

# How Knowledge and Language Skills Can Save a Man from His Political Misfortunes: Anastasius Bibliothecarius as the Cultural Broker *Par Excellence*?

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This contribution is dedicated to the well-documented and peculiar case of Anastasius, librarian of the Roman Church. It will show how Anastasius, despite great erudition and thorough plans, did not succeed with his plans as a (ecclesiastical) politician and diplomat on several occasions – but still remained a powerful figure in Rome and beyond due to his unique language skills and cultural knowledge. It will address if and in what way Anastasius can be seen as a cultural broker.

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What could a cultural broker be? That is the key question of the short section at hand. The following article will take up this concept and demonstrate its usefulness using the example of one of the most well-known persons of the ninth century, Anastasius, librarian of the Roman Church. Our protagonist is best known nowadays for his ample translation oeuvre, but was at the time at least as prominent for his political career, which we will analyse in the first part of the contribution.

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1 This article is not only part of this section, but also meant as an addition and supplement to my contribution »Ad utriusque imperii unitatem« in number 13 (2021) of this journal.

First, we should, however, quickly present the analytical question that prompted this contribution: to what extent and in what way was Anastasius a cultural broker? The development of the concept of cultural broker has been analysed by Kurtis Schaeffer in his contribution to this section and will not be reiterated at this point.<sup>2</sup> Schaeffer has also briefly demonstrated how the concept was later introduced into historical research and has cited several influential works.<sup>3</sup>

According to some medievalist approaches to cultural brokerage, a translator cannot but also be a cultural broker him- or herself.<sup>4</sup> Taking on board that bold claim made by von der Höh, Jaspert and Oesterle a decade ago, Anastasius could not help but automatically *be* a cultural broker, as the leader of a translation circle in Rome, the likes of which even the city of Rome had hardly ever seen before.<sup>5</sup>

Schaeffer has, however, defined far more restrictive criteria which a cultural broker should meet. The concept is only applicable to its full extent and analytical quality if all of the following five criteria are met: cultural brokers need (1) to be social mediators, even when brokering »culture«. They (2) mediate between small, often local social groups and large, often trans-local social groups; (3) attend to the needs of both contexts; (4) confer authority for both the mediator and members of the local group; and finally, (5) bring cultural innovation.<sup>6</sup> We will revisit these five criteria towards the end of the contribution, but it can be helpful to keep them in mind as we start browsing through the life of Anastasius.

#### *An Exceptional Life: The Ups and Downs of the Talented Anastasius*

In 879, the exact date and month are unknown, Anastasius Bibliothecarius died in Rome, possibly aged around 70. During his last years, his name appeared in an exceptional number of papal charters. He had officially been instated as librarian of the Roman Church by Pope John VIII (872-882). Much more than the title itself suggests to us, the post of librarian was an important office in the papal chancellery at the time.<sup>7</sup> Anastasius thus managed to reach the highest point of his career at quite an old age, shortly before he died. At this point, he was one of the most illustrious and well-known sons of the Eternal City. That was not only due to the prestigious office he held – we do not know many high officers of papal Rome from the ninth century by name, and if we do know them by name, then we know little more than that. A charter from Rome from early 868 can serve to illustrate this: many important persons from the Roman lay nobility signed this document, even though it seems like a simple sale at first. We have no real valuable additional information about the signatories, and we would have none at all, were it not for the charter, transmitted by chance.<sup>8</sup> Why then do we have so much more information on Anastasius, more indeed, than on some ninth-century popes? As is so often the case, there are several factors that need to be taken into account.

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2 Schaeffer, Cultural brokers and other historiographic metaphors, 111-115.

3 Höh, Jaspert and Oesterle, Courts, brokers and brokerage; Reimitz, Cultural brokers of a common past; *idem*, Historian as cultural broker.

4 Höh, Jaspert and Oesterle, Courts, brokers and brokerage, 26-27.

5 Forrai, *The Interpreter of the Popes*.

6 Schaeffer, Cultural brokers and other historiographic metaphors, 116.

7 Arnaldi, Anastasio Bibliotecario, antipapa.

8 On the charter, see Gantner, Lay administration.

The first aspect is surely Anastasius' unique set of skills, which seems to have set him apart from most of his contemporaries. The librarian had received an exceptional education in the city of Rome, especially in Greek. He was better known for his translations from Greek than for any of his political deeds and projects – and this still applies to some extent today. Anastasius learned Greek early in his life, and there has been speculation in literature as to whether his family was of Greek origin, like so many families in Rome in the eighth century.<sup>9</sup> Research has, however, been sceptical about this for quite some time: for one thing, Anastasius' family seems to have been firmly Roman based, was considered Roman (i.e. Latin) in the city itself and used western, in one case even Frankish names in the ninth century.<sup>10</sup> But the most convincing evidence lies in the translations produced by Anastasius and his team, which reveal that they were not made by a native Greek speaker.<sup>11</sup> More likely, Anastasius was a skilful student of the Greek language. What distinguished him even more was his command of Latin at an even higher level, as his texts clearly show. He had a very recognizable, sophisticated style in this language.<sup>12</sup> Taken together, he was the best language expert Rome could muster at this point. We shall take a look at his cultural output later, but we must already state here that he not only translated religious texts, often saints' lives, which were very important to specialists in the Latin world, but he also translated religio-political texts, such as two ecumenical councils, and perhaps most importantly for his position in Rome, he drafted most papal diplomatic letters relating to Constantinople.

