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Portrayal of Anastasius I (491–518) in the *Church History* by Theodore Lector. A Few Remarks

Abstract: The portrayal of Anastasius' reign as presented by Theodore is both one-dimensional, focusing on the Emperor's activities related to religious matters, and entirely negative. For Theodore, Anastasius was a ruler who fought against the orthodox Church (of which the author of the Church history was a member himself). Furthermore, Theodore Lector became, in a sense, subject to Emperor's repressions, as he was a secretary to patriarch Macedonius, who was removed from his position and exiled from Constantinople. For Theodore, Anastasius was an evil, impious and weak ruler, against whom even his own subjects rebelled (rising of Vitalian, riots in Constantinople).

Key words: Theodor Lector, Emperor Anastasius, Early Byzantine Empire, Church history

Surviving passages of the *Church History* by Theodore Lector, regarding Anastasius' reign,[1] occupy twenty six of fifty four pages of Hansen's edition – nearly half of it.[2] One might therefore risk arguing that for some reason it held significance for the Byzantine historian. Considering what we know about Theodore, one might speculate that his interest in Anastasius' reign stemmed from the fact that it was contemporary to the author. Another possible reason is Theodore's association with the patriarch Macedonius,[3] who suffered much from

[1] Basic literature on the reign of Anastasius: C. Capizzi, 1969; P. Charanis, 1974; F.K. Haarer, 2006; M. Meier, 2009.

[2] Edition – G.Ch. Hansen, 1995. On the subject of Theodore the Lector and his work, e.g.: G.Ch. Hansen, 1995, p. 9–39; P. Nautin, 1994, p. 213–243; M. Whitby, 2003, p. 467–472; Ph. Blaudeau, 2006, p. 12–15, 549–552, 622–648; W. Treadgold, 2007, p. 169–173.

[3] We know that Theodore accompanied Eutychius during his exile to Euchaita.

the Emperor – thus the author's negative attitude to the latter. Certainly, the surviving passages' overtones attest that the Emperor was not merely a historical figure for our author, but a man who had a direct influence on his life, and towards whom he had a personal, emotional attitude.

Before I move on to attempt at drawing a picture of Anastasius that emerges from the extant passages of Theodore Lector's *Church History*, I would like to sketch – if only in general outline – portrayals of other rulers who were discussed in his work. This will allow us to find out what the historian paid attention to in evaluating particular emperors, and the means by which he created their image.

Theodosius II. Theodosius II is presented as a weak ruler, who allowed himself to be directed by his favourites, such as Chrysaphius in the matter of the bishop of Constantinople Flavian (350, p. 99) or by his own sister Pulcheria (336, p. 96). He easily changes his mind, and signs documents presented to him without reading. To substantiate the latter view Theodore relates a story about how Pulcheria supposedly wanted to prove this point to the ruler, and presented him with a document to sign which would have made his wife Eudocia a slave. The Emperor signed it, for which he was berated by his sister (352, p. 99–100).

Marcian. Marcian, Theodosius II's successor, was presented by Theodore the Lector in an exceedingly positive light, for his merits for the orthodoxy. He exiled Eutyches (evaluated negatively by Theodore), recalled from exile supporters of the bishop of Constantinople Flavian (357–358, p. 100), recognised the authority of the Pope Leo (359, p. 100–101), and convened the General Council in Chalcedon (360, p. 100). In addition, he had reverence for divine matters and respected the Church (364–365, p. 102–103). His wife, Pulcheria, was also a credit to him. Theodore Lector underscored the fact that she cared for the poor and founded churches (363, p. 102). She was supported in her activities by her husband. Theodore also noted that the Emperor was proficient in the art of war (354, p. 100).[4]

Leo I. Leo I is presented as a defender of the decisions made at the Council of Chalcedon, and a protector of the Church. Theodore Lector devoted particular attention to the Emperor's struggles against Timothy Ailuros, the patriarch of Alexandria, whom the author referred to as a heretic (369–373, p. 104–105; 379–380, p. 106–107). Noteworthy actions taken by the Emperor include, i.a. proclaiming Sunday as a day free from work and one to be appropriately celebrated (377, p. 106), erection of the church of Our Lady in Blachernae and placing within it the robes of the temple's patron (397, p. 111). Outside of Church matters, Theodore noted the expedition against the Vandals. For its failure, he blamed Basiliscus and Aspar, on whose advice the former took

