates Scholasticus, *Historia Ecclesiastica* IV 26, 11 (GCS NF 1: 261; transl. NPNF II 2: 111).

² Van Dam (2003): 155–156.

Constantinople (381).³ He treated the friendship with Basil as part of the classical culture he was committed to.⁴ It seems that the theme of fatherland (πατρίς) was of crucial importance in constructing a literary picture of Basil.

According to Gregory of Nazianzus, the family of Basil's father came from Pontus and the family of his mother was from Cappadocia – it is worth noting that Gregory refers to the homeland of the families rather than specifically of Basil's father and mother: “On his father's side Pontus offers to me many details, in no wise inferior to its wonders of old time, of which all history and poesy are full; there are many others concerned with this my native land, of illustrious men of Cappadocia, renowned for its youthful progeny, no less than for its horses. Accordingly we match with his father's family that of his mother (Ὅθεν τῷ πατρῷῳ γένει τὸ μητρῷον ἡμεῖς ἀντανίσχομεν).”⁵

According to Gregory of Nazianzus, Basil was first taught by his father, “acknowledged in those days by Pontus as its common teacher of virtue (κοινὸν παιδευτὴν ἀρετῆς ὁ Πόντος τῆνικαῦτα προὔβάλλετο).”⁶ Gregory does not admit straightforwardly that Basil was brought up in Pontus, but the suggestion is clear enough to convince some scholars that Basil came from the province of Pontus (as well as his father's family).⁷ Pontus must mean the province Pontus Polemoniacus

³ McLynn (2001): 193.

⁴ Konstan (2000): 161; Van Dam (2003): 171–172.

⁵ Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oratio* 43, 3 (SC 384: 123; transl. NPNF II 7: 396).

⁶ Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oratio* 43, 12 (SC 384: 141; transl. NPNF II 7: 399).

⁷ Rousseau (1998): 1: “Basil belonged to a relatively prosperous and locally prominent family in Pontus, near the Black Sea coast of Asia Minor;” Silvas (2005): 1: “Basil was born in c. A.D. 329 to an aristocratic

here, since in the same oration Gregory of Nazianzus uses the name in the narrow sense referring to the province when he described that Basil fled from Caesarea to Pontus when the conflict with Eusebius, bishop of Caesarea at that time, broke out.⁸

Gregory of Nyssa, Basil's brother, mentions Pontus as his own fatherland.⁹ However, the context of those mentions is pivotal. Both statements about Pontus as his homeland come from his writings about Macrina. I think that Macrina was invented by Gregory of Nyssa and Gregory of Nazianzus in order to create a model of asceticism alternative to the one of Eustathius of Sebastea and Basil.¹⁰ The main difference between those two kinds of asceticism did not lie in strict morals or in the attitude towards the poor, or in the zealousness in reading the Holy Scriptures and in praying, or in renouncing the pleasures and comforts – in all those points both ways of practicing asceticism were similar. The difference lied in the attitude towards one's own family. Basil was eager to leave his family for the sake of asceticism, while Macrina is a model of "the life of a sister surrounded by mother,

Christian family of Neocaesarea, the capital of Pontus Polemoniakos;" Silvas (2005): 62: "Basil lived at 'home' with his father, that is, in the city where his father pursued his career. All of this points to Neocaesarea, the metropolis of Pontus Polemoniakos, not to Caesarea metropolis of Cappadocia, as the family's residence;" Silvas (2008): 10: "The family seat was not Caesarea of Cappadocia but the city of Neocaesarea, the metropolis of Pontus Polemoniakos;" Van Dam (2003): 9: "Basil had been raised in Pontus."

⁸ Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oratio* 43, 29 (SC 384: 191).

⁹ Gregory of Nyssa, *Epistulae* 19, 10 (GNO 8/2: 65); *Vita sanctae Macrinae* 15 (GNO 8/1: 387).

¹⁰ Przyszychowska (2018): 323–343. The problem of different ways of practicing asceticism will be explained in detail in my book *Macrina the Younger as a substitute for Eustathius of Sebastea*.

brothers, and sisters; it is at the same time the story of an aristocratic clan fully conscious of its own distinction.”¹¹ Gregory of Nazianzus and Gregory of Nyssa apparently shared the same idea of the family that was based on absolute loyalty to the parents, siblings and other family members – especially one’s father. On the contrary, Basil “seems to have wanted to ignore, even forget, his father.”¹² The statements both in Gregory of Nazianzus and in Gregory of Nyssa pointing at Pontus as the fatherland of Basil and Gregory of Nyssa could have been a well-thought-out literary device. It was aimed at stressing the close relationship of Basil with his father.