The basis of the second aspect of Anastasius' fame is certainly his familial network – he was someone to keep an eye on, probably from the moment was born. The other prominent person from Anastasius' family we know well from our sources is his uncle Arsenius, and the two are but the tip of the iceberg. The entire family was well connected, so well that Anastasius was obviously considered by some a suitable candidate for the papal throne in the late 840s.<sup>13</sup>

These two factors, Anastasius' prominent birth and exceptional language skills, laid the basis for a fame that was to last his entire life.

Why then have I even dared to question his career in the title of this contribution? Because Anastasius' life story can alternatively be told as a narrative of failure. The first time the sources mention him is in his biggest personal defeat. In his thirties, Anastasius was archpriest of the Roman church of S. Marcello, when he fled from Rome for undisclosed reasons, leaving his office behind. He was summoned several times by Pope Leo IV (847-855) and condemned and excommunicated at two Roman synods in 850 and 853 respectively. I have argued elsewhere that we should consider the possibility that Anastasius feared being promoted and becoming bishop of one of the episcopal sees in the Roman diocese.

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9 On Greek Rome see, e.g., Winterhager, *Migranten und Stadtgesellschaft*; Gantner, *Freunde Roms und Völker der Finsternis*; von Falkenhausen, *Greek and Latin*, 551, calls Anastasius bilingual, which cannot be ruled out.

10 Gantner, *Ad utriusque imperii unitatem?*, 36-37. For more information on Anastasius' career in the curia and on his family networks, see Neil, *Seventh-Century Popes*, 11-34.

11 Forrai, *The Interpreter of the Popes*, 95-114.

12 On his style, see still the analysis by Perels, *Papst Nikolaus I. und Anastasius Bibliothecarius*, 242-316.

13 See, e.g., Haller, *Nikolaus I. und Pseudo-Isidor*, esp. 131-132.

That career step would have removed the young cleric from the rank of realistic candidates for the papal see and hence to succeed Leo,<sup>14</sup> as it was against canon law at the time to leave one's episcopal see without the permission of the pope. This rendered it near impossible for a bishop to become pope without breaking canon law, as was seen later in the ninth century in the case of the infamous Formosus, whose tenure as pope was overshadowed by his translation from the see of Porto and whose breach of the law threw the papacy into a phase of uncertainty for decades thereafter.<sup>15</sup> While Anastasius' flight from Rome at first seemingly also removed him from any position of candidacy, it did not do so permanently. Still, it did produce a scandal that was discussed in the Italian kingdom, to where he had allegedly fled. Leo IV even had Louis II personally confirm the Roman excommunication.<sup>16</sup>

When Leo IV died on 17 July 855, his successor Benedict III was quickly elected. Envoys were sent to Emperor Louis II, who was expected to confirm the pope elect. However, it seems these envoys were bribed by Arsenius, Anastasius' uncle, and presented Louis with a very different case. The emperor thus sent his own envoys to Rome with a small armed force and the Franks installed Anastasius as pope. The episode lasted only a few weeks, at the end of which Anastasius was driven out of the city together with his Frankish supporters by the outraged Romans.<sup>17</sup> These events, recorded meticulously in the *Liber Pontificalis*, the official papal history book,<sup>18</sup> should have been the end of any cleric's career – but strangely, Anastasius weathered the storm. He returned to Rome after Louis II had installed »his« candidate, Nicholas I, at the next papal election in spring 858.<sup>19</sup> The former antipope hence returned, after spending more time in exile, as abbot of the monastery of S. Maria in Trastevere. The long time in exile and the failed attempt to win the papal throne through a coup were nevertheless his greatest personal defeats.

As abbot, Anastasius had the opportunity to build up his famous team of translators, which we will discuss in more detail below. Apparently as a part-time occupation, he also became Nicholas' chief advisor and diplomat for eastern affairs, an important and demanding position in the 860s.<sup>20</sup> Nicholas had formally deposed Photios, patriarch of Constantinople, who did not relinquish his post but engaged in a diplomatic dispute with the pope until he was effectively deposed in early autumn 867 following a coup d'état in Byzantium.<sup>21</sup> Anastasius was at the centre of this dispute and composed most of the writings from the papal perspective, as he reminded Pope Hadrian II (867-872) in a letter.<sup>22</sup>

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14 Gantner, *Ad utriusque imperii unitatem?*, 38-39.

15 Heckmann, *Der Fall Formosus*; Grabowsky, *Tote Päpste und neues Recht*.

16 See Herbers, RI 4,2,1, nos. 288 and 291, and Synod of Rome, Dec. 853, ed. Hartmann, 335-339. In preparation: Gantner, *Worthy of Heaven*.

17 *Liber Pontificalis*, ed. Duchesne, vol. 2, 143-144.

18 McKitterick, *Rome and the invention of the papacy*; Herbers, *Zu frühmittelalterlichen Personenbeschreibungen*; and Gantner, *Freunde Roms und Völker der Finsternis*.

