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## Topographies of power: towns and elites in Merovingian northern Gaul, 450-650

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## 5. Political culture and elite networks at the Austrasian court

*Enchanted thus by your stirring sweetness, Gogo, the foreign traveller draws near the distant realm. Your eloquence, like Orpheus with his lyre, summons all to hasten here with greater speed from all quarters.*

- Venantius Fortunatus, Carmen 7.1., to Gogo, transl. George (p. 57)<sup>1</sup>

### 5.1. Introduction

In the last chapter I have looked at the macro-picture of the Merovingian courts, studying the general patterns of movement throughout all of Gaul and through three centuries of time. To further fill in the details of the story, I will now zoom in from the general to the particular, almost to the micro-historical level. My story will start with the arrival of the Italian poet Venantius Fortunatus at the Austrasian court,<sup>2</sup> probably in Metz, in the year 566, and will follow the acquaintances he met there in the orbit of the Austrasian king Sigibert. Friendships blossomed there at the verdant banks of the Moselle River, bonds of *amicitia* that were later commemorated in the compositions of poems now available for our study. One of those acquaintances, a man called Gogo, will turn out to be a particularly central figure in the world of Austrasian high politics and courtly poetry. This microcosm of courtly friendship offers a valuable insight into the workings and whereabouts of the Austrasian court in the second half of the sixth century, under Sigibert (r. 561-575) and his son Childebert II (r. 575-596).

We get such an incredible insight into friendship at the Austrasian court due to the unique collection of poems preserved in Venantius Fortunatus' *Carminum Epistularum Expositionum*.<sup>3</sup> According to the classical tradition of aristocratic letter writing, Venantius exchanged highly embellished, flowery pieces of literature with his friends. Of course, this means we only get to read Venantius' side of the correspondence, although a separate collection of letters known as the *Epistolae Austrasicae* preserve poems penned by some of his correspondents.<sup>4</sup> Together, these verse letters offer a unique window into the Austrasian court under Sigibert, an area that remains mostly obscure in the other main sources for this

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<sup>1</sup> Translation by George 1992, 57.

<sup>2</sup> I will use the term Austrasia here consistently to refer to the eastern *Teilreiche* under Sigibert's and later Childebert's II control. At this point in time Austrasia seemed to have acquired some territorial consistency, whether this coincided with a notion of Austrasian identity or "Australianness", and whether there was continuity with a supposed earlier kingdom of the *Ripuarian* Franks is beyond the scope of this chapter; cf. Stegemans 2014, 15-24.

<sup>3</sup> MGH Auct. Ant. 4.1.

<sup>4</sup> *Epistolae Austrasicae*, W. Gundlach (ed.), 1888.

period, Gregory of Tours' writings. Moreover, where Gregory is particularly focused on tales of extraordinary nature or importance, Fortunatus' poetry gives us a glance at the more ordinary, day-to-day life of the Merovingian elite. 'The poems fill the interstices left in the more formal and public records'.<sup>5</sup>

As such, there are three themes I want to consider in the current chapter. The first is a continuation of the last chapter, a closer look at the Austrasian court and the whereabouts of its attendants, which will provide a fuller texture to my argument on the whereabouts of the Merovingian kings. Fortunatus' poems give us valuable insight into Merovingian whereabouts in the sixth century, which helps round out the picture sketched by Gregory's histories. That said, unlike Gregory, Fortunatus is much less forthcoming in providing geographic detail. The demands of the poetic genre demand less geographic precision than does the writing of history. For instance, his stay at the court of Austrasia is referenced in his letters as 'Germania', which is usually interpreted as Austrasia, but nowhere is the precise location of the royal court (Metz?) mentioned explicitly.<sup>6</sup> The topographic details that he does give must, because of the poetic genre, be even more carefully placed within the broader (inter)textual context. For that reason, I have focused on a deeper reading of one 'geographic' poem later in this chapter.

Secondly, a closer look at the social dynamics of court will, I hope, reveal somewhat the political culture of the Merovingian world. Power does not exist in a vacuum, rather the practices, ceremonies and social mores of courtly life provide the framework against which kings and magnates acted out their ambitions.<sup>7</sup> Here, I follow the definition of political culture given by L.E. Tacoma for the study of Roman imperial politics:

[P]olitical culture has come to refer to the form of the participants' behaviour, in contrast to the content of their decisions. The crucial assumption is that this form is anything but empty: the social meaning that the behaviour generates is of vital importance. Political culture is in that sense not merely an articulation of power relations, but it is actively construing these relations by acting them out.<sup>8</sup>

In the context of his book on Roman political culture in the imperial period, the concept of political culture is a useful tool in the study of members of the senate and local city councils. Politically, in the sense of enacting decisions to organize society, the office of Roman senator had become almost superfluous, since true power lay with the *de facto* monarch, the emperor. But it was in the 'game' of politics that members of the senate could enact

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<sup>5</sup> George 1995, xvii.

<sup>6</sup> Roberts 2009, 261.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Barbier 2007b.

<sup>8</sup> Tacoma 2020, 14.

their class interests, maintain their social status and wield influence.<sup>9</sup> The situation at the Merovingian court was similar. Formally the king was the central figure of authority, but courtly life provided the stage for ambitious men to advance or maintain their social position, compete for influence and prestige and play out faction politics. It is not the aim here to give a full-fledged account of the political games of the Merovingian royal court, but rather to paint in broad strokes the contours of political life in the royal centre as revealed by epistolary exchanges.

Life at the royal court was above all a social affair, a who knows whom; ties of friendship or *amicitia* bound men together in allegiance or patron-client relationships. Unlike the modern notion of friendship, friendship according to classical mores often tended to invoke expectations of clientage, to be a friend was also to be a “political follower” – and could therefore also carry the implications of an unequal patron-client relationship – although this need not preclude a personal level of affection.<sup>10</sup> Reconstructing these is the third and most important theme in this chapter. To this end, I have employed the methodological and computational tools of *social network analysis* (SNA) in order to map out the Austrasian relations Venantius Fortunatus made in 566 and sustained thereafter. The precise benefits and methodology of SNA will be discussed further below. For now, it suffices to say that employing the toolbox of SNA allows us to unravel the social dynamics of courtly life. To my knowledge, no formal network analysis has been performed for any of the Merovingian courts, although Bruno Dumézil has done something similar with his reconstruction of the *réseau aristocratique* of the aforementioned Gogo; my analysis here will inevitably repeat some of his conclusions.<sup>11</sup>

I will argue that Fortunatus’ network of *amicitia* highlights the continuation of Romanising cultural practices in Merovingian political culture well into the sixth century for at least certain members of the royal court.<sup>12</sup> A key component in sustaining courtly life and friendship was literacy and Late Antique *paideia*, education in classical – and, by now, Christian – literature, a tradition that placed Fortunatus and Gogo in the long lineage of Roman elite praxis. Literary networks of friends sustained by the art of exchanging highly embellished Latin letters in classical tradition lay at the basis of the network studied in this chapter. I follow Hope Deejune’s Williard observation that “[l]iterary networks were

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<sup>9</sup> Tacoma 2020, 1-23.

<sup>10</sup> Althoff 1990, 88-119. In classical tradition, terms of friendship (*amicitia*; *amicus/amica*) can be taken to ‘designate bonds of reciprocal obligations rather than affection, emotional warmth, or intimacy’ (Pucci 2020, xxxiii). Pucci argues against such a cold reading of friendship in Fortunatus’ poetry, arguing for a level of personal devotion and affection. In my view, the two do not need to contradict each other, it could well be possible that a personal bond of affection was coupled with a public bond of reciprocal obligations.

<sup>11</sup> Dumézil 2007; cf. Wood 2023, 549.