In Letter 210 to the learned in Neocaesarea Basil himself admits his acquaintance with Pontus in his childhood (διὰ τὴν ἐκ παιδός μοι πρὸς τὸ χωρίον τοῦτο συνήθειαν), because he was brought up there by his grandmother (ἐνταῦθα γὰρ ἐτράφην παρὰ τῆ ἑμαυτοῦ τήθη).¹³ The context of the letter is crucial. During the conflict with Atarbius, bishop of Neocaesarea, in 376, Basil addresses a letter to the laity of the city and by referring to his grandmother legitimizes himself as a lawful heir of “the tradition of the truly great Gregory Thaumaturgus and of those who followed after him up to the blessed Musonius.”¹⁴

There is one hint that indicates that Basil was really brought up in Cappadocia. Letter 37 without an address on behalf of a foster brother indicates that Basil really was raised in Cappadocia. “For I admit that I have many friends and relatives in my country (ἐπὶ τῆς πατρίδος), and that I myself have been appointed to the position of a father (εἰς τὴν

¹¹ Momigliano (1987): 217.

¹² Van Dam (2003): 18.

¹³ Basil, *Epistulae* 210, 2 (Courtonne 2: 190).

¹⁴ Basil, *Epistulae* 210, 3 (Courtonne 2: 191–192).

πατρικὴν τάξιν) by reason of this station to which the Lord has appointed me. But I have only one foster brother, this man who is the son of the woman who nursed me, and I pray that the household in which I was brought up may remain at its old assessment.”¹⁵ πατρικὴ τάξις refers or to the presbyterate, or to the episcopate¹⁶ – Basil obtained both in Caesarea in Cappadocia. As his wet-nurse lived in Cappadocia, he must have been nursed here, not in Pontus. A fatherland (πατρίς) meant to Basil the place where somebody was born and raised as he wrote in one of his letters: “What man is so patriotic, honouring equally with his parents the fatherland which gave him birth and reared him (τὴν ἐνεγκοῦσαν καὶ θρεψαμένην πατρίδα), as are you yourself.”¹⁷

The textual analysis of Basil’s writings shall reveal what Basil considered as his own fatherland. In the writings of certain authorship, Basil uses the noun πατρίς 72 times in several slightly different meanings depending on the use of the article: without the article πατρίς means a fatherland in general, with the article πατρίς means Cappadocia for Basil regardless of whether it is used with a possessive or not.

I. A fatherland in general

Basil uses πατρίς without the article 13 times – it refers to a fatherland in general or to the fatherland of someone who was not Cappadocian. Only twice in Basil’s writings πατρίς with the article has such a general meaning – but in both cases it is used in the plural.

¹⁵ Basil, *Epistulae* 37 (Courtonne 1: 80; transl. Deferrari 1: 193–195).

¹⁶ Pouchet (1992): 186.

¹⁷ Basil, *Epistulae* 96, 1 (Courtonne 1: 208; transl. Deferrari 2: 157).

In two letters written on the occasion of the death of Nectarius' son, Basil calls him "a hope of his fatherland" (πατρίδος ἐλπίς)¹⁸ and laments that his death "has stricken two countries" (πληγὴ ἐγένετο πατρίδων δύο).¹⁹ Nectarius, later bishop of Constantinople, was from Tarsus in Cilicia²⁰ and his wife was of Cappadocian origin.²¹

In Letter 28 written in the spring of 368, Basil consoles the Church of Neocaesarea after the death of a person whom he calls, among other epithets, "a bulwark of his native land" (ἔρεισμα πατρίδος).²² This letter is assumed to be on the death of Musonius, bishop of Neocaesarea.²³

In the letter dated to 373,²⁴ he calls on the citizens of Satala to accept a new bishop "that he may come to forget his fatherland" (λήθην μὲν αὐτῷ ἐγγενέσθαι πατρίδος).²⁵ In the homily on Gordius the Martyr, Basil states generally that "the rule of an encomium is to look for the fatherland (Ἐγκωμίων μὲν γὰρ νόμος πατρίδα διερευνᾶσθαι)."²⁶ In one of his homilies, he accuses a hearer: "you glory in fatherland (ἐπαγάλλη πατρίδι)."²⁷ In one of the homilies on psalms, he calls blessed a person who is not attached to the things of this world "as through here were our natural fatherland (ὥσπερ πατρίδος τινὸς φυσικῆς)."²⁸ Elsewhere, he praises the perseverance of Apostle Paul: "He did not cease through impatience

¹⁸ Basil, *Epistulae* 5, 1 (Courtonne 1: 16).