19 See Gantner, *Worthy of Heaven*. See also *Annales Bertiniani*, a. 858, trans. Nelson, 87, ed. Grat, 78.

20 Haller, *Nikolaus I. und Pseudo-Isidor*, 198-199. See Perels, *Papst Nikolaus I. und Anastasius*, 208-231.

21 Chrysos, *Council of Constantinople*; Kislinger, *Eildiplomatie*; Kislinger, *Erster und zweiter Sieger*; Price and Montinaro, *Acts of the Council*, 5-37.

22 Anastasius, ep. 5, to Hadrian II, ed. Laehr, 403-415. I will say more about the problematic transmission, dating and content below, p. 29 with n. 49.

As Hadrian had been part of Nicholas' inner circle, it would not have made any sense to lie about this role. Moreover, in the same letter Anastasius refers to his vital role in the negotiations regarding the Bulgarian question. A few years earlier, the Bulgarians, under their king Boris-Michael, had sought Roman rather than Constantinopolitan guidance in their conversion to Christianity.<sup>23</sup> Rome had invested substantially in the Bulgarian mission, also with the help of Anastasius, but in the letter of 870 we already see that things were not going well for the Roman claims. Soon, Bulgaria would be back under the authority of the patriarch of Constantinople, another lost cause in which our author had invested a lot of energy. 870 had, however, also been a year of temporary triumph, as Photios had been formally deposed by the council of Constantinople and replaced by his old opponent Ignatius. The findings of the synod were a total success and confirmed the papal point of view entirely. It is doubtful whether it was known in Rome that its rulings were not supported by a big part, maybe even the majority of the eastern bishops.<sup>24</sup> The decisions of the synod were overturned after Ignatius' death, when Photios was reinstated as patriarch – reinstated with the consent of Pope John VIII, who was forced to make this agreement with the Byzantine emperor Basil I in exchange for naval support against the Saracens in the Mediterranean.<sup>25</sup> It is not unlikely that Anastasius lived to see the ultimate failure of his Byzantine policy in this respect as well, though it is doubtful that he still had any influence on the decision – and highly doubtful that he would have embraced it. By his death, the cornerstones of his papal-Byzantine diplomacy had clearly developed in directions he did not want them to.

Unfortunately, when we look at the imperial side of his diplomacy, the picture does not change significantly. Again, we need a little background on his relations to the Italian imperial court. We have already seen that Anastasius spent several years outside of Rome when he was probably in his 30s, maybe early 40s. Louis II, first as king of Italy (until 850) then as emperor, officially seems to have declined harbouring the prominent fugitive – but it did not take much to persuade him to support the renegade priest's claim to the papal throne in 855. It is at least likely that some form of contact had been made between the two men before that date, even though we cannot prove it.

In 864, Louis besieged Rome, because Pope Nicholas had acted against his interests in the affair surrounding the divorce of Louis II's brother Lothar II, in the course of which the pope had deposed and excommunicated several North Alpine and Italian bishops, some of whom were close allies of the Pavian court. It was the last part of the actions that drove Louis to attack the pope.<sup>26</sup> When the siege was lifted, after Queen Angilberga had negotiated a treaty, Arsenius of Orte was installed as the emperor's permanent envoy («apochrisarius») in the Eternal City.<sup>27</sup> We can assume that together with his uncle, Anastasius was also firmly in the imperial camp at this point.

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23 Heiser, *Die Responsa*. Ziemann, *Vom Wandervolk zur Großmacht*, 390-400.

24 Chrysos, Council of Constantinople.

25 Gantner, *New visions of community*.

26 Gantner, *Worthy of Heaven* (forthcoming).

27 Haller, *Nikolaus I. und Pseudo-Isidor*, 47-52.

And while Anastasius broke with his uncle in 867 in a quarrel over the legacy of the dying pope Nicholas I, he seems to have stayed on good terms with Louis II all the same.<sup>28</sup> We can see that in autumn 868, when a trial was held against Anastasius in Rome. What had happened this time? In March of the same year, Arsenius' son Eleutherius had abducted the new pope Hadrian II's daughter and wife (!) and murdered both women after the pope had refused to allow him to marry the younger one. Eleutherius himself was immediately slain by imperial envoys, who had been with him to mediate between him and the Lateran. Arsenius had to flee Rome immediately afterwards and died shortly after reaching Angilberga in Montecassino. Anastasius was also suspected of having known of his cousin's plans – and when a relative by the name of Ado testified against him a few months later, he was stripped of his offices and threatened with imprisonment in a monastery.<sup>29</sup> In that situation, he fled from Rome and was officially taken in by Louis II, who installed him as tutor of his only surviving daughter Ermengard. In late 869, Anastasius was then sent to Constantinople to be part of an imperial embassy negotiating a marriage between Ermengard and a son of the still quite new emperor Basil. The envoys reached the city in early 870. There, they succeed with their main task, namely the betrothal. Anastasius also gave (uncommissioned) aid to the papal delegation at the ecumenical council, which had been running for a few months already.<sup>30</sup> He was present for the final session in February 870 and seems to have helped with the condemnation of Photios. He could not, however, help with the Bulgarian negotiations, as he was deliberately excluded from those by Basil.