<sup>12</sup> Beyond the scope of this book is how courtly literary culture changes into the seventh century and beyond. However, the classifying tendencies found in the sixth centuries could nuance the notion of a Carolingian renaissance.

important not just for mutual solidarity and support but also for aristocratic identity [...] the ability to participate in shared intellectual culture was a sign and a reaffirmation of status'.<sup>13</sup> This image of Merovingian courtly life is a far cry from the violent world of Gregory of Tours' narrative. It is also far removed from the supposed barbarian or "Germanic" stereotype of the heroic concept of society discussed in chapter two, and instead more closely resembling the bureaucratic concept I outlined there. That is not to say that one corpus is more "real" than the other, but that both chose to highlight different aspects of life and present a different image of their own times, no doubt because of very different authorial intentions. One of the recurring questions in this chapter (and indirectly, the next), is to what extent this "Romanising" ideal found in the letters is representative of a wider (elite) culture, or are we simply dealing with a classisicing mirage produced by a tiny group of literati?

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<sup>13</sup> Williard 2014, 694.

## 5.2. Venantius Fortunatus

Before turning to the technicalities of social network analysis, it is time to introduce the main character of this chapter, Venantius Fortunatus.<sup>14</sup> Fortunatus was born in a town called *Duplabilis*, possibly Valdobbiadene,<sup>15</sup> near Treviso in northern Italy, probably somewhere in the 530s. Overall little is known of his youth or family; the Italy of his childhood was one suffering the upheavals of war, following the Byzantine attempts to (re)conquer it from Ostrogothic rule, but no indication is given that Fortunatus himself was particularly afflicted by the tides of war. To the contrary, he went to Ravenna to receive a classical education *in arte gramatica sive rethorica*, laying the basis for his poetic skills.<sup>16</sup> From a young age, also, it seems that he had good connections to several notable bishops in his area. One of those, a certain Vitalis of Altinum – not far from Fortunatus' home town – had connections with various Gallic bishops, perhaps Nicetius of Trier among them. It is possible then, that at his instigation and with his recommendation the young poet left for Gaul in the spring of 566.<sup>17</sup> Why exactly Fortunatus decided to exchange his Italian homeland for Gaul is not entirely clear, he himself gives two reasons in his writing. On the one hand, Venantius portrays himself as a travelling bard, a second Orpheus, and if so, he may have been looking for patronage at one of the Merovingian royal courts.<sup>18</sup> On the other hand, he presents himself as a pilgrim of Saint Martin, undertaking a journey to the holy man's tomb in Tours after the saint's intervention had cured an affliction to his eyes.<sup>19</sup> Perhaps, as Judith George suggests, a combination of both motives led to his travels.<sup>20</sup>

Venantius' journey from his homeland to northern Gaul is described in some detail in his poetry.<sup>21</sup> He seems to have crossed the Julian Alps, travelling via Lienz (*Aguontum*)<sup>22</sup> to Augsburg (*Augusta Vindelicorum*) before crossing the Rhine and arriving in Gaul, where he was welcomed at the royal court of Sigibert, presumably in Metz.<sup>23</sup> At least part of the

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<sup>14</sup> For an overview of the poet's life, see Brennan 1985; George 1992, 18-34; Pucci 2010, xix-xxvii; PCBE s.v. Fortunatus, 801-822.

<sup>15</sup> The PCBE (volume 4, p. 801) suggests this identification.

<sup>16</sup> Paulus Diaconus, *Historia Langobardum*, 2.13.

<sup>17</sup> On these connections, see George 1992, 25-26.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Venantius Fortunatus, *Carm. Praefatio* 4.

<sup>19</sup> Venantius Fortunatus, *Vita St. Martini*, 4.630-701.

<sup>20</sup> George, *Venantius Fortunatus*, 26.

<sup>21</sup> The preface of the *Poems* and in *Vita St. Martini* 4.630-680.

<sup>22</sup> George identifies it with a hilltop site called *Fliehbürg*, since Venantius describes a site in the mountains; *hic montana sedens in colle superbit Aguontus* (Venantius Fortunatus, *Vita St. Martini* 4.650); George 1992, 24. However, a retreat of Roman urban areas from valleys to hilltop sites is a common occurrence in this area during this period, cf. Hammer, 2011, 226.

<sup>23</sup> See PCBE 803-804 for this reconstruction of his journey. Pietri and Heijmans argue that Fortunatus crossed the Rhine at Mainz, because of two letters to its bishop Sidonius thanking him for his kindness; and likewise to the bishop Vilicus of Metz; however he could have visited these cities later on his journey.

way he was escorted by one of Sigibert's courtiers, a man named Sigoaldus. Once there, he arrived perfectly on time to attend the royal wedding between Sigibert and the Visigothic princess Brunhild, for the occasion of which he performed a lofty nuptial poem or *epithalamium*.<sup>24</sup> It may well be that news of the wedding-to-be had been the immediate reason for his departure from Italy, since such a spectacle would have offered the young bard the perfect opportunity to make a grand entrée among Gallic high society. Nevertheless, he seems not to have found any lasting patronage at Sigibert's court, so he subsequently travelled onwards to Sigibert's brother Charibert in Paris, staying there late in 566 and early 567. There, he publicly performed a panegyric to King Charibert for the Parisian audience.<sup>25</sup> After Charibert's untimely death in 567, however, it seems he had little choice but to continue his pilgrimage to Tours. From there, he travelled onwards to Poitiers, where he became acquainted with Queen Radegund and the nuns of the Abbey of the Holy Cross. In Poitiers, the travelling bard finally settled down until his death as the city's bishop around or after 600, although he still travelled around occasionally to meet with various episcopal patrons. One of Fortunatus' most notable connections was with nobody other than Gregory of Tours himself, to whom his published compilation of poems was dedicated. On multiple occasions, the Italian bard wrote and performed poetry that helped cement Gregory's political and diplomatic ambitions. For instance, in 573 Venantius performed an *adventus* poem for the citizens of Tours to welcome the newly elected bishop into the city, surely aiding Gregory in creating consensus among the divided public for his election.<sup>26</sup> In exchange for his help, Gregory became Venantius' most important patron.<sup>27</sup> It is surely noteworthy, and I will draw attention to this again below, that our two most important written sources for sixth-century Gaul were intimately connected in a network of *amicitia*.

I spent some time discussing Venantius' biography, because not only does his arrival in Gaul set the stage for the rest of this chapter, but because his presence, and success, in itself is noteworthy for our understanding of Merovingian political culture. Apparently, there was a place – even demand – for a classically educated poet from the schools of Ravenna to sit at the tables of Frankish kings and Gallic bishops. Brian Brennan formulates it rather cynically when he writes that the Merovingian '[...] *palatia* were dim reflections of the Roman imperial court [...] Venantius would have offered to Sigibert and his circle a living link with the cultural heritage to which they aspired'.<sup>28</sup> Brennan's picture of the Merovingian kings is one of northern barbarians clumsily and desperately looking to emulate classical culture, and finding in Fortunatus their bridge to ancient splendour. This

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<sup>24</sup> Venantius Fortunatus, *Carm.* 6.1.

<sup>25</sup> Venantius Fortunatus, *Carm.* 6.2.

<sup>26</sup> Venantius Fortunatus, *Carm.* 5.3.

<sup>27</sup> Brennan 1985, 70-78.

<sup>28</sup> Brennan 1985, 59.

image is outdated, I believe, and it will become clear that broad parts of the Merovingian upper class participated in the same Late Antique literary culture. Nevertheless, I agree with Brennan's underlying sentiment. There was, among the upper echelons of Merovingian society, a real interest in exactly the kind of classical literacy that Fortunatus could provide. '[H]e contributed as a Latin poet, the epitome of the tradition that Gallo-Romans strove to maintain and the Franks to achieve'.<sup>29</sup> Whether this interest in the Latin literary tradition at the sixth-century courts of the Merovingians was the last flowering of classical culture, an 'Autumn of Antiquity' if you will, as Brennan seems to suggest, is a question that cannot be answered here – although the occurrence of the later 'Carolingian' renaissance suggests a continued interest in the classical past throughout the Early Middle Ages.<sup>30</sup> For kings such as Sigibert and Childebert II, as for Chilperic before them, the educated culture emanating from the learned halls of Ravenna offered them an opportunity to present themselves as more than just barbarian warlords, instead joining a centuries-old tradition of high (imperial) culture through the display of Latin *paideia* or education.