¹⁹ Basil, *Epistulae* 6, 1 (Courtonne 1: 20; transl. Deferrari 1: 41).

²⁰ Sozomen, *Historia Ecclesiastica* VII 8, 1 (GCS NF 4: 310).

²¹ Pouchet (1992): 639.

²² Basil, *Epistulae* 28, 1 (Courtonne 1: 66; transl. Deferrari 1: 161).

²³ Deferrari, in: Basil, *Letters*, 1: 158–159, note 1.

²⁴ Loofs (1898): 20.

²⁵ Basil, *Epistulae* 102 (Courtonne 2: 3; transl. Deferrari 2: 193).

²⁶ Basil, *In Gordium martyrem* (PG 31: 492).

²⁷ Basil, *Homilia in illud: Attende tibi ipsi* (Rudberg: 32).

²⁸ Basil, *Homiliae super Psalmos*, in psalmum XIV (PG 29: 252).

at the continuous succession of evils, when he was not only driven out of his country (οὐ μόνον πατρίδος ἀπελήλατο), away from his relatives, friends, and possessions, but also when he was handed over.”²⁹

In a few cases, the meaning of πατρίς is even closer to “a land/a country” than “a fatherland.” In the letter written in 376 to the citizens of Nicopolis, a town in Armenia Minor, Basil lamented: “When I read the letter of your Holiness, how did I moan and grieve that I had been obliged to hear these new troubles—blows and insults against yourselves, and pillaging of homes, and devastation of city, and upheaval of all the land (πατρίδος ὅλης ἀνατροπήν), persecution of church and banishment of priests, attack of wolves, and scattering of sheep.”³⁰ In his *Homiliae in hexaemeron*, Basil compares natural limits of every kind of a creature to a town or a country: “Thus each kind is as if it were stationed in towns, in villages, in an ancient country (πατρίσιν ἀρχαίαις), and has for its dwelling place the regions of the sea which have been assigned to it.”³¹ In the homily on the forty Martyrs of Sebastea, he states that the saints came from different countries (Οὐκ ἦν μία πατρις τοῖς ἁγίοις),³² that they spurned “a wintry country” (πατρίδα χειμέριον),³³ and they became a pride of many countries (πολλὰς πατρίδας κατακοσμήσαντες).³⁴

²⁹ Basil, *Homiliae super Psalmos*, in psalmum XXXIII (PG 29: 352; transl. Way 249).

³⁰ Basil, *Epistulae* 247 (Courtonne 3: 85; transl. Deferrari 3: 477–479).

³¹ Basil, *Homiliae in hexaemeron* VII 4 (PG 29: 156; transl. NPNF II 8: 92).

³² Basil, *In quadraginta martyres Sebastenses* (PG 31: 509).

³³ Basil, *In quadraginta martyres Sebastenses* (PG 31: 524).

³⁴ Basil, *In quadraginta martyres Sebastenses* (PG 31: 524).

Twice Basil uses *πατρίς* in the general sense in the plural and with the article. In the letter to the Bishops of Italy and Gaul regarding the condition and confusion of the Churches, he refers to the persecutions of Orthodox believers: “On this account the pious are driven from their native places (τῶν πατρίδων), and are exiled to desert regions.”³⁵ Similarly, in a letter to Gregory of Nazianzus he expressed his concern for the Orthodox: “We expect to suffer very soon some even greater misfortune for the sake of the doctrine of truth; or, if not that, then at least certainly to be banished from the churches and from our countries (τῶν πατρίδων).”³⁶