He managed to obtain at least a copy of the Greeks acts of the council for himself and the emperor and returned safely to Italy with this text – while the papal delegation was robbed of all their possessions by pirates on their way back. Anastasius, not only the only person in possession of a copy of the synodal acts but also the one who could be commissioned with a Latin translation, was reinstated to the papal service soon afterwards, maybe already in late 870.<sup>31</sup> Before returning to Rome, however, he travelled once more to Louis II, whom he met in Benevento in southern Italy. Louis had conquered the Saracen emirate of Bari in early February and was about to expel the Muslims from southern Italy. He needed Anastasius' services, as he had to reply to a letter he had received from Basil I, full of accusations and provocations.<sup>32</sup> The result was the famous, very long reply in Louis' name, sent to Basil at some point in spring 871, transmitted only in the *Chronicle of Salerno*.<sup>33</sup> We can clearly see Anastasius' style in the text we have today, which means that there is little doubt that he was the Frankish emperor's ghostwriter in this case, and he also snuck in his personal erudite argumentation about the superiority of the western emperor's imperial title over the eastern *basileus*.<sup>34</sup>

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28 Perels, *Papst Nikolaus I. und Anastasius*, 231235; Grotz, *Erbe wider Willen*, 140.

29 On the murder case, see the very convincing summary in Grotz, *Erbe wider Willen*, 168-172. See also Gantner, *Ad utriusque imperii unitatem?*, 40.

30 Gantner, *Ad utriusque imperii unitatem?*, 40-42.

31 Gantner, *Ad utriusque imperii unitatem?*, 42-50.

32 Fanning, *Imperial diplomacy*.

33 *Chronicle of Salerno*, ed Westerbergh, 107-121

34 Louis II, *Letter to Basil*, ed. Henze, 385-394. See now the introduction by West, *The Fall of a Carolingian Kingdom*, 182-186.

As this was a commissioned work, he still conveyed a lot of the emperor's self-perception and included the outstretched hand towards Byzantium, trying to rekindle the alliance in the Italian south.

Anastasios did not join the Frankish embassy this time, an embassy that clearly failed in its objectives, not least, we may imagine, due to the tone of the official letter it carried. Even before that, the marriage alliance had collapsed in autumn 870, when the Byzantine general Nikephoros Ooryphas had caused the problems that needed to be addressed in the letter a few months later.<sup>35</sup> This meant that all political achievements that Anastasios had brought back from Constantinople that year had failed in the short or long term. In this case that must have been particularly annoying, as Anastasios had been Ermen-gard's personal tutor and had dreamt of a new unity of the Roman Empire in the letter to Hadrian II.<sup>36</sup> Louis II's south Italian war, that seemed to go in such a promising direction, also failed in the same year, when his plans were crossed by a conspiracy of south Italian potentates led by none less than the Prince of Benevento.<sup>37</sup> The anti-Saracen agenda was abandoned for good by the kingdom of Italy and its quickly changing leaders after Louis II died unexpectedly in 875.<sup>38</sup>

The agenda had, however, been taken over by Anastasios' new employer, Pope John VIII, in the course of the 870s.<sup>39</sup> Does it surprise us at this point that Anastasios played a role in these endeavours yet again? Already in early autumn 871, having returned to Rome but a few weeks earlier, he led a papal embassy to Naples, one of the important Roman city-states in the south. Many of them were theoretically still subject to the Byzantine Empire, but by the end of the ninth century, they had become de facto independent, as the comparable cases of Amalfi and Gaeta show quite clearly.<sup>40</sup> What was maybe surprising for Rome was that all these city-states with their important harbours were very inclined to forge coalitions with Muslims pirates or even officials. This led to acrimonious politics by Pope John, who tried to pursue a policy between carrots (bribes in silver) and sticks (excommunications, military interventions) – a policy that ultimately failed yet again.<sup>41</sup> The southern Italian Saracens were only finally driven out decades later in the 915 proto-crusade organized by Pope John X (914-928) against the Saracens at the river Garigliano.<sup>42</sup> Anastasios was – again – an eyewitness of John VIII's misfortune with his south Italian policies coinciding strangely with the return of Photios to the scene in the east.<sup>43</sup>

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35 Niketas Ooryphas #25696, in: Prosopographie, accessed on 24 October 2023: db-degruyter-com.uaccess.univie.ac.at/view/PMBZ/PMBZ27850; Kislinger, *Erster und zweiter Sieger*. Gantner, *Ad utriusque imperii unitatem?*, 45.

36 Gantner, *Ad utriusque imperii unitatem?*, 45.

37 Granier, *La captivité de l'empereur Louis II*.

38 Bougard, *Le royaume d'Italie* gives a great brand-new insight into the time after 875.

39 See Gantner, *New visions of community*, esp. 415-417, on the reign and political agenda of John VIII.

40 Granier, *Rome and Romanness*; Skinner, *Medieval Amalfi*; Skinner, *Family Power in Southern Italy*.

41 Gantner, *New visions of community*.

42 On the ever-changing fortunes of Southern Italy and the Arabs, see Wolf and Herbers, *(Re-)thinking early medieval southern Italy*, 9-39, as well as the entire volume. On the development of crusade ideology in the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> century, see amongst others Gantner, *New visions of community*.