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<sup>29</sup> George 1995, xviii.

<sup>30</sup> Indeed, the poetry of Fortunatus and his friends might suggest that the idea of a Carolingian renaissance has been much overstated, since the notion of renaissance requires the Merovingian period to have been relatively "dark" and deprived of culture by comparison.



Figure 5.1. Whereabouts of Venantius Fortunatus.

Looking at his whereabouts (figure 5.1) and his social connections, three worlds collided in his person. He brought with him the learning and sophistication of northern Italy to the northern Gaul of kings and courts, and the world of southern Gaul with its ancient Gallo-Roman senatorial and episcopal families. Fortunatus is but one striking figure who links these regions together. A rudimentary analysis of Fortunatus’ social network will show just how interconnected the Merovingian world could be, sustained by a shared framework of classical literary culture.

For my argument, I want to zoom in on a specific event, and the connections Venantius made there, namely the royal wedding that started his Gallic career in 566. The wedding between King Sigibert and Brunhild was the perfect stage for Fortunatus to start his budding career as a wandering poet in Gaul. Not only was it a grand occasion where he could impress the royal couple with his song, but it was the perfect opportunity to meet and mingle with all the Austrasian “VIPs”. We know from Gregory of Tours that Sigibert had

assembled the magnates of his kingdom to attend his wedding.<sup>31</sup> Counts, dukes, bishops and other magnates from afar would have assembled to witness the spectacle, as much is suggested in Fortunatus' *epithalamium* itself: 'In diverse ranks so many glorious Dukes encircle the king on all sides, blessed for all ages. So many eminent lords come together to this one lord [...] With everyone's arrival, the festive palace teems'.<sup>32</sup> Among those he met were Gogo, who would later become *nutricius* or tutor for the young king Childebert, the *dux* Lupus, and with distinguished Dynamius and Iovinus, future governors of the Provence. In the same period, Fortunatus also travelled around Austrasia to meet with various important bishops such as bishop Nicetius of Trier and Bishop Ageric of Verdun. He stayed in touch with many of those important men long after he departed from Sigibert's kingdom in 566, as is attested by the poems Fortunatus wrote for them, combined and collected in his *Carmina*.

Since many of these magnates are known from other sources, Fortunatus' list allows us to gain a unique insight into the social relations and geographic whereabouts of the Austrasian court in the second half of the sixth century. To understand these relations, however, it is fruitful to be able to map the social network using digital social network analysis tools.

### 5.3. Social network analysis: tools and methodology

Social network analysis is a formal analytical tool to analyse the relationship between entities, often, as in this case, people. It is a useful tool to help visualise and analyse the who-knows-who of the Merovingian courts and help distil which and what kind of relationships mattered.

A social network exists of two factors: nodes (also called actors) and links (or edges). A node or actor in this case represents a person, a link is a tie between two people.<sup>33</sup> Mapping such a network for the Merovingian elites is made easier through the important scholarly work done before by prosopographers. Particularly the *Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire volume III* (abbreviated here to PLRE),<sup>34</sup> and *Prosopographie Chrétienne du Bas-Empire 4: La Gaule Chrétienne (314-614)* (abbreviated to PCBE).<sup>35</sup> A prosopography is

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<sup>31</sup> Greg.Hist., 4.27.

<sup>32</sup> Venantius Fortunatus, *Carm.* 6.1.17-19;21. *ordine multiplici felicem in saecula regem / undique cinxerunt lumina tanta ducum. / culimda tot procerum concurrunt culmen ad unum [...] cunctora adventu festiva palatia fervent.*

<sup>33</sup> For an introduction to SNA within the field of ancient and early medieval history, see e.g. Ruffini 2009, 8-40; Cline 2012.

<sup>34</sup> Martindale 1992.

<sup>35</sup> Pietri/Heijmans, 2013.

essentially a collection of mini-biographies of all, or at least many of, the named individuals in our sources. The PCBE is most detailed for Merovingian Gaul and also references which people were known to have been in contact with each other. I will use these two prosopographical works as the basis for my map of the social network, preferring the PCBE over the PLRE, because of its greater detail and reliability. However, it should be noted that prosopography relies on the subjective interpretation of the editors, who must often choose whether a person named in one text is the same as the person named in another. For prosopography and social network analysis to be fruitful, the benefit of the doubt has to be given to some of these identifications.

In order to map a social network, various assumptions and choices must be made. For the Merovingian period, our evidence is sparse; reconstructing a “real” social network is impossible. We can only see the social network where links are preserved in our sources, or we can presume them to be extant where they are not attested. Here, I will make the following choices: I will map only the historically attested relations (links) between people (nodes). I will take an “ego-centric” approach: meaning I will start from Venantius Fortunatus and follow the connections he made during his stay at the Austrasian court in 566. To be clear; I will only trace the connections of Fortunatus’ contacts at the Austrasian courts,<sup>36</sup> and only to the 2<sup>nd</sup> degree, meaning I will record people who knew someone who knew Fortunatus, but no more than that. As is well known in social network theory, the amount of nodes increases exponentially with each degree.<sup>37</sup> In the modern world, it is said that most people on the planet are connected by only six degrees; known as the Small World Model. For the Early Middle Ages, Søren Sindbæk has shown that the Small World Model applies even to Viking Age Europe; a peasant in Scandinavia was only six handshakes away from the Pope in Rome, at the most.<sup>38</sup> The same must therefore have been the case for the Merovingian world, making it prudent to limit the amount of degrees that are traced. For the present study, a degree of two from Fortunatus (or one from the Austrasian courtiers of 566), limits the amount of nodes to a manageable number. Otherwise, a mapping of the Austrasian court quickly devolves into mapping simply every known historical figure – an interesting endeavour, presumably, but far beyond the scope of the current investigation.

The object here is to map the social network of the Austrasian court, so I will only pay limited attention to the remainder of Fortunatus’ social network which he built up after his departure from Sigibert’s court. Furthermore, for heuristic purposes, I have had to leave out royal individuals such as Sigibert, Childebert II and Brunhild, since otherwise they would dominate the entire network. Of course, this is precisely what they did historically, but the point here is to investigate the links between magnates, not between magnates and

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<sup>36</sup> Therefore leaving out other acquaintances.

<sup>37</sup> Cline 2012.

<sup>38</sup> Sindbæk 2007.

kings. The chronological range is also somewhat artificial: I depart from Fortunatus' connections from 566, but from there I will collect the social relations from the courtier's lifetimes. The goal here is to trace how Fortunatus' brief stay at Sigibert's court embedded him in a much wider elite network, so it is only fitting that the network broadens as we move away from Fortunatus.

Similarly, only the individual's most high-standing office is recorded, even if they did not hold that office at the time of meeting Fortunatus. For instance, Romulfus became bishop of Reims only in 590, many years after Fortunatus met his father Lupus in 566. Like before, the aim here is not to give a synchronous overview of the network at the time of Sigibert's and Brunhild's wedding, but rather to gain an impression of the overall level of socio-political power the network attained diachronically; a "networking"-event in 566 meant Fortunatus could call upon powerful allies decades later. There is a problem with determining the relative hierarchy and status of a given office. Generally, Merovingian secular offices can be divided into functions at the royal court, and functions in the regional administration. About the later ones we are relatively well informed, and it is clear that a *dux* is of a higher order than *tribunus* (and presumably, but not certainly, *comes*). However, it is uncertain how the prestige attached to regional offices correlates to those of palatial offices, and furthermore, a *comes* in our sources can in some instances also refer to the *comes stabuli* or *comes palatii*, both functions at the royal court. The hierarchy at the royal court itself remains relatively obscure, making it difficult to establish a precise hierarchy of offices.<sup>39</sup>

The following table (5.1) simplifies the administrative hierarchy; those holding 'officium' all hold important offices in regional or palatial administration at some point in their lives. This division allows us to easily distinguish individuals of high secular or ecclesiastical rank, whatever the precise degrees of prestige now lost to us. In the analysis, each node is assigned a "role" from each of the following categories from table 5.1, giving an overall impression of socio-political power as distributed among the network.