II. Paradise/heaven

Nine times Basil uses the term *πατρίς* in the meaning of paradise or heaven. That meaning appears eight times in homilies and once in the dogmatic writing (*De Spiritu Sancto*). It is actually clear and does not need any special comment. The places are as follows: *De Spiritu Sancto* 27, 66 (τὴν ἀρχαίαν ἐπιζητοῦμεν πατρίδα, τὸν παράδεισον); *De ieiuno* (hom. 2), PG 31, 188 (πρὸς τὴν ἄνω πατρίδα); *Homilia de gratiarum actione*, PG 31, 236 (Ἐξέπεσες τῆς πατρίδος; ἔχεις πατρίδα τὴν ἐπουράνιον Ἱερουσαλήμ); *Homilia dicta in Lacisis*, PG 31, 1456 line (ὁ τόπος τῆς ἐξορίας· εἰς ὃν ἐκπεσῶν, μὴ ἐπιλάθῃ τῆς πατρίδος τῆς ἀρχαίας, μέμνησο τῆς πατρίδος ὅθεν ἐξωρίσθης); *Homiliae in hexaemeron* VI 1, PG 29, 117 (ἡ ἀρχαία πατρίς ἡμῶν); *Homiliae in hexaemeron* IX 2, PG 29, 192 (Ἀληθινὴ σου πατρίς ἡ ἄνω Ἱερουσαλήμ); Basil, *In quadraginta martyres Sebastenses*,

³⁵ Basil, *Epistulae* 243, 2 (Courtonne 3: 69; transl. Deferrari 3: 437–439).

³⁶ Basil, *Epistulae* 71, 2 (Courtonne 1: 168; transl. Deferrari 2: 59).

PG 31, 509 (ἐπὶ τῶν μακαρίων τούτων ἡ ἐκάστου πατρὶς κοινὴ πάντων ἐστί).

III. Cappadocia

Except for two quotations from the Bible, references to paradise/heaven and four cases where the meaning of ἡ πατρὶς is uncertain, Basil always and with no exception refers ἡ πατρὶς (in singular with the article) to Cappadocia and never to any other country/homeland of anybody. Twenty-six times it is ἡ πατρὶς itself with the article and no possessive and sixteen times ἡ πατρὶς ἡμῶν/ἐαυτῶν (with the article and the possessive). As Y. Courtonne explains the custom of avoiding proper names and replacing them with a periphrasis is one of the characteristics of the rhetoric of this era.³⁷

In Letter 1, written probably in 357 to Eustathius the philosopher,³⁸ Basil said that after having left Athens he “reached the fatherland (κατέλαβον τὴν πατρίδα).”³⁹ According to Gregory of Nazianzus,⁴⁰ Basil went from Athens to Caesarea, so clearly πατρὶς is Caesarea/Cappadocia to him. After a relatively short time Basil went on a journey to Alexandria, Egypt, Palestine and Coele-Syria, and Mesopotamia where he had an opportunity to observe the life of the ascetics.⁴¹ Basil confessed in a letter to Eustathius of Sebastea: “On this account, then, having perceived some in my fatherland (ἐπὶ τῆς πατρίδος) trying to imitate the example

³⁷ Courtonne, in: Basile, *Lettres* (Courtonne) 1: 3, note 2.

³⁸ Gribomont identified the addressee with Eustathius of Sebastea and dated this letter to 357 on the basis of events that Eustathius of Sebastea was involved in; cf. *Gribomont* (1959): 120.

³⁹ Basil, *Epistulae* 1 (Courtonne 1: 3; transl. Deferrari 1: 5).

⁴⁰ Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oratio* 43, 25 (SC 384: 182).

⁴¹ Basil, *Epistulae* 223, 2 (Courtonne 3: 10).

of those men, I believed that I had found an aid to my own salvation.”⁴² Again, Gregory of Nazianzus gives us the external reference confirming that it was Caesarea rather than Pontus. Gregory makes an allusion to the journeys of Basil⁴³ and describes as following the sequence of events of Basil’s ordination as a priest⁴⁴ and a conflict between Basil and the then bishop. Gregory states that some ascetics “who have separated themselves from the world and consecrated their life to God”⁴⁵ went over to Basil’s side. With Gregory’s advice Basil “set out from the place into Pontus, and presided over the abodes of contemplation there.”⁴⁶ So, clearly the bishop was bishop of Caesarea and the place of action – Caesarea in Cappadocia which Basil called his fatherland (ἡ πατρίς).

The place of origin of Eustathius of Sebastea has been discussed for the last three hundred years. Although both Socrates Scholasticus⁴⁷ and Sozomen⁴⁸ confirm that Eustathius’ father was called Eulalius and was bishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia, in 1703 Tillemont stated that there was no place in the hierarchy of Caesarea for any bishop named Eulalius and that Eustathius’ father was from Antioch.⁴⁹ Following

⁴² Basil, *Epistulae* 223, 3 (Courtonne 3: 11; transl. Deferrari 3: 295).