43 Arnold, *Johannes VIII: Päpstliche Herrschaft*, esp. 205-225; Gantner, *New visions of community*, 420-421.

It is thus fair to say that while Anastasius personally overcame extreme vicissitudes in his career, between his city of Rome and the Italian court, nearly all the political projects he supported or even instigated in his time would ultimately come to an end and (partial) successes would be overturned or annulled during the last years of his life. There is one notable exception, which is the mission of the Greek Methodius in Moravia, a mission that had been supported by Rome and not least by Anastasius.

This religio-political project alone still thrived in 879. It did not survive the Magyar arrival around the turn of the tenth century, but the territory covered by Methodius' project, adhered to Rome throughout the centuries.<sup>44</sup> It is also fair to sum up and has to be noted here that most of Anastasius' setbacks, actually all after 855, cannot be connected to his own actions or political position. Many were failures of the papal administration as a whole or can be attributed to individual popes, while some were failures of the policy of the Carolingian court in Italy. In many a setback, Anastasius was simply unlucky.

### *Can a Luckless Cultural Broker Exist?*

Still, after this quick tour through the career of Anastasius, librarian of the Roman Church, the question remains just how this man could survive so many misfortunes and so many miscalculations on his own and on his family's part. Well into the 19<sup>th</sup> century, historians speculated whether all these adventures had actually been experienced by one person or whether there had been several Anastasii, sharing both a name and a city.<sup>45</sup> But his contemporary Hincmar, archbishop of Reims, transmitted a letter by another contemporary, no less a personage than Hadrian II, concerning the year 868 and the renewed condemnation of Anastasius, making it very clear that it was the very same antipope from 855 who was deposed again after 13 years.<sup>46</sup> One man had led one of the most exciting lives we know of in the early Middle Ages.

How could he weather all the storms he experienced? For a partial answer, we may return once more to his mission to Constantinople in 870 and take a closer look at what his role there was. Granted, we only have one full account of the events by Anastasius himself, in the letter he sent to Hadrian II on his way back,<sup>47</sup> but if we venture to doubt the truthfulness of his report, we have to take into consideration that when Anastasius wrote his letter, the papal envoys were also on their way back to Rome. While they lost all their belongings in the famous pirate attack, the envoys seem to have made it back to Rome alive. Indeed, Anastasius refers to these *missi* several times in his text, claiming that they can affirm his account, should need be. In the letter, he points out his important role in the events that led to the Roman triumph over Photios at the synod. He lays out the help provided to the papal delegation and his (unsuccessful) attempt to assist in the Bulgarian negotiations, which went badly, although our author is sure enough of himself to assure Hadrian that the papal side would have fared better had he been admitted.<sup>48</sup>

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44 Meyvaert and Devos, *Trois énigmes cyrillo-méthodiennes*, 400-405.

45 Perels, *Papst Nikolaus I. und Anastasius*, 317-322.

46 *Annales Bertiniani*, a. 868, trans. Nelson, 148-150, ed. Grat, 144-147.

47 Anastasius, ep. to Hadrian II, ed. Laehr, 410.

48 Gantner, *Ad utriusque imperii unitatem?*



The dating of the letter also has to be addressed briefly here. It is transmitted only as the preface to the acts of the council of 869/870, and its final version can only be dated to the time of the production of the translation of the acts, possibly in winter 870/871. But, and this cannot be stressed enough, parts of the letter, and specifically all that directly concern the imperial (!) embassy Anastasius had been part of in 869 and early 870, reflect an earlier date than that, earlier than late summer or early autumn 870 to be more exact.

The letter still sees the marriage alliance between the two empires as binding, but after the mission of the Byzantine patrician Niketas in 870, it was broken off by the Carolingian side over quarrels about protocol. It would have been a very strange move to include this part after that *terminus ante quem*.<sup>49</sup>

Importantly, Anastasius also gives a full account of how he came into possession of the copy of the acts of the council:

*When this venerable council was being held, it happened that I your servant was present, because I had been sent by the most pious emperor Louis [...]. The reason was a nuptial contract between a son of the emperor Basil and the daughter of aforesaid augustus, a worshipper of God, whose completion, desired by both parties, was in preparation. [...] When I was afterwards in Constantinople for the reason given above, I gave no inconsiderable assistance in this matter to your representatives, as they themselves will testify. Conscious of the various accidents in human affairs, I decided to bring to Rome, transcribed in another codex, the proceedings of this council, which the representatives of the apostolic see had had transcribed in one volume to take with them. This is why it was that, when the same representatives 'fell among thieves' [Lk 10:30] and lost this codex together with all their baggage, I carried to Rome the codex I had brought, which your holiness received with gratitude and returned to me to translate into Latin. I said that I was not competent for the task, even though I am trying at the present time to translate texts in the archives into the Roman language and, at the urging of many and particularly of your predecessor, had already translated and published some works of edification. However, the command of so great a pontiff prevailed, since a ready servant is not lacking in obedience. I therefore translated this holy council word for word, as far as Latin idiom permitted; but sometimes, while preserving the sense, I had to alter the Greek construction into a Latin one;*<sup>50</sup>

At this point, in the original letter Anastasius was already clearly aware that he was carrying the last extant exemplar of the acts of the council, as the actual copy designated for the papal see had been lost in the pirate raid, mentioned here briefly. However, his translation work and the decisions that led to him translating the acts are also already included, which they could not have been in the letter that formed the basis for this introduction – we see clearly, that it had been reworked. Thankfully, passages explaining why Anastasius had been in Constantinople at the same time as the council and why he had helped the papal envoys were still left in.