[4] The historian has no doubt that had it been not for Marcian's death, the latter, as befitted a Roman ruler, would have prepared an expedition against the Vandals in response to their occupation of Rome in 455 (367, p. 103).

money offered by the Vandals (399, p. 111). The author also mentioned the marriage of Ariadne, the daughter of Emperor Zeno (390, p. 109–110) and bestowing by Leo upon his grandson (also Leo) first the title of Caesar (398, p. 111), and subsequently of an Emperor (400, p. 112).

Zeno. Zeno, after becoming an Emperor, was criticised by Theodore Lector for supporting Peter the Fuller (against Martyrius) in the matter of filling the vacancy of the patriarchal see of Antioch. Martyrius, despite the support of Emperor Leo, resigned from the bishopric (390, p. 110). An undistinguished portrayal of Zeno by the historian, albeit devoid of harsher and emotional opinions, was affected by Emperor's publication of the *Henotikon* (e.g. 429–430), the schism with Rome or supporting of Peter Mongus (e.g. 422–423). In the light of Theodore's account, Zeno appears as a weak ruler, which could have been seen i.a. in the fact that he feared his collaborators, especially Illus, and that he faced rebellions by Basiliscus (the uncle of Ariadne, 401–402, p. 112) and subsequently by Marcian, her brother-in-law (419–420, p. 116).

Basiliscus. Basiliscus was portrayed in dark colours – for the obvious reason of his religious policy. Having taken over power by removing Zeno, he "began madness against Faith" (402, p. 112). He was riled against the orthodoxy by his wife, Zenonis. The fact that he listened to her only made it worse. He issued a law condemning the Council of Chalcedon (405– 406, p. 113), and vindicated the second council of Ephesus. He recalled from exile Monophysite clergy. Among them, particular attention was devoted to Timothy Ailuros, the bishop of Alexandria (406, p. 113). Basiliscus' policy, according to Theodore Lector, was met with justified opposition from the people of Constantinople, monks (407, p. 113) and Saint Daniel (408, p. 114), Basiliscus was deprived of imperial power and, eventually, along with his wife lost his life (414, p. 115). Theodore Lector did not comment on Basiliscus' fall. Leaving aside the observed tendency in Theodore's works to not formulate judgements, one might risk stating that in this particular case the reason for not doing so was the fact that Zeno, which has already been noted before, was not among his favourites.

Justin I. A brief, but very positive assessment was given by Theodore Lector to Anastasius' successor – Justin I, who is described as a zealous advocate of the orthodoxy, a perfect man (524, p. 151), Although in the preserved passages of the *Church History* of Theodore we find no arguments to justify such opinion, it was undoubtedly a consequence of abandoning of Anastasius' religious policy – and a return to orthodoxy and eliminating the schism between Constantinople and Rome.[5]

The picture of particular rulers presented above that we find in the extant fragments of the *Church History* leads us to a not at all surprising conclusion

[5] On Justin I's religious policy see A.A. Vasiliev, 1950, p. 132–253.

that the basic criterion of the evaluation was their attitude to religious matters. Supporters of orthodoxy were presented in a positive light, others negatively, although without a particular aggressiveness or emotional judgements. Matters unrelated to Church life are presented on the margin of their rule, and do not influence the overall evaluations.