I have tried to keep the relations (links) between individuals (nodes) equally simple: two people are either acquaintances (colleagues, friends, correspondents, patron/clients, etc.), rivals, or family (father, son, brother, father-in-law, etc.).<sup>40</sup> The relations between Fortunatus and his acquaintances of the Austrasian wedding of 566 have been assigned a special relation for ease of analysis. The reason for this division is simple: it allows

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<sup>39</sup> Murray 2015, 206-223; Weidemann 1982, 24; n. 32.

<sup>40</sup> One problem is that familial relations may also be used metaphorically by our sources, expressing close relations without actual familial ties in the modern sense of the word. Pucci 2010, 63, suggests Fortunatus referenced to *parentes* and *fratrum* to suggest Alagisil and Sigimund shared a figurative kinship with him, or "familial surrogates upon his arrival in Gaul". For the sake of the current network analysis I have tended to assume actual family relations where family terminology is referenced, but the reader ought to bear in mind that familial relations cannot be ascertained in some cases.

comparison of social networks with family relationships: if the latter feature strongly then it is more likely that the network consisted of an ‘aristocracy of birth’ (as discussed in chapter three). I have decided not to try and qualify the edges further, for instance by assigning weight to qualify the strength of a given relationship. The problem is that the dataset is of insufficient depth to provide this information, as many of the ties are singularly attested. Take, for instance, the friendship between the magnates Gogo and Lupus, mentioned only once in a poem by Fortunatus (see below). The friendship is portrayed as one of deep connection between the two, but not a single letter between Gogo and Lupus survives.

Category	Includes
Royal	King, prince, queen, princess (left out of the network analysis)
Officium	Rector, comes, nutricius, dux, domesticus, queen’s servant, referendarius
Agent	Lower offices or office not named: e.g. spatharius, agent, socius, senator, envoy, vir magnificus
Episcopal	bishop
Ecclesiastical	All other ecclesiastical offices
Other	Unknown; people without public office

*Table 5.1. Categories of rank used for the social network analysis.*

The data for the analysis was recorded simply by using Excel. The raw data from Excel can subsequently be imported into Gephi for visualisation and analysis.<sup>41</sup> Gephi is an open source specialised but relatively simple tool for social network analysis and was therefore appropriate for my analysis here. After all, the network in my investigation here is larger than convenient for manual analysis, but not yet so large to require advanced statistical approaches; in total I recorded 66 nodes that are connected by 121 ties.<sup>42</sup> The prime advantage of Gephi is that it offers an easily readable ‘map’ of these social ties, including the categorisation into social roles and types of links that I just discussed.

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<sup>41</sup> Available to download online through [gephi.org](http://gephi.org).

<sup>42</sup> I had a larger number of nodes when I included royal members in the network, but this turned out to be impractical, since the number of ties between royalty and everyone else would quickly make the network unreadable.

#### 5.4. Friendship at the Austrasian court of 566

My analysis starts with a group of 18 Austrasian courtiers that Fortunatus presumably met at the royal wedding of 566.<sup>43</sup> We know of them from a series of poems collected mainly in books 6 and 7 of Fortunatus' *Carmina*, showing he stayed in touch with this circle of friends long after he had left Austrasia.<sup>44</sup> I have summed up the 18 individuals and their political titles or roles in table 5.2. It would be tedious to introduce them all at length here. Many of these courtiers fulfilled or would eventually fulfil important functions in the highest echelons of Merovingian politics. Others seemed to have been passers-by or courtiers of less import, such as the brothers Flavus and Evodius, who held an otherwise undescribed function at the royal court; the woman Palatina, important by association with her husband Bodegisil, who was a *dux*; or a certain Sigimund who would later end up as a mercenary on campaign in northern Italy with his brother Alagisil.<sup>45</sup> Overall, the impression is of a social circle that enjoyed, or would come to enjoy, high political standing.

Three individuals stand out in the network and deserve to be introduced here. The first is a man called Gogo, a *comes* at the time of Fortunatus' arrival in Gaul.<sup>46</sup> Known to have received literary education from someone called Dodoreus, he became one of the more notable literati of the Austrasian court. When king Sigibert died in 575, Gogo became the *nutritius* (tutor) of the child-king Childebert II, likely in charge of the young king's education. Through his proximity to Childebert, Gogo would presumably have been one of the most influential men at the time.<sup>47</sup> Gogo is also the author of several (diplomatic) letters in the *Epistulae Austrasicae*, written on behalf of the king.<sup>48</sup> Gogo's friend Lupus was another significant member of the network, known both for his abilities as a judge and as a general.<sup>49</sup> Lupus held the esteemed office of *dux*. At least for some of his time in office he specifically was *dux* over the Champagne area [*dux Campanensis*]. There are some clues that Lupus originated from an old and distinguished Gallo-Roman family from Reims, which would imply he held the office of *dux* in his family's homeland. According to Wickham, 'Lupus was almost certainly a local man – his links are all with Champagne – and his family land is most likely to have had a pre-Frankish core'.<sup>50</sup> If so, Lupus could be called an aristocrat in the true sense of the word (see ch. 2), were it not that his family's

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<sup>43</sup> PCBE s.n. Fortunatus, p. 804-805.

<sup>44</sup> For an overview and translation of many of Fortunatus' friendship letters to secular friends, see

<sup>45</sup> Cf. their respective entries in the PCBE and PLRE.

<sup>46</sup> PCBE, s.n. Gogo, 899.

<sup>47</sup> Williard 2014, 695-696.

<sup>48</sup> *Epistulae Austrasicae* nr. 13; 16; 22; 48.

<sup>49</sup> For a close reading of Fortunatus' four letters to Lupus, see: Herschend, 1996.

<sup>50</sup> Wickham 2005, 181.

background must remain hypothetical.<sup>51</sup> Finally, there is Dynamius, *patricius et rector Provinciae*; patrician and rector of the Provence, the local equivalent of *comes* or governor. Holding sway over Marseilles, an important centre of trade with the Mediterranean, Dynamius held a particularly influential post in the Merovingian administration.

Name in the PCBE	Title/Role	Poem in Venantius Fortunatus' <i>Carmina</i>
Iovinus 2	future rector of Provence	carm. 6.10-69-70
Dynamius 3	rector	carm. 6.10-35-44
Sigimundus	Courtier/mercenary?	carm. 7.20-22
Flavus	courtier	carm. 7.18-19
Evodius	Courtier; brother of Flavus	carm. 7.18-19
Gogo	comes	carm. 7.4
Palatina 1	spouse of Bodegisilus	carm. 7.6
Lupus 7	dux	carm. 7.7-7.8
Magnulfus 1	(brother of Lupus)	carm. 7.10
Bodegisilus	dux	carm. 7.5.
Mummolenus 2		carm. 7.14
Berulfus 1	comes	carm. 7.15
Conda	domesticus	carm. 7.16
Sigoaldus	comes	carm. 10.16.1-4
Gunduarius	service to queen	carm. 7.17
Chrodinus	dux	carm. 9.16
Alagisilus	courtier/mercenary?	carm. 7.21
Boso 1	referendarius	carm. 7.22

Table 5.2. Austrasian magnates at Sigibert's court, recorded by Venantius Fortunatus. Naming based on the PCBE, p. 804-805 (the numbers are used to distinguish from other people with the same name).

In addition, Dynamius seems to have been at the centre of a Provençal group of *literati*, and may himself have been the author of multiple saints' lives, poems and a work of grammar as well as being a patron to Fortunatus. He also wrote two letters preserved in the *Epistolae*

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<sup>51</sup> The argument is based on the recurring name element of 'wolf', of which Lupus is the Latin rendition. An earlier Lupus is attested in the early fifth century as bishop of Soissons and nephew of the bishop Remigius of Reims, known for his famed letter congratulating king Clovis' ascension to power. Thus, Heinzelmann also speculates that this was no coincidence; it is not that Lupus was a popular name within the Reims area, but rather that a family of Lupi was very influential in this area for many generations. Hence, Lupus' sons Romulf (the -ulf suffix deriving from Germanic \*wulfaz, i.e. wolf) and Iohannis would go on to acquire respectively the episcopate of Reims and the *dux* of the Champagne (Heinzelmann 1976, 87). Nevertheless, it is impossible to prove a family connection, and in any case the evidence is based on the much later collection of church documents by Flodoard of Reims in the tenth century, who was concerned more with justifying his church's land claims than with historical authenticity; Roberts, 2019, 104-144.