49 See more in Gantner, *Ad utriusque imperii unitatem?* See also the introduction to the preface version, which was clearly reworked, especially on the topics of Photios and Bulgaria, in Price and Montinaro, *Acts of the Council*, 73-82. On the complicated chronology of our sources for these years, see Kislinger, *Erster und zweiter Sieger*, and *id.*, *Eildiplomatie*.

50 Trans. Price and Montinaro, *Acts of the Council*, 94-95. Anastasius, ep. 5, to Hadrian II, ed. Laehr, 403-415.

Anastasius himself, or one of his travel companions, gave an even more vivid account of the embassy's return journey, still preserved today. It was found in a gloss in the original manuscript of the translation, most likely a working manuscript from which the nicer and tidier copies were to be made, today preserved as Vat. Lat. 4965 in the Vatican Library.<sup>51</sup>

This comment is a concise travelogue describing the journey back from Constantinople: The Latin embassies, both the papal and the imperial one, had travelled to Dyrrhachium together. There they went separate ways. The papal envoys took a ship to Ancona, which was captured on the way by Slavic pirates, whereupon the original codex with the council acts was lost. Anastasius' party made it safely to Siponto and went on to Benevento.<sup>52</sup> This move was logical, as the imperial mission had to find their employers, that is the imperial couple in southern Italy, where Louis II was campaigning against Bari, whereas the Romans were heading directly to Rome. From the letter by Anastasius, originally finished in southern Italy, we learn that he, too, was to go on to Rome, mostly to translate the council acts there.<sup>53</sup>

The loss of all-important documentation by the papal *loci servatori*, as our author likes to call them, gave Anastasius a golden opportunity. Even with his valuable help in Constantinople and his ability to offer translations of long Greek documents, he will have calculated that he had a fair chance of making a non-shameful return to the Roman scene – but now he was very confident, as we can also sense in his letter. Anastasius was in the perfect position for an actor of knowledge exchange in this case. By sheer chance, he controlled not only most of the know-how of translation, but also the entire transmission of valuable information. This position of control earned him his re-entry to Rome, even though his exile had been a personal matter for Pope Hadrian. Indeed, we hear no more of that affair.<sup>54</sup>

Can we generalize this example? Can we say that Anastasius could in general *only* capitalize on his unrivalled role as a cultural broker and communication expert, balancing out his sometimes overly zealous and rather luckless political career? That would probably be too easy a conclusion. Not all of Anastasius' cultural work was successful. For example, in Louis II's letter to Basil he inserted a long argument on the meaning of the term *basileus*, which, albeit intellectually valuable, will conceivably have played a role in the ongoing animosities between Louis II and Basil I.<sup>55</sup> This even nearly led to war between the two empires in summer 873.<sup>56</sup> In general, despite his keen interest in the »Greeks«, our author did not like them very much.

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51 BAV Vat. Lat. 4965, fol. 22v. The gloss takes the full page next to the main text. See an edition in: Leonardi, *Anastasio bibliotecario*, 170-171. On the genesis of the codex see Palma, *Antigrafo/apografo*; as well as my own brief comments in Gantner, *Ad utriusque imperii unitatem*?

52 Vat. Lat. 4965, fol. 22v. Leonardi, *Anastasio bibliotecario*, 171.

53 On the chronology, see Leonardi, *Anastasio bibliotecario*.

54 This is less surprising if we consider that only Hincmar ever mentioned it, whereas Roman documents and also imperial documents remain tacit.

55 For the letter, see the translation and comment by West, *The Fall of a Carolingian Kingdom*, 186-200; Fanning, *Imperial diplomacy*; Gantner, *Worthy of Heaven*.

56 Gantner, *Worthy of Heaven*.

When he translated the acts of the second council of Nicea (787) a few years after those of the council he attended, he noted that a letter had been shortened in the Greek acts he had obtained in Constantinople as compared to a copy of the said letter in Rome. He could have pointed that out in any way, but chose to comment that the lines by Pope Hadrian I (772-795) had been »forged, as is the custom of the Greeks« (*falsata Graecorum more*).<sup>57</sup> He also composed a dossier of translations concerning Pope Martin I (648-653/55), who had spectacularly opposed Emperor Constans II and been arrested in Rome, tried in Constantinople and exiled to Cherson, near modern Sevastopol in Crimea.<sup>58</sup> Over 200 years later, Anastasius used the text to strengthen the anti-Byzantine sentiments of his home city.

This goes to demonstrate that in the register of cultural exchange, Anastasius was also not always the simply functional erudite one tends to imagine. Rather, he included his personal agenda in this part of his work – and he nearly always connected his cultural work with his political and diplomatic life. This is not exceptional and nearly all known authors from the early Middle Ages acted in that way, but it is a trait in his work we need to keep in mind for analytical purposes. It reminds us that we cannot separate the political and the cultural persona of our subject.

To contemporary onlookers, Anastasius will have been a prominent figure because of the combination of his literary and political careers – and even if the political one was not ultimately successful, his input was still valued by such influential contemporaries as Louis II, Nicholas I or John VIII.