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Anastasius. Against the backdrop of the above Emperors, the portrayal of Anastasius is much richer, abounding in words of evaluation, often emotional. To justify the latter remark, I shall quote some of the statements: the one who ruled badly (ὁ κακῶς<μετὰ ταῦτα> βασιλεύσας, 445, p. 125), heretic unworthy of the name of a Christian (αἱρετικὸνκαλῶν καὶ τῶνΧριστιανῶν ἀνάξιον, 446, p. 125), vengeful (πικρῶς, 514, p. 148), Manichean, unworthy of imperial power (ὕβριζονδὲτὸν βασιλέα Μανιχαῖον καλοῦντες καὶ τῆς βασιλείας ἀνάξιον·, 485, p. 138), hypocritical (ὑπόκρισις, 486, p. 138), insidious (παρασκευάζω, 490, p. 139), disrespectful towards the law (ὁ παράνομος βασιλεὺς, 498, p. 142), impious (δυσσεβής, 503, p. 143), perjurer (ἐπίορκος, 511, p. 146).

These terms appear in the context of the Emperor's religious policy and from Theodore Lector's perspective are fully justified. The (mostly preserved) fragments of the *Church History* pertaining to Anastasius are focused on several matters[6], or rather perhaps people, specifically the conflict between the ruler and the ruler and patriarchs of Constantinople – Euphemius[7] and Macedonius,[8] the patriarch of Antioch Flavian,[9] and the rebel Vitalian.[10] The historian relates the reasons for the clashes of the Emperor with his particular opponents, and subsequently sketches the stages of the conflict, presenting the methods used by the Emperor and highlighting the mediocrity and impiety of the men he used.

The creation of Anastasius' portrayal is done through various methods. Aside from direct, negative evaluations, one of the key methods is confronting, "clashing" the Emperor with members of his family, as well as with respected (for various reasons) people, among them the historian himself. The most important person used for this purpose was the Empress Ariadne, the wife of Anastasius.[11] She was responsible, to some extent, for the fact that he became a ruler (446, p. 125), as it was she who, along with some senators, put pressure on the patriarch Euphemius, so that the latter agreed to acknowledge

[6] Cf. F. Haarer, 2006, p. 260; W. Treadgold, 2007, p. 172–173.

[7] On the conflict between Anastasius and Euphemius, see i.a. P. Charanis, 1974, p. 54–56; M. Meier, 2009, p. 84–90; R. Kosiński, 2012, p. 72–78.

[8] On the conflict between Anastasius and Macedonius, see: W.H.C. Frend, 1979, p. 183–195; M. Meier, 2009, p. 259–269.

[9] On relations between Anastasius and Flawian: G. Downey, 1961, p. 508–511; P. Charanis, 1974, p. 72–77; F. Haarer, 2006, p. 151–155; M. Meier, 2009, p. 252–257, 291.

[10] On Vitalian and his attitude towards Anastasius: J.R. Martindale, A.H.M. Jones, J. Morris, 1980, p. 1171–1176; F. Haarer, 2006, p. 164–179; M. Meier, 2009, p. 295–311.

[11] On subject of Ariadne, see, i.e. M.J. Leszka, 1999, p. 267–278; K. Twardowska, 2009, passim.

him as the Emperor, even though he considered him a heretic.[12] The patriarch submitted, taking a precaution by having Anastasius sign a document in which the latter accepted the decisions of the Council of Chalcedon. The Empress then could have been blamed for the wrongdoing that Anastasius committed against the state, his subjects and the Church. Such accusations however were not levelled at her. Other remarks about the Empress allow us to state that that, according to Theodore the Lector, she cut, or at least distanced, herself from her husband's religious policy. This can be seen in the context of Macedonius' removal (489, p. 139). The Empress was a supporter of the Constantinopolitan bishop, supposedly appreciating his faithfulness to the dogmas and honesty in the sphere of affairs of state. The historian wrote that she worried about Macedonius' removal, although he does not relate whether she undertook any efforts in his defence. Ariadne's aversion towards Anastasius' policy was even more clearly presented in the context of the introduction of Trisagion in 512 (508, p. 144–145), which resulted in riots in Constantinople. Ariadne was to have considered (according to Theodore) her husband as a man who is the source of calamities that befell Christians. She was also to have insulted him in some way. A wife, opposing her husband!

Theodore noted Ariadne's death (520, p. 150), however he does not praise the Empress on this occasion, does not enumerate her achievements (as he did with Pulcheria). The lack of appreciation for Ariadne may be a trace of Theodore Lector's aversion to her or, what I consider more likely, fear that presenting her in a positive light would have constituted a breach in the uniformly negative portrayal of Anastasius.