*Austrasiacae*.<sup>52</sup> It will become clear below that these three men played a vital role in this elite network, but let me return to the entire group of Austrasian courtiers for now. It is possible to visualise the network so far as a simple 1.5-degree ego-centric network starting from Fortunatus (fig. 5.2.).<sup>53</sup> The resulting visualisation is simple because few social ties between the courtiers are attested by our sources. We can see the family ties between Bodegisil and Palatina, as well as between Evodius and Flavus; Alagisil and Sigimund; as well as that between the brothers Lupus and Magnulfus. In addition, we can trace ties of friendship between Dynamius and Lupus, Lupus and Gogo, Gogo and Chrodin, and Sigimund and Magnulfus. That is how far the written evidence takes us in spelling out the internal relations of this network separate from Fortunatus; we can assume of course that most of these men knew each other. But in which cliques they split apart remains unknown; was Fortunatus their only friend in common, or did the network have other ties besides him? And if so, were these ties strong (e.g. friends/family) or weak (acquaintances).<sup>54</sup> We have hints of a clique around Lupus and Dynamius, and in all likelihood Gogo as well; in his article on the social network of friendship, Dumézil assumes a hypothetical link between Gogo and Dynamius (see below).<sup>55</sup> It is still not a real clique in its strict definition of social network theory; the link between Sigimund and Lupus only goes indirectly through Lupus' brother Magnulfus, we have no proof that the two men directly corresponded with each other as well, although the probability that they did is made likely by the network. Whether the whole group of courtiers formed a clique or a 'faction' at court, or whether they are only connected through Fortunatus, is similarly unknown. This sketches out the problem of this network analysis; most of the network that I am mapping remains invisible, leaving us with the barest traces. To some extent, the network maps more the relations of *amicitia* that our letters wanted to commemorate than an actual social network on the ground.

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<sup>52</sup> *Epistulae Austrasiacae* nr.12 and 17. Cf. Williard 2014, 699-702; Dumézil 2007, 560-562.

<sup>53</sup> A 1.5 degrees network traces all the contacts of the egos and the links between those contacts.

<sup>54</sup> Although even a network of weak ties can still be an influential network; Granovetter 1973.

<sup>55</sup> Dumézil 2007, 592.

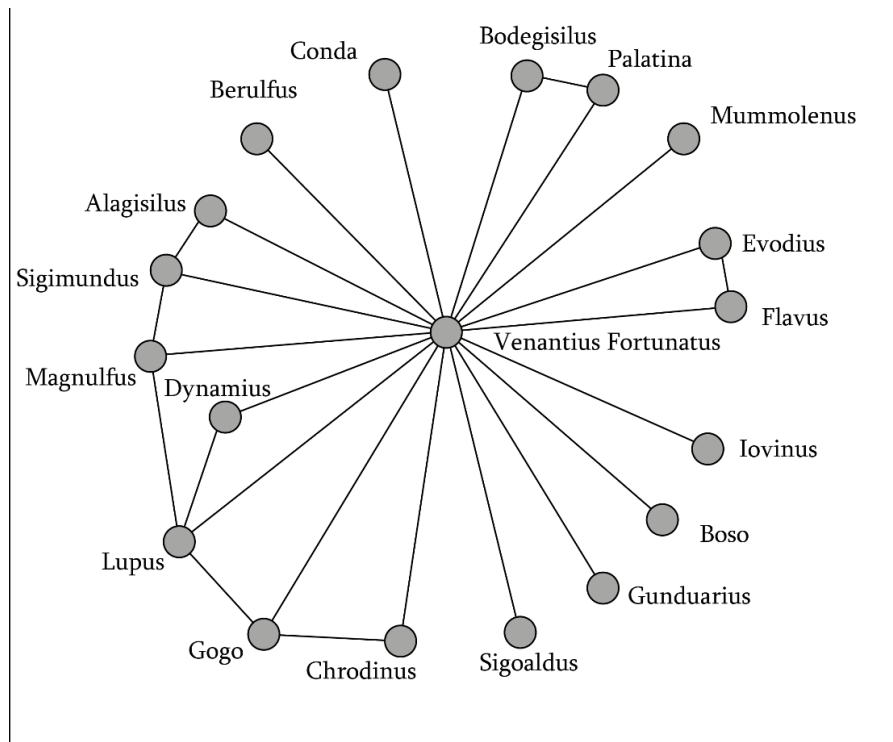


Figure 5.2. A 1.5 degree ego-network of Fortunatus and his Austrasian circle of courtiers.

From here, the network can be expanded to include all the social ties of the Austrasian courtiers that are recorded in the written sources. The resulting networks expands drastically from 19 to 66 nodes; bearing in mind that these are only relations recorded in our sources, this simple fact reveals a wide-ranging network of many well-connected powerful individuals (fig. 5.3).

Some of the eighteen original courtiers are “dead ends” with no further attested connections. However, there is a small number of nodes with many connections. Social network theory calls these high-degree nodes; nodes that have a high amount of links or edges to other nodes. In other words, these nodes are crucial parts of the network in connecting otherwise separate individuals to the wider network. Of course, in this case (as we will see) this is largely a product of surviving source material, but it is nonetheless revealing in which individuals formed key members of this literary network of “pen-pals” and their acquaintances. The majority of new connections emerge from four individuals: the aforementioned Gogo, Lupus, Dynamius. Almost certainly these three men knew each other, although no direct tie between Gogo and Dynamius is attested, there is an indirect link between these two figures through the bishop Vilicus.<sup>56</sup> In addition to these, Iovinus, also a *rector* in the Provence and part of Dynamius’ circle of literati, can be recognised as a high-degree node. For now, it can be observed that besides Fortunatus, Gogo represents the highest-degree node, with 33 ties to 20 nodes, equalling roughly 30% of the entire network.

<sup>56</sup> Dumézil creates a hypothetical edge between Gogo and Dynamius (2007, 592).

Of these, 13 are linked to the network exclusively through Gogo. Likewise, Dynamius also has 33 ties to 17 nodes, Iovinus has 26 ties to 12 nodes, and Lupus has 22 ties to 13 nodes (only about 15% of the entire network). By comparison, Fortunatus has 56 ties to 30 nodes, representing roughly 45% of the entire network. In brief, while Fortunatus has personal ties to nearly half the network, it is only through other well-connected men that the network drastically expands. Perhaps one of the most surprising names to find in the social network is Pope Gregory the Great, connected to the network through correspondence with Dynamius. His namesake, Gregory of Tours, is also intimately connected with the network, both through his direct relationship with Fortunatus and through a bond of *amicitia* both men shared with Berulfus.