### *The Cultural Legacy in a Nutshell*

In the late 850s, after being taken back into Roman service, Anastasius started his translation work. In the decade before his second flight from Rome (868) he is known to have produced four translations altogether, the vitae of St. John the Almsgiver, of St. Basil of Caesarea, of St. Amphilochius and of St. John Kalybitas.<sup>59</sup>

But it was only after his return from Constantinople in 870 that he produced the texts he is most well-known for today: the acts of the eighth and seventh councils (871 and 873 respectively), and the collection on Pope Martin (874), plus a dossier of translations from short Greek texts on Saint Martin and several other hagiographical works.<sup>60</sup> Between 871 and 874 he is also believed to have produced his *Chronographia tripertita*, a compilation and translation of three Greek chronicles up to the year 813.<sup>61</sup>

His translation work becomes even more impressive when we consider that he produced the greatest part of it only after 870, that is during the last years of his life, maybe also because he was not as distracted by day-to-day politics as before.

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57 Lamberz, »Falsata Graecorum more«? Anastasius did not even consider that the papacy could have sent a shortened version for the council, leaving out controversial topics and that the letter could have differed from the one sent to Empress Irene (780-802) for that reason.

58 Neil, *Seventh-century Popes and Martyrs*; Brandes, »Juristische« Krisenbewältigung im 7. Jh.?

59 Cò, *Vescovi, re, imperatori*, 271-273 with further literature on each.

60 See Cò, *Vescovi, re, imperatori*, 273-282.

61 *Mango and Scott*, Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor, lxxiv-xcv.

He had such an impact on the imagination of later generations that he was seen as the author of (at least the biggest part of) the Roman *Liber Pontificalis*.<sup>62</sup> While the attribution was proved wrong a long time ago, it shows his standing as »the« author of the papacy in his time.<sup>63</sup> In addition, several letters by Anastasius have been preserved, most of them, because he was in the habit of inserting them in his translations when he dedicated them to one of his addressees.<sup>64</sup> Furthermore, there are many letters for which he could claim to have been their drafter and formulator, as with most of Nicholas I's letters concerning eastern matters. Many of Nicholas' letters have been preserved in the Latin version (we may speculate that Greek versions were produced at times, maybe even already in Rome). Anastasius' authorship or collaboration has not been proven so far, and some cannot have been influenced by him – but many will have been.<sup>65</sup>

### *Conclusion: Anastasius the Success Story?*

If we measure the most famous Roman librarian of the ninth century, maybe of all time, against the more purist approach we employed in the introduction to this journal section, we must notice immediately that he does not entirely fit the »job description«. Anastasius was far more than just a cultural broker, than just an agent of knowledge exchange. He was a (rather) high-born Roman, a teacher of queens, a diplomat of the papacy and the empire. He also was an antipope *putschist*, an intrigant, self-promotor and power broker – and quite certainly not the easiest person to be around.

Without the Annals of St Bertin written by Hincmar of Reims and the recording of Anastasius' condemnation in Rome in 868, we would still doubt that the cultural broker was indeed identical with the antipope from 855. But Hincmar, who at least knew his prominent relative Arsenius personally, was sure of that fact, which has been good enough for research for quite some time.<sup>66</sup>

Seen through the lens of political history, his literary output and translation work from Greek to Latin and maybe even the other way around, can be seen as an addition to an accomplished careerist, as the icing on the cake of an illustrious and infamous life. And yet it was mainly, indeed almost exclusively, for this role he was remembered in the following centuries up to the modern age. During his lifetime, it was his function as the most important purveyor of knowledge that, as we have tried to show, kept him in a powerful and prominent position and ensured that he appeared in our sources at all. It also ensured that we have several of his letters transmitted today, in which he gives his own testimony about his activities. Most of these texts he reused in his translation work, hence providing us with his own legacy. We can thus see his role as translator of the popes at the heart or basis of his historical persona. This would then make him one of the most prominent and powerful agents of knowledge exchange of his time, someone who surely surpassed and transcended his original role – a role, however, he consistently returned to and could fall back on in times of need or trouble.

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62 Arnaldi, *Come nacque la attribuzione*. McKitterick, *Rome and the Invention of the Papacy*.

63 Bougard, *Anastase le Bibliothécaire ou Jean Diacre?*

64 Anastasius Bibliothecarius, *Epistolae*, ed. Perels and Laehr.

65 See Nicholas I, *Epistolae*, ed. Perels. Perels, *Papst Nikolaus I. und Anastasius*, 242-316.

66 Arnaldi, *Anastasio Bibliotecario*, and Arnaldi, *Anastasio Bibliotecario*, antipapa.

His ambition did bring him into a lot of precarious and troublesome situations. On the other hand, it also helped to ensure his fame for centuries. At the beginning of this contribution, I briefly mentioned the conviction of Höh, Jaspert and Oesterle that all translators are qua profession also cultural brokers. It may make us wary as historians, trained to distrust absolute claims like »translator ergo broker«. But I must concede that I find it hard to contradict the claim entirely. If it were to be disproved, after all, it would be a figure like Anastasius we should look at, a figure who embodied so many more *personae* than »just« the translator.

We will, as promised in the introduction, now test Anastasius against our more exclusive model of cultural brokers, taken from our introduction to this journal section. They ...