Theodore uses Anastasius' other family members against him as well. He stresses that his family members were heretics (448, p. 126), The mother, whose name is not mentioned, was to have been a "zealous follower" of the Manichaean beliefs, and his uncle Clearchus was to have been an Arian. As a side note, one might comment that it is not particularly surprising that with a family like that Anastasius did not become an orthodox faithful. Theodore also brings up a story about Magna, the Emperor's sister-in-law (481, p. 137) – likely the wife of Paul, the only brother of the Emperor that we know of.[13] She was an adherent of the orthodoxy, and on one occasion gave the Emperor a work of the monk Dorotheus, in which the latter supported the decisions made at Chalcedon. Magna was hoping that, having familiarised himself with the book's contents, Anastasius would change his views. That, of course, did not happen. While Anastasius read the book, his only reaction to it was to per-

[12] There are some objections regarding whether this passage really comes from Theodore Lector's Church History. One argument for this view is the fact that Theodore did not perceive this event as a cause of the later conflict between Euphemius and Anastasius, and the same goes for Euphemius' ban on the future Emperor voicing his views in one of the Constantinopolitan churches. The problem here lies in the fact that Theodore often did not refer to the previously provided information, which may be a consequence of his writing style – or of the obvious issue that we do not know the entirety of his work. On the presence of this passage in Theodore's work, see R. Kosiński, 2017, p. 110–123.

[13] J.R. Martindale, A.H.M. Jones, J. Morris, 1980, p. 700 (*Magna*), p. 853 (*Paulus 26*).

secute its author. Dorotheus was exiled to the Oasis. Magna herself, as one may guess, did not suffer. Another case: Anastasius was to have humiliated somehow his nephew Pompeius,[14] and his wife (an honest and charitable woman), for assisting Macedonius in his exile so that the latter would not suffer poverty (505, p. 144).

Anastasius trusted at least some of his relatives, and depended on them to perform certain important tasks – although this did not mean that he was ready to support them in difficult situations, moreover, the choices he made were not entirely correct. Thus Hypatius, Anastasius' nephew,[15] was sent at the head of the army to quell Vitalian's rebellion (503, p. 143). Not only did Hypatius lose the battle, but was also captured and imprisoned by Vitalian. Theodore does not mention whether Anastasius intervened on his nephew's behalf, but did include a note about Hypatius' release, a result of efforts by the latter's father-Secundin[16] (Emperor's brother-in-law). Secundin was to have prostrated himself at Vitalian's feet and softened his heart with mournful tears (510, p. 145).

As was mentioned above, Theodore Lector also used examples of contemporary personages to present the Emperor in a bad light. It would seem that he used the example of Anicia Juliana, a great Constantinopolitan lady with the blood of the Theodosian house in her veins, for that very purpose.[17] After listing her achievements, Theodore Lector described how Anastasius vainly attempted to convince her to accept Timothy, whom the Emperor placed upon the patriarchal see of Constantinople, after removing Macedonius. Anicia, a well-respected and God-fearing woman, was not afraid of the Emperor, and the latter had to accept her position. It is worth noting that Anicia did not accede to requests of the imperial nominee – Timothy (504, p. 144).

The criticism of Anastasius may also be found, it would seem, in the manner in which Theodore Lector presented the Gothic ruler – Theoderic the Great, who was, after all, an Arian. From one such as he one certainly would not have expected anything good, unlike from the Byzantine Emperor. Nonetheless it was Theoderic, not Anastasius, who according to Theodore respected adherents of the orthodox Christianity and pursued peace within the Church (462–463, p. 130–131).[18]

Theodore Lector, while focusing his narrative primarily on ecclesiastical matters, nonetheless does mention events that seemingly did not relate to them and, moreover, could be seen as presenting the Emperor in a positive light. However, they are presented in such a way that in the final reckoning any of the Emperor's merits are counterbalanced. I will discuss here in more details two examples. Theodore wrote that Anastasius removed Isaurians, who did much

[14] J.R. Martindale, A.H.M. Jones, J. Morris, 1980, p. 898–899 (*Pompeius* 2).