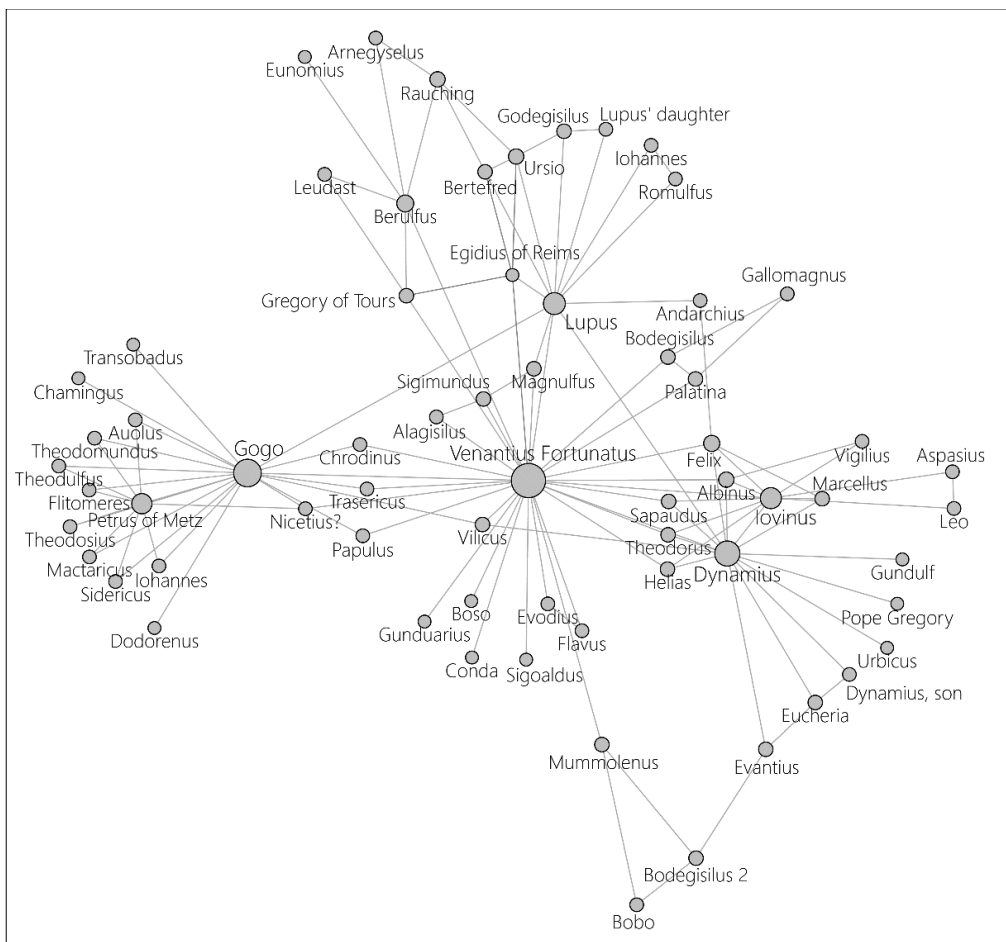


Figure 5.3. The full network, visualised in Gephi using the YifanHu Proportional algorithm.

The fact that both Fortunatus and Gregory of Tours are integrally connected with the same group of courtly friends is poignant. It reveals just how one-sided our knowledge of sixth-century Gaul is. We should bear in mind the possibility that Gregory's *Histories* were circulated in a social milieu much like this network and that the contents of his narrative were similarly adapted to suit the tastes, and political interests, of the faction of which Gregory was a part. To a considerable degree, therefore, our information on sixth-century

Gaul seems to be coloured by the factional interests of an overlapping network of *amici*. Indeed, some of the individuals who were political rivals with members of the network are depicted in a negative light by Gregory, such as Egidius of Reims (more on him below). Similarly, some of the network members gain good press in Gregory's narrative. Thus, curiously, at the start of book six in the *Histories*, Gregory mentions Gogo's death almost in passing:

'In the sixth year of his reign King Childebert broke the peace which he had made with King Guntram and formed an alliance with Chilperic. *Gogo died soon afterwards and Wandelen was appointed in his place* [my Italics]. Mummolus fled from Guntram's kingdom and took refuge inside the walls'.<sup>57</sup>

How to explain this brief and sudden namedrop between otherwise seemingly more relevant events of high politics? Gogo plays no important role in Gregory's narrative otherwise; in fact he is only mentioned once, briefly, as a side character, 'A priest called Transobadus, who had once been archdeacon under Dalmatius, had high hopes, trusting to the fact that he had placed his son in the household of Gogo, who at that time was King Childebert's governor [*nutricius*].'<sup>58</sup> The best explanation for the mention of Gogo's passing is because his passing mattered to Gregory's audience, the shared members of this *amicitia*-network who knew Gogo and to whom his death was a relevant event, despite his minor role in the events of Gregory's historical narrative. A commemoration of a shared friend is a tacit clue that Gregory's writing needs to be seen as socially embedded in a network of friendship and clientage.<sup>59</sup> Incidentally, the value of *amicitia* is highlighted exactly by the previous passage; as *nutricius* to the king, Gogo was a useful patron to acquire, and by placing his son in Gogo's household, Transobadus connected himself to a powerful ally. In a similar way, Gregory was an important patron to Fortunatus. Their bond of *amicitia* relied on mutual interest. While Gregory held the political capital due to his high standing as metropolitan bishop, Fortunatus' friendship provided Gregory not only the fruits of his literary talents, but also access to a wide social network of other powerful individuals.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> *Non post multum tempus Gogo moritur; in cuius locum Wandelenus subrogatur*; Greg.Hist. 6.1.

<sup>58</sup> Greg.Hist. 5.46.

<sup>59</sup> Cf. Dumézil 2007, 553-554.

<sup>60</sup> Roberts 2015.

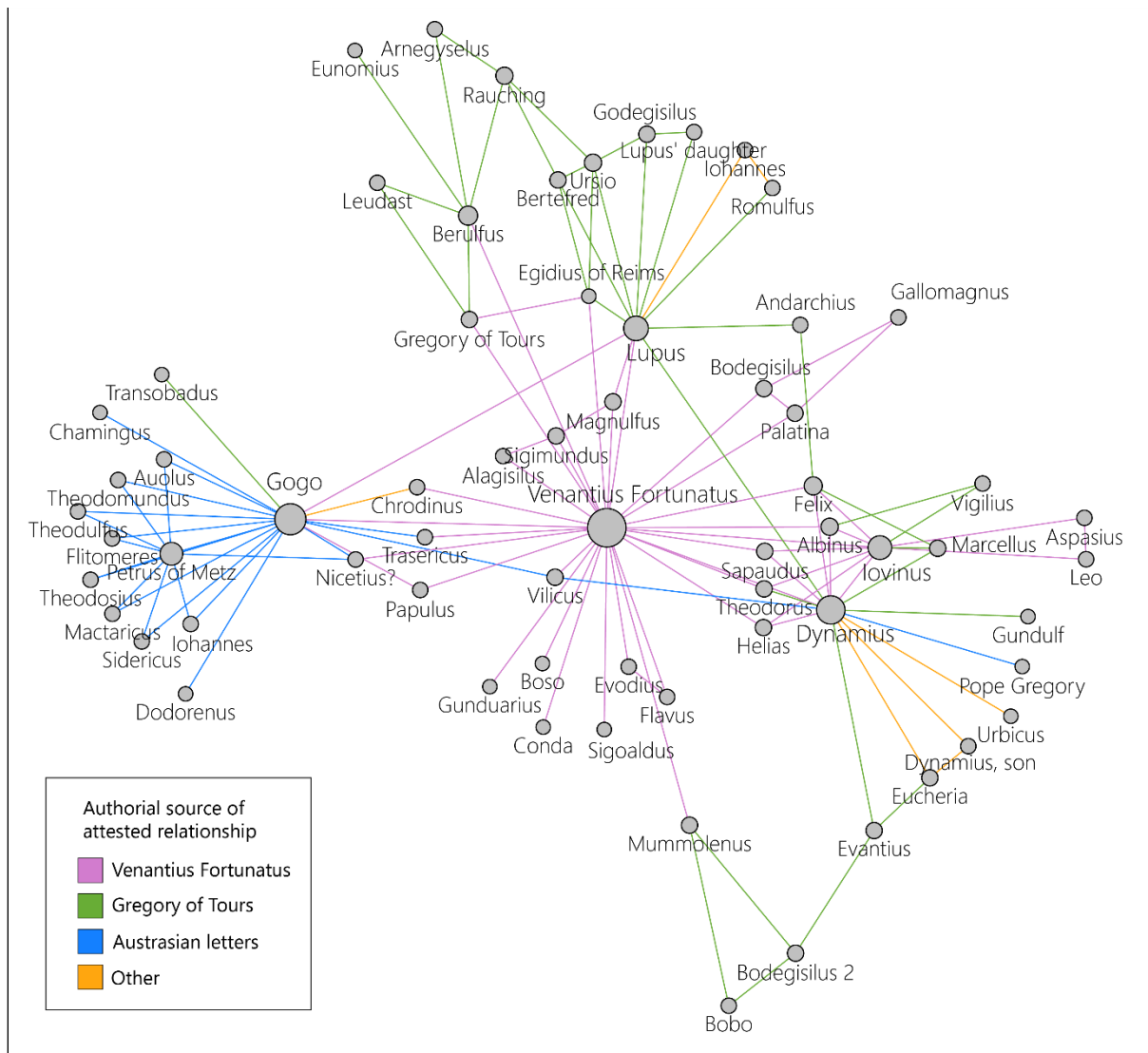


Figure 5.4. The full network, visualised in Gephi using the YifanHu Proportional algorithm. The links are coloured according to which source names the relationship between the two connected nodes.