1. are social mediators, even when brokering »culture«;
2. mediate between small, often local social groups and large, often trans-local social groups;
3. attend to the needs of both contexts;
4. confer authority for both the mediator and members of the local group; and
5. bring cultural innovation.<sup>67</sup>

Not all items on our list are easy to associate with our subject at hand, but after our analysis we can assign them all. The most difficult may well be the social component (1). It is hard to show how an important Roman nobleman, erudite and ecclesiastic, so immersed in Mediterranean elite culture, could have acted as a social mediator. But digging deeper, we can see him doing just that, albeit at a very high level of society. He did try, as we see in his letters, to connect Rome, its church and most certainly his own circle to several political formations in the Latin west. The West Frankish kingdom, surely, the other formerly Byzantine Roman cities on the Italian coasts, even the Lombard areas in the south of the peninsula were in his focus towards the end of his life. However, he tried nothing more than to bind the Frankish Empire under Louis II more firmly to Rome. While not always successful, we cannot but attest that integration was firmly on his agenda.<sup>68</sup> Another important case in point would be the emerging Slavic world, where he had contact to the famous Slavic apostles Constantine-Cyrill and Methodios.<sup>69</sup> His scope also included Dalmatia, as the famous letter he drafted for Louis II to Basil proves (*Sclavenia nostra*).<sup>70</sup> He worked with local and translocal communities, as this list also shows. (2, 3) True, the Roman Church did have universal contacts and worldwide prestige long before Anastasius was born, but his own circle (or workshop?) of translators surely did not.

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67 Schaeffer, Cultural brokers and other historiographic metaphors, 111-116.

68 Anastasius himself discusses the role of mediators in his letter/introduction to Pope Hadrian, making a very specific point about the negotiations on Bulgaria, see Price and Montinaro, *Acts of the Council*, 99-100.

69 *Vita Constantini*, trans. Bujnoch, 76, see Ziffer, *Per il testo*, 147. This section is surely a little legendary, as neither Anastasius nor Arsenius can have been present in Rome in late 868/early 869 – Arsenius had died earlier the same year and Anastasius had fled in early autumn after his trial had not gone well for him. The consecration of Constantine's helpers could have happened earlier though. On Anastasius and his contacts with the Slavs, see also Neil, *Seventh-Century Popes*, 32-34.

70 Louis II, Letter to Basil, ed. Henze, 392.

By the 870s at the latest, this had changed, as their leader had involved them heavily in the East-West controversy, which had been fuelled by the opponents Nicholas I and Photios. I have shown elsewhere how and to what extent Anastasius enhanced papal and imperial prestige in his mission in 869/70 alone (4).<sup>71</sup> The fifth and last factor is the easiest to address, as is clear that through his unprecedented translations, he brought important innovation to Rome and the entire Latin world. He did so in a quite unique way of translating on a word-by-word basis, together with his workshop, as we have read him describe above.

The new look at our list has (surprisingly for me) confirmed Anastasius as an, if a little extravagant, example of a cultural broker. Interestingly, even in some moments when he surpassed or transcended his role, like during his great embassy year at Constantinople, he still conformed remarkably with our criteria. Anastasius was, in the end, an agent of knowledge exchange, of the exchange of ideas, norms and culture. He worked in several ways in this respect, between many different, at times overlapping social groups, even between kingdoms and states, but also cities and monasteries.<sup>72</sup>

In the end, Anastasius always reverted to his role as translator of the popes. His literary fame was to survive more than a millennium, even surpassing his actual oeuvre and leading to over-the-top attributions of many famous texts produced in Rome, in the case of the whole *Liber Pontificalis* even despite known facts that contradicted this attribution. His school of translation did not, however, enjoy a comparable long-term success. After his death shortly before the year 880, it seems to have ceased its work. About two decades later, we have no traces left of it. Translation work will have gone on in Rome, but it seems to have become more like the situation before Anastasius, when each monastery produced translations as it saw fit.<sup>73</sup> The ecclesiastic, diplomat and part-time politician Liutprand of Cremona was a little like Anastasius in the tenth century, as he was also one of the handful of people in Italy who could compose a decent argument in Latin and was proficient in Greek.<sup>74</sup> This is as far as the analogy goes, however. Liutprand had had to learn his Greek on his first visit to Constantinople in the 940s, as there was no school left in Italy where he could have been taught. He never managed to translate longer texts into Latin for general use – let alone build up a school of translators. He never seems to have reached Anastasius' level of language mastery.

Anastasius thus remained the outstanding papal translator, who used this basis to remain an important diplomat and politician for several decades, withstanding a remarkable series of setbacks and misfortunes.

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71 Gantner, *Ad utriusque imperii unitatem?*

72 Höh, Jaspert and Oesterle offer many definitions and even though Anastasius did not receive a stand-alone contribution in their volume, their middle category, explicitly encompassing envoys and diplomats, neatly fits this »persona« of our protagonist, see Höh, Jaspert and Oesterle, *Courts, brokers and brokerage*.

73 Falkenhausen, *Greek monasticism*, esp. 80-83. Falkenhausen, *Greek and Latin*.

74 Liutprand, *Works*, ed. Squatriti, 3-37, esp. 29-37.

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### Abbreviations

MGH	Monumenta Germaniae Historica
EE	Epistolae
Conc.	Concilia

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