[15] J.R. Martindale, A.H.M. Jones, J. Morris, 1980, p. 577–581 (*Fl. Hypatius* 6).

[16] J.R. Martindale, A.H.M. Jones, J. Morris, 1980, p. 986 (*Secundinus* 5).

[17] On Anicia Iuliana, see i.a.: C. Capizzi, 1997; C.L. Connor, 2004, p. 105–116; M.J. Leszka, 2011, p. 227–238.

[18] A positive evaluation of Theoderic by Theodore was already noted by Mark Whitby (2004, p. 470).

harm to the inhabitants of Constantinople, from the city (449, p. 126–127). Having left the city, the Isaurians rebelled.[19] The Emperor sent against them an army under the command of John the Scythian and John Kyrtos. The war is said to have lasted for five years, which poorly reflects on the Emperor who was not able to deal with the enemy for such a long time. While Theodore does not attack the Emperor for that specific reason, he does so through weaving into his Isaurian narrative the matter of patriarch Euphemius, who therein becomes more significant than the events related to dealing with the Isaurian rebellion. Theodore relates how the Emperor told Euphemius in confidence that he desires peace with the Isaurians. The patriarch, without Anastasius' approval, relayed this information to John, a patrician who was a father-in-law of Athenodorus (and one of the leaders of the Isaurians). The latter, in turn, informed the Emperor of Euphemius' action. From that point onward, as Theodore wrote, Anastasius was to have hated Euphemius, which eventually resulted in Euphemius' removal from the position and his exile. If we keep in mind that the way in which a patriarch, a defender of Chalcedon, was treated by the Emperor was one of the key charges levelled against the Emperor by the historian, then the Isaurian thread and suppression of the uprising (450, p. 127), which was undoubtedly a success of the Emperor, becomes cleverly obscured by the matter of Euphemius. Moreover, it seems the matter of the rebellion was brought up only to explain the causes of the conflict between the Emperor and the patriarch.

The other example is Theodore's recollection of the Persian military expedition against Byzantium, and its key episode, the siege of Amida (466, p. 134). The author is completely disinterested in the course of the war, and in the fact that it eventually ended with a Byzantine success.[20] He included a remark about the war only to state that Anastasius' involvement in waging put his persecution of the orthodox Christians on halt. Once the Persian threat passed, however, he resumed his activity against the Church. One might get an impression that the information about the war with the Persians was brought up solely to highlight Anastasius' determination in fighting the orthodox Christians, since only a war could induce him to halt the repression against them.

Let us look at one other example showing that Theodore mentioned extra-ecclesiastical matters only in the context of religious issues. He recalled a raid of Huns (514, p. 148) who "passed the Caspian Gates and invaded Armenia, Cappadocia, Galatia and Pontus".[21] This information was introduced by the historian to later state that they reached the vicinity of Euchaita, where resided the exiled patriarch Macedonius. Fearing the Huns, the patriarch fled to Gangra. The historian does not speak of any military action against the Huns, but states that Anastasius was interested only in Macedonius, whom he

[19] On Isaurian revolt – C. Capizzi, 1969, p. 94–99; N. Lenski, 1999, p. 428–430, 440–441; K. Feld, 2005, p. 332–338; F. Haarer, 2006, p. 22–28.

[20] On this stage of the Byzantine-Persian conflict, see: F. Haarer, 2006, p. 47–65; M. Meier 209, p. 174–222.

[21] Cf. M. Meier, 2009, p. 312.

ordered to be kept under guard and even, as a rumour went, sent someone to kill him. In relating this episode Theodore stressed Anastasius' vindictiveness.