⁴³ Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oratio* 43, 25 (SC 384: 182).

⁴⁴ Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oratio* 43, 27 (SC 384: 188).

⁴⁵ Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oratio* 43, 28 (SC 384: 188–190; transl. NPNF II 7: 405).

⁴⁶ Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oratio* 43, 29 (SC 384: 190–192; transl. NPNF II 7: 405).

⁴⁷ Socrates Scholasticus, *Historia Ecclesiastica* II 43, 1 (GCS NF 1: 180): ὑπὸ Εὐλαλίου τοῦ ἰδίου πατρὸς καὶ ἐπισκόπου Καισαρείας τῆς ἐν Καππαδοκίᾳ ἤδη πρότερον καθήρητο.

⁴⁸ Sozomen, *Historia Ecclesiastica* IV 24, 9 (GCS NF 4: 180): Εὐλάλιος ὁ πατὴρ καὶ τῶν εὐχῶν ἀφώρισεν, ἐπίσκοπος ὢν τῆς ἐν Καππαδοκίᾳ ἐκκλησίας Καισαρείας.

⁴⁹ Tillemont (1703): 79.

Loofs a lot scholars claim that Eulalius was bishop of Sebastea.⁵⁰ Jurgens tried to connect reports of Sozomen and Socrates with the theory of Loofs reaching a rather weird concept: “Probably Eustathius was born at Caesarea; for Basil refers to Caesarea as Eustathius’ «own country». And while it is dangerous to urge half of an admittedly erroneous proposition in favor of any theory which is expected to be taken seriously, Socrates and Sozomen, as we have just pointed out, do say that Eustathius’ father Eulalius was bishop of Caesarea. If we amend the thought of their remark to indicate that he was, while not bishop of Caesarea, yet of Caesarea in the sense that it was his native place, we have testimony which may assist in urging Caesarea as Eustathius’ birthplace.”⁵¹ Tenšek still claims that Eulalius was bishop of Caesarea.⁵²

The textual analysis of Basil’s letters confirms the testimony of Socrates and Sozomen. In two letters, Basil says that Eustathius was ordained by Hermogenes, bishop of Caesarea, then went to Constantinople and returned to his homeland: ἐπὶ τῆς πατρίδος,⁵³ εἰς τὴν πατρίδα⁵⁴ – of course his homeland could have been other than Caesarea and he could have returned to that after having been ordained by Hermogenes. But fortunately, in one of the letters, when describing that sequence of events, Basil stated that Eustathius of Sebastea returned (from Alexandria) to his own country and there he was ordained by Hermogenes: “On returning to his

⁵⁰ Loofs (1898): 95; Frank (1980): 38; Frazee (1980): 17; Gribomont (1984): 95–96; Hauschild (1982): 547.

⁵¹ Jurgens (1959): 16.

⁵² Tenšek (1991): 3.

⁵³ Basil, *Epistulae* 263, 3 (Courtonne 3: 123).

⁵⁴ Basil, *Epistulae* 244, 9 (Courtonne 3: 82).

own country (ἐπανῆλθεν εἰς τὴν ἑαυτοῦ), gave a confession of sound faith to the most blessed bishop Hermogenes of Caesarea, who was judging him on the charge of false doctrine. And having thus received ordination at his hands, after the decease of the latter, he ran to Eusebius of Constantinople, a man who himself less than no one sponsored the impious doctrine of Arius. Then after being driven for some cause or other from that place, he returned and made a defence again before the people of his own country (τοῖς ἐπὶ τῆς πατρίδος ἀπελογήσατο πάλιν), concealing his impious sentiments and screening himself behind a kind of orthodoxy of words.”⁵⁵ So, it is clear that in both letters ἡ πατρίς means Caesarea in Cappadocia.

In Letter 75 to Aburgius (a layman from Caesarea), Basil speaks about the division of Cappadocia into two provinces without naming it even once. Instead, he uses the noun ἡ πατρίς without any possessive: περὶ τὴν πατρίδα σπουδῆ, Αὕτη τοίνυν ἡ πατρίς, φανῆναί ποτε τῇ πατρίδι. With reference to Caesarea Basil uses the noun ἡ πόλις with the article and no possessive.⁵⁶ In Letter 74 to Martinianus, written in 372, in the face of the division of Cappadocia, Basil uses ἡ πατρίς three times, clearly referring it to Cappadocia: “I am discontented with it. Why in the world, for instance, am I now writing, when I ought to be with you? It is because my afflicted country (κάμνουσα ἡ πατρίς) urges me to hurry to succour her,”⁵⁷ “for this very reason I wanted to meet you and express my mind to you; or rather to beg you to devise some

⁵⁵ Basil, *Epistulae* 263, 3 (Courtonne 3: 123; transl. Deferrari 4: 93–95).