It is insightful to look at which ties of friendship are recorded in which source. Figure 5.4 visualises just that, with the colour of the tie representing whether we know of the social relationship from Gregory, Fortunatus or the Austrasian epistles.<sup>61</sup> Unsurprisingly, it turns out the majority of the network is revealed through Fortunatus' poems, accounting for 43% of all the ties. However, the majority of those are first-degree ties between Fortunatus himself and the people he corresponded with, mostly the core network of Austrasian courtiers that I started with. Comparatively few ties between his correspondents' themselves are revealed. Instead, the network is expanded massively through the addition of evidence from Gregory's Histories and the Austrasian letters. Thus, almost the entire cluster around Gogo, 21 ties to be specific, are revealed from a single letter written by Gogo

<sup>61</sup> A small handful of other sources are included: one from Fredegar's chronicle and two from the much younger tenth century Flodoard of Reims, which is based on earlier archival documents.

to the bishop Petrus of Metz, and preserved in the *Epistolae Austrasiacae*.<sup>62</sup> Similarly, the relationship between Dynamius and the bishop Vilicus is also attested through a letter that Dynamius wrote to the latter.<sup>63</sup> It is through the extraordinary survival of letters like these two that we can get an insight into the literary praxis of Fortunatus' recipients. Clearly, the literary art of letter writing was a more widespread activity among Merovingian magnates and crucial in preserving networks of *amicitia* between each other.<sup>64</sup> It is unfortunate that only such a small group of letters have survived, or else we might have been able to trace many more relationships that now remain invisible. It is hard to gauge the extent to which letter-writing was a crucial aspect of elite culture altogether, or whether many more courtiers at the royal court never in their lives touched the quill. What the network shows us, is that the ideal of *paideia* was still there, and that the ability to employ it could be of great use in maintaining elite networks.

Finally, the remaining 31% of ties in the network are derived from Gregory's *Histories*, based on anecdotes revealing some kind of social interaction between two individuals. Admittedly, this introduces a bit of a methodical impurity in my analysis, since I am comparing apples and pears. The epistolary ties are almost all expressions of literary *amicitia*, based on correspondence between two individuals, or the request to give their regards to so-and-so.<sup>65</sup> The epistolary greeting is not just reflective of a friendship, but a performative act; the act of epistolary exchange creates and sustains the bond of *amicitia* between the correspondents.<sup>66</sup> By contrast, Gregory's information is an outsider's description or evaluation of the relationship. Still, it provides us with further crucial information to extend the network. Thus, we learn from Gregory that a man called Godegisel is the son-in-law of Lupus, and can therefore also extrapolate that Lupus had a daughter.<sup>67</sup> By the way, it is striking that Godegisel is introduced here explicitly in his relationship with Lupus. While Lupus is mentioned in the previous passage of Gregory's narrative here, it is also likely that in tying Godegisel back to Lupus, Gregory is actively referencing back to key members of his social network, and presumably, his audience.

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<sup>62</sup> *Epistulae Austrasiacae* 22.

<sup>63</sup> *Epistulae Austrasiacae* 17.

<sup>64</sup> Roberts notes a preserved letter from Dynamius back to Fortunatus (*Austr. Ep.* 12.1): 'Confirmation, if confirmation is needed, of the shared literary culture of Fortunatus and at least the innermost group of his secular correspondents'; Roberts 2009, 263.

<sup>65</sup> In Gogo's letter to Petrus (*Epistulae Austrasiacae* 22), he asks the bishop to extend his greetings to various ecclesiastics in Petrus' surrounding; 'saluto Theodulfum [...] Saluto reliquos abates [...] Saluto Flitomerem [...] Saluto Mactaricum archidiaconum.' And so forth.

<sup>66</sup> It is important to note that the language of friendship cloaks the referred relationship. It is often impossible to ascertain to what extent the two agents were true friends in our sense of the word, and thus formed a strong tie, or whether etiquette of patronage embellished acquaintances from acquaintances into *amici*.

<sup>67</sup> *Greg.Hist.* 9.12.

Another example is the slave Andarchius. Interestingly, he is linked to two of Fortunatus' contacts, Lupus and Felix, but only through Gregory's narrative can we now indirectly link Felix back to Lupus through Andarchius. Incidentally, why else would Gregory dwell upon the talents of this Provençal slave, if not because he was intimately tied to members of his *amicitia*-network?<sup>68</sup> In a sense, the network is self-referential; people and their ties are mentioned because they mattered to the network of literati who read and produced the sources we have access to.

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<sup>68</sup> Greg.Hist 4.46 narrates how Lupus came to Marseilles and placed the slave Andarchius under his patronage. He subsequently brought Andarchius back to Sigibert's court, where the king became impressed by his literary talents and put him into personal employ in the public service. Andarchius also visited Clermont-Ferrand, making it possible that Gregory made his personal acquaintance.

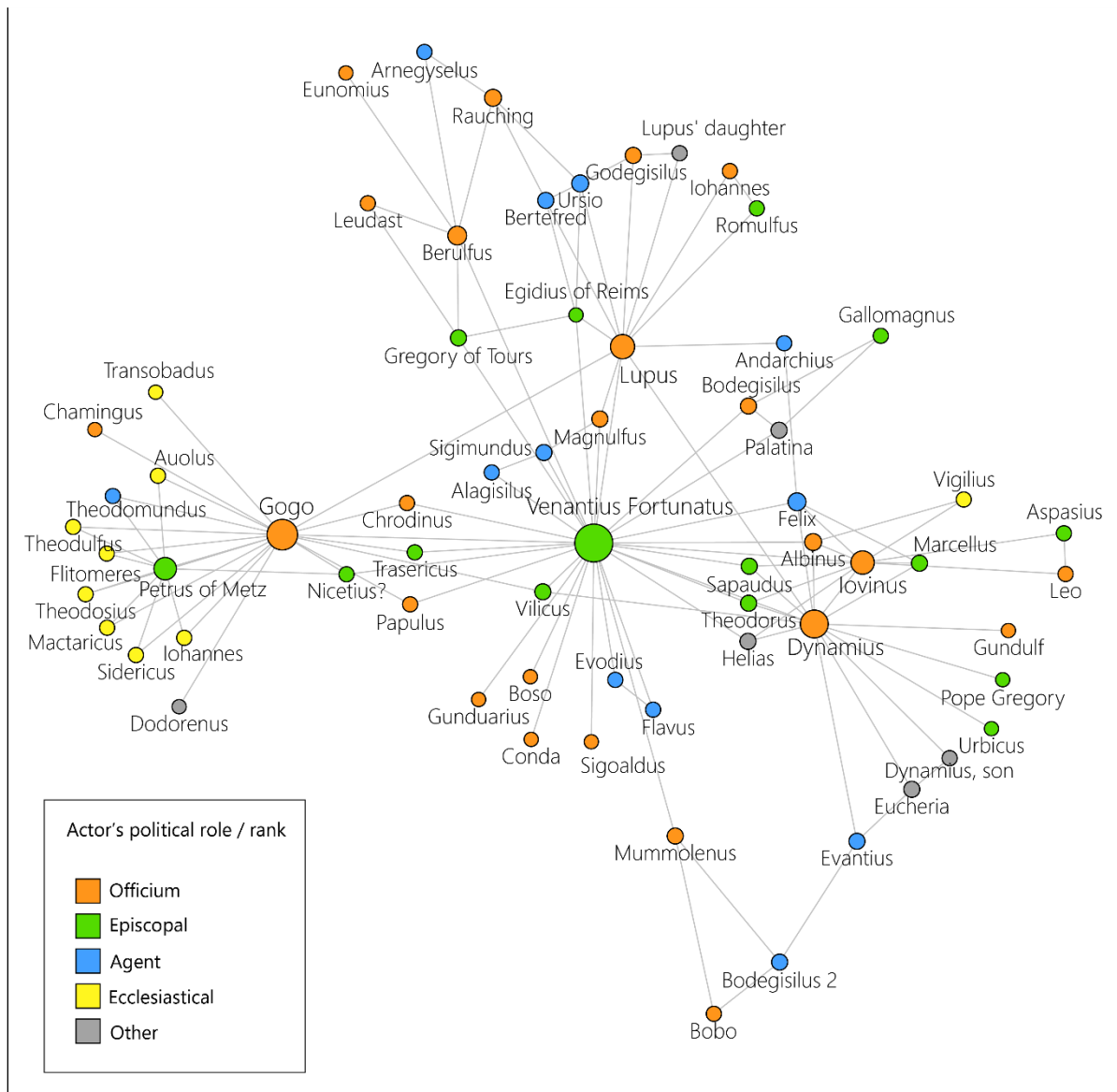


Figure 5.5. The full network, visualised in Gephi using the YifanHu Proportional algorithm. The nodes are coloured according to their socio-political role (compare table 2).

Moving on to the who-is-who of the network, using Gephi it is possible to visualise the socio-political role of all the actors involved (see table 5.1), as well as the nature of their relationships (fig 5.5). Most of the members in the network belong to the highest echelons of Merovingian political life. The majority (36%) held a high political office at some point in their life, such as *comes*, *dux* or *rector* (governor of the Provence). For the current purposes, I have not made a distinction between the *comes* as provincial administrator or one of the palatial *comites*, since this is often left ambiguous by our sources. However, some of the members of our network are known to have held high ranks in the king's household. Gogo, of course, as *nutricius*; Conda who was *domesticus* and a member of the royal household (*convivia regis*); Gunduarius, who was a manager of Queen Brunhild's patrimonium, and Boso, who was a *referendarius* (in charge of the royal chancellery). Others who held a provincial office still seemed to have enjoyed a special standing with the

king, such as the *dux* Lupus, who appears to have been held in high regard by Queen Brunhilde.<sup>69</sup> The high standing of many of the network's members, and their close association with the Austrasian royal family, is precisely what made this network successful and appealing. A successful career need not have been secular, however; the second largest group in the network is bishops (23%). To be fair, for some the honour of episcopal office would only come towards the end of their life (as it did for Fortunatus himself). It is telling that bishops operated within the same network of *amicitia*, equipped with the same tools of patronage and letter-writing as their secular counterparts. Clearly, the distinction between secular and clerical office was not all-important; having friends in the right places also helped climb the church's career ladder. Lower-ranked clerics play a minor role in the network, however. While 18% of the nodes belong to this category, all but one are part of bishop Petrus' cluster mentioned in Gogo's letter. A similarly sized group I have called 'agents', that is people who fulfilled some kind of secular duty, but not of clearly high standing. Thus, Evantius and Bodegisel 2 are known to have been sent as envoys to Constantinople – Unfortunately meeting an untimely end en route in the African city of Carthage.<sup>70</sup> Felix is described as a *senator*, clearly holding some kind of socio-political status, but presumably not of the same political standing as a *comes* or a *dux*. Andarchius was formally a slave, but sent on important public missions by the king; a salient reminder that social status cannot simply be equated to political office or rank. Yet others, such as Evodius and Sigimund have no clearly described duty, but I have grouped them in this category because for one reason or another, they frequented the royal court. Finally, the last group I have labelled 'other'; these include women and others without clear political office.

Next, further information about the network can be gleaned by looking at the type of social relations (figure 5.6). Around 57% of the edges I have characterised as relations of friendly contact, in other words, individuals interacting within the framework of *amicitia*; I have assigned the "starting" links of Fortunatus' network from the Austrasian wedding of 566 a special category of their own (15%) for clarity's sake. In addition, a few edges are not friendly at all, but indicate rivalry or animosity, notably that between Gregory of Tours and Leudast. Similarly, Egidius of Reims seems to have held an ambiguous relationship in the network, having received a poem of praise from Fortunatus,<sup>71</sup> and having appointed Gregory to the episcopal see of Tours at king Sigibert's behest in 573.<sup>72</sup> However, at a later

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<sup>69</sup> Gregory tells a story of Queen Brunhilde interfering in a conflict between Lupus and Ursio and Berthefried, protecting the life of 'her faithful supporter' [*fidelis sui*]; Greg. Hist. 6.4.

<sup>70</sup> Greg. Hist. 10.4.

<sup>71</sup> Venantius Fortunatus, *Carm.* 3.14. Dumézil (2007, 560) speculates that Fortunatus during his arrival at the Austrasian court may have been unaware of the subtle factional hostilities at court in greeting Remigius, apologising later to Gogo for a falling out between him and Gogo 'concerning Reims'; Venantius Fortunatus, *Carm.* 7.3.

<sup>72</sup> Venantius Fortunatus, *Carm.* 5.3.13-16.

date he appears as an opponent of the network and belonging to a rivalling faction in Austrasian politics. In particular, during Childebert's II infancy, there was a power struggle between queen Brunhild on the one hand, and powerful magnates like Egidius, Guntram Boso and Rauching on the other hand.<sup>73</sup> Lupus and Gogo seem to have been more closely aligned to Brunhild, but after Gogo's early death Lupus may have been left isolated at court. He was subsequently deprived of office thanks to the machinations of Egidius and attacked by his accomplices Ursio and Berthefred until Queen Brunhild personally interfered. In the end, Lupus was forced to flee to King Guntram's court until the political winds changed with Childebert's coming of age.<sup>74</sup> The story around Egidius and Lupus is revealing of how the otherwise mostly obscure factionalism of Merovingian magnates played out.<sup>75</sup> The network of *amicitia* was thus crucial for a Merovingian courtier to survive the –sometimes deadly– games of courtly politics. It is precisely thanks to ties of friendship that a magnate could have some protection against ties of rivalry.

While most of the network is based on ties of friendship, 20% of the links are familial in nature, meaning either blood relation or ties through marriage. Here it is possible to recognise a form of “aristocratic” or dynastic principles at work in the network.<sup>76</sup> Family ties certainly seemed to have helped establish one's career. The clearest illustration of this can be found in Lupus' cluster. His brother Magnulfus was probably a *comes*,<sup>77</sup> his son Romulfus would eventually become bishop of Reims,<sup>78</sup> his other son Iohannes is recorded in a tenth-century text by Flodoard as *dux*,<sup>79</sup> and his son-in-law Godegisel also became *dux*. As mentioned before, Lupus himself may have been of distinguished ancestry. The same trend can be found elsewhere in the network. Senator Felix' son Marcellus became bishop of Uzès; Iovinus' father Aspasius was probably the bishop of Eauze, and his brother Leo became *patricius* and *rector* of the Province.<sup>80</sup> Similarly, Mummolenus' son Bobo followed in his father's footsteps as *dux*, and his other son Bodegisel was appointed as an envoy to

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<sup>73</sup> Wood 1994a, 98.

<sup>74</sup> Greg. Hist. 6.4; Greg. Hist. 9.14; Cf. Dumézil 2007, 581-586.

<sup>75</sup> Major events in Merovingian history can often find their origin in magnate rivalries. This was particularly true for the seventh century, about which Wood (1994a, 154) states: ‘Politics in the time of Chlothar and Dagobert, therefore, were apparently dominated by the rivalries of leading magnates and their families’; However, already in the sixth century courtly rivalries would steer the grand narrative of Merovingian history. Wood (1994a, 96-99) sees behind the famous affair of the pretender Gundovald the