The remarks presented above relating to creating by Theodore a portrayal of Anastasius are only part of the literary efforts of the historian to present the Emperor in the darkest colours possible. The underlying reason for such perception of the Emperor is, of course, presentation of his policy towards the Church. Without going into further analysis of comments relating to this sphere of the Emperor's activity, I will present a few remarks which, I think, will allow the Reader to understand the literary technique and intentions of the historian. Generally speaking one might say that Theodore submitted his narrative to the argument that Anastasius moved against the decisions of the Council of Chalcedon and through various methods took action against their adherents, and furthermore, attempted to introduce changes to the Church doctrine contrary to the resolutions made at Chalcedon. One of the methods used by the Emperor to oppose his religious opponents was the policy of filling the most important Church positions with men who shared his views, and removing those who disagreed with them. Among the victims of the latter actions by the Emperor were such men as the patriarchs of Constantinople: Euphemius and Macedonius, and Flavian, the patriarch of Antioch. The Emperor plotted against them, forced them to accept his views,[22] resorted to slander, was behind attempts to physically eliminate them, called councils that through the use of false accusations[23] were supposed to proclaim their removal from office, brought about their exile and made certain that no-one made the exile's harsh circumstances any easier.[24] In combating bishops faithful to the orthodoxy the Emperor made use of other clergymen, who are presented by Theodore in the worst possible light (e.g. Xenaia-Philoxenos), and such men were put in the most important positions. For example, Timothy, Macedonius' successor, according to Theodore was nicknamed Disgusting Glutton and Stallion, which reflected his nature and deeds, while Severus, Flavian's successor, was an impious man (498, p. 142).

Theodore Lector clearly underscored that Anastasius' activities aimed against the orthodox Christians and his attempts at introducing changes in the doctrine resulted in an opposition from the society. The historian described Hypatius's rising against the religious policy of Anastasius, and the rioting by the people of Constantinople, spurred by removal of popular patriarchs, or by the introduction of Trisagion.[25] While the Emperor emerged from them victorious, he nonetheless achieved it through ignoble means. Generally speaking,

[22] E.g. Flavian was to have condemned the decisions of Chalcedon under pressure from Anastasius (497, p. 141)

[23] Euphemius was accused i.a. of plotting with the Isaurians (455, p. 128), and Macedonius – of pederasty and heresy (490, p. 139).

[24] Recent work of R. Kosiński (2015, p. 231–247) discussed the places of exile of the patriarchs of Constantinople.

[25] On the disturbances in Constantinople related to the question of Trisagion, eg.: M. Meier, 2007, p. 157–234; P. Filipczak, 2013, p. 474–495.

he would first commit himself under pressure to withdraw from his anti-Chalcedon policies, and once the threat has passed, returned to them.

Theodore Lector, wanting to bolster the negative portrayal of Anastasius, referred not only to the resistance of the society, the human factor, but also to miraculous signs. For example, it was for this reason that he recalled the tale of how Macedonius, after his death, was to have asked Theodore to relay to Anastasius that Macedonius will be waiting for the Emperor until such time as they, together, are judged by God (515, p. 148).

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In conclusion of my considerations I would like to stress once again that the portrayal of Anastasius' reign as presented by Theodore is both one-dimensional, focusing on the Emperor's activities related to religious matters, and entirely negative[26]. For Theodore, Anastasius was a ruler who fought against the orthodox Church (of which the author of the *Church History* was a member himself). Furthermore, Theodore Lector became, in a sense, subject to Emperor's repressions, as he was a secretary to patriarch Macedonius, who was removed from his position and exiled from Constantinople. For Theodore, Anastasius was an evil, impious and weak ruler, against whom even his own subjects rebelled (rising of Vitalian, riots in Constantinople).

Theodore's work was created during the initial phase of Justinian's reign, during the time when reversal of Anastasius' religious policy was a long accomplished fact, and the author did not need to hide his Chalcedonian views or personal animosity towards the – dead since 518 – Emperor.

Translated by Michał Zytka

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[26] The only positive factor in the Emperor's activity that is mentioned by Theodore is the rebuilding of many churches in Constantinople (468). This matter was not, however, elaborated on by the historian – neither by providing any specific details about the Emperor's construction activity, nor even by expressing of approval because of it. On Anastasius' building works, see: C. Capizzi, 1969, p. 183–232.

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