⁵⁶ Basil, *Epistulae* 75 (Courtonne 1: 176–177; transl. Deferrari 2: 79–81).

⁵⁷ Basil, *Epistulae* 74, 1 (Courtonne 1: 173; transl. Deferrari 2: 69).

vigorous measure, worthy of your wisdom, and not to ignore our country (τὴν πατρίδα ἡμῶν) when she has fallen to her knees,”⁵⁸ “if you do your country (τῇ πατρίδι) the service of helping her by letter [...]”⁵⁹ Pouchet identifies the addressee with Martinianus to whom Gregory of Nazianzus dedicated some epigrams, who came from Cappadocia, from a place near Nazianzus.⁶⁰

In his letters to Sofronius, written in 372, Basil sometimes uses only the noun πατρίς with the article and sometimes the noun with the article and the possessive: “The magnitude of the misfortunes which have fallen upon our country (τὴν πατρίδα ἡμῶν) was constraining me to go to court,”⁶¹ “What man is so patriotic, honouring equally with his parents the fatherland which gave him birth and reared him (τὴν ἐνεγκοῦσαν καὶ θρεψαμένην πατρίδα), as are you yourself,”⁶² “it was under you that our city (ἡ πατρίς ἡμῶν) became rich as in a dream,”⁶³ “whole fatherland (πᾶσαν οἴου τὴν πατρίδα) addresses those words to you by our single voice.”⁶⁴ According to Deferrari, Sofronius was “a native of Cappadocian Caesarea, was an early friend and fellow-student of both Basil and Gregory Nazianzenus while at Athens. He entered the Civil Service, and soon rose to a high office. In 365 A.D., he was appointed Prefect of Constantinople.”⁶⁵

⁵⁸ Basil, *Epistulae* 74, 2 (Courtonne 1: 173–174; transl. Deferrari 2: 71).

⁵⁹ Basil, *Epistulae* 74, 2 (Courtonne 1: 174; transl. Deferrari 2: 73).

⁶⁰ Pouchet (1992): 222.

⁶¹ Basil, *Epistulae* 76 (Courtonne 1: 178, transl. Deferrari 2: 81). Letter 76 was written in 372 in the face of the division of Cappadocia.

⁶² Basil, *Epistulae* 96, 1 (Courtonne 1: 208, transl. Deferrari 2: 157).

⁶³ Basil, *Epistulae* 96, 1 (Courtonne 1: 208, transl. Deferrari 2: 157–159).

⁶⁴ Basil, *Epistulae* 96, 1 (Courtonne 1: 209).

⁶⁵ Deferrari, in: Basil, *Letters*, (Deferrari) 1: 178, note 1.

Without address, on behalf of a compatriot – according to Pouchet a letter could have been addressed to Sophronius or Aburgius⁶⁶ – Basil uses ἡ πατρίς twice: once with a possessive: “Those who come from our fatherland (ἐκ τῆς πατρίδος ἡμῶν) are commended to you by the very claim of the fatherland (τῆς πατρίδος), even though you, through the goodness of your character, bring under your fostering care all those who in any way need any succour.”⁶⁷

In many letters to the Cappadocians, Basil uses the term ἡ πατρίς without any possessive and it is clear that he refers to Cappadocia as a common fatherland of the author and the addressee: in Letter 116 to Firminus, who was a son of a Cappadocian curial,⁶⁸ Basil calls him on to come back to the fatherland (καταλαβεῖν τὴν πατρίδα);⁶⁹ to Caesarius, a brother of Gregory of Nazianzus, he writes as follows: “Thanks be to God, who has shown His wonders even in your person, and has preserved you from such a death, for the fatherland (τῇ τε πατρίδι) and for us your relations;”⁷⁰ in the letter written at the beginning of the episcopacy (about 370) to Bosporius, bishop of Colonia in Cappadocia and a close friend of Basil and Gregory Nazianzenus:⁷¹ “I, together with many Godfearing people of our fatherland (ἐν τῇ πατρίδι);”⁷² to Gregory of Nazianzus he describes the matters of the fatherland (τὰ τῆς πατρίδος πράγματα);⁷³ to Amphilochius, on his consecration as bishop: “the fatherland is rejoicing

⁶⁶ Pouchet (1992): 630.

⁶⁷ Basil, *Epistulae* 318, 1 (Courtonne 3: 191; transl. Deferrari 4: 259).

⁶⁸ Pouchet (1992): 297.

⁶⁹ Basil, *Epistulae* 116 (Courtonne 2: 21).

⁷⁰ Basil, *Epistulae* 26 (Courtonne 1: 63, transl. Deferrari 1: 155).

⁷¹ Deferrari, in: Basile, *Letters* (Deferrari) 1: 321, note 2.

⁷² Basil, *Epistulae* 51, 2 (Courtonne 1: 132, transl. Deferrari 1: 325).

⁷³ Basil, *Epistulae* 71, 2 (Courtonne 1: 168).

(χαίρει καὶ ἡ πατρίς).⁷⁴ In the homily on Gordius the Martyr the expression “he listed his fatherland” (εἶπε τὴν πατρίδα)⁷⁵ could have meant a fatherland in general, but Gordius was from Cappadocia and as the homily was preached when Basil was bishop,⁷⁶ it was most probably preached in Caesarea.

Also in many letters not to the Cappadocians or to unknown addressees Basil uses the noun ἡ πατρίς without the possessive, and it is clear from the context that it refers to Cappadocia. In the letter written in 375 to Meletius, bishop of Antioch: “Many and divers journeys abroad have taken us from home (τῆς πατρίδος). For indeed we went even as far as Pisidia that we might settle the affairs of the brethren in Isauria with the bishops there. And thence our journey took us to the Pontus.”⁷⁷ To an unknown addressee: “We pray to God that by advancing to greater renown and glory you may by your own virtue do honour both to us and to all the fatherland (καὶ ἡμᾶς καὶ τὴν πατρίδα πᾶσαν).⁷⁸ In the letter written in 372 to an unknown addressee: “I have written also to the governor of my native land (τῆς πατρίδος) in order that, if they do not wish to do what is right of themselves, they may be forced to do so under pressure of the courts.”⁷⁹ In the letter written in 375 to bishop Elpidius: “But now I am in such a state that I must submit to be content even with the journeys in my own country (τῆς πατρίδος) which we must necessarily make when we inspect

⁷⁴ Basil, *Epistulae* 161, 1 (Courtonne 2: 93).

⁷⁵ Basil, *In Gordium martyrem* (PG 31: 500).

⁷⁶ Fedwick (1981): 10, note 40.

⁷⁷ Basil, *Epistulae* 216 (Courtonne 2: 207; transl. Deferrari 3: 239).

⁷⁸ Basil, *Epistulae* 326 (Courtonne 3: 198; transl. Deferrari 4: 277).

⁷⁹ Basil, *Epistulae* 87 (Courtonne 1: 192; transl. Deferrari 2: 115).

the parishes in our district.”⁸⁰ To an unknown addressee: “You will do well, if you send the relics of martyrs to [our] native land (τῆ πατρίδι);”⁸¹ the letter written in 373 refers to transferring the remains of the Gothic martyr Sabas (d. April 372) to Caesarea in Cappadocia.⁸²

In many letters written after he was ordained bishop Basil adds the possessive ἡμῶν/ἐαυτῶν to ἡ πατρίς when he refers to Cappadocia and the addressee is not Cappadocian: to Athanasius (τὴν ἐαυτῶν πατρίδα),⁸³ to a Censor (ἡμῶν τὴν πατρίδα),⁸⁴ to Antipater, governor (τὴν πατρίδα ἡμῶν),⁸⁵ to Ascholius, bishop of Thessalonica (ἡμῶν τὴν πατρίδα),⁸⁶ (τὰ ἐν σοὶ καλὰ τῆς πατρίδος ἡμῶν ἐστὶ σεμνολογήματα, ἡ πατρίς ἡμῶν),⁸⁷ to the prefect Modestus, who was an Arab,⁸⁸ (τῆ πατρίδι ἡμῶν),⁸⁹ (Ἐμοὶ δ’ ὑπὲρ πατρίδος πάσης ἀγωνιῶντι),⁹⁰ (τῆς πατρίδος ἡμῶν),⁹¹ to Jovinus, bishop of Perrha, a town near Samosata,⁹² (ἡμῶν τῆ πατρίδι),⁹³ to Trajan, who according to Pouchet could have been a high-ranking official at the court,⁹⁴ (ἀδελφὸς Μάξιμος, ὁ τῆς πατρίδος ἡμῶν ἠγησάμενος),⁹⁵ to Trajan, according

⁸⁰ Basil, *Epistulae* 206 (Courtonne 2: 182; transl. Deferrari 3: 179).

⁸¹ Basil, *Epistulae* 155 (Courtonne 2: 81; transl. Deferrari 2: 385).

⁸² Deferrari, in: Basile, *Letters* (Deferrari) 2: 380–381, note 1.

⁸³ Basil, *Epistulae* 61, 1 (Courtonne 1: 151).

⁸⁴ Basil, *Epistulae* 83, 1 (Courtonne 1: 186).

⁸⁵ Basil, *Epistulae* 137, 1 (Courtonne 2: 53).

⁸⁶ Basil, *Epistulae* 164, 1 (Courtonne 2: 97).

⁸⁷ Basil, *Epistulae* 165 (Courtonne 2: 100).

⁸⁸ Pouchet (1992): 320.

⁸⁹ Basil, *Epistulae* 104 (Courtonne 2: 5).

⁹⁰ Basil, *Epistulae* 104 (Courtonne 2: 5).

⁹¹ Basil, *Epistulae* 281 (Courtonne 4: 153).

⁹² Pouchet (1992): 272.

⁹³ Basil, *Epistulae* 118 (Courtonne 2: 23).

⁹⁴ Pouchet (1992): 327.

⁹⁵ Basil, *Epistulae* 148 (Courtonne 2: 69).

to Pouchet a military,⁹⁶ (Μαξίμου, τοῦ ἄρχαντος τῆς πατρίδος ἡμῶν),⁹⁷ to Demosthenes vicar of Pontus (τῆς πατρίδος ἡμῶν),⁹⁸ in the same letter πατρίς appears without possessive: “So that we beseech you to keep the hearing in our fatherland (ἐπὶ τῆς πατρίδος) for us, and not to drag us beyond its.”⁹⁹

IV. Others

In four cases the meaning of ἡ πατρίς is uncertain - the addressee of the letter is unknown, dating of the letter impossible, context says nothing about the meaning of ἡ πατρίς: “You have mixed a cup of infamy for your country (Ἐκέρασας τῇ πατρίδι κρατῆρα δυσφημίας)” (to a fallen monk),¹⁰⁰ “send him back to [his] country (ἀποπέμψαι αὐτὸν τῇ πατρίδι),”¹⁰¹ τῇ πατρίδι ἡμῶν, ἐπὶ τῆς πατρίδος ἡμῶν (to an unknown addressee).¹⁰²

In *Regulae morales* 61, PG 31, 796 Basil quotes the Bible, where the noun appears (Ἐλθὼν εἰς τὴν πατρίδα αὐτοῦ, ἐδίδασκεν αὐτοὺς ἐν τῇ συναγωγῇ αὐτῶν; Οὐκ ἔστι προφήτης ἄτιμος εἰ μὴ ἐν τῇ πατρίδι αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐν τῇ οἰκίᾳ αὐτοῦ).

* * *

The textual analysis of Basil’s writings dispels doubts regarding the fatherland of two very important personages of the 4th-century Asia Minor: Basil himself and Eustathius

⁹⁶ Pouchet (1992): 326–327.

⁹⁷ Basil, *Epistulae* 149 (Courtonne 2: 70).

⁹⁸ Basil, *Epistulae* 225, 1 (Courtonne 3: 21).

⁹⁹ Basil, *Epistulae* 225, 1 (Courtonne 3: 22; transl. Deferrari 3: 325).

¹⁰⁰ Basil, *Epistulae* 45, 2 (Courtonne 1: 115; transl. Deferrari 1: 281).

¹⁰¹ Basil, *Epistulae* 275 (Courtonne 3: 148; transl. Deferrari 4: 157).

¹⁰² Basil, *Epistulae* 78 (Courtonne 1: 180).

of Sebastea. They both were from Caesarea in Cappadocia. The effects of my research on the notion of πατρίς in Basil's writings can help as well in establishing some crucial facts concerning the people whom Basil mentioned in his letters. My study has proved that except for two quotations from the Bible, references to paradise/heaven and four cases where the meaning of ἡ πατρίς is uncertain, Basil always and with no exception refers ἡ πατρίς (in singular with the article) to Cappadocia and never to any other country/homeland of anybody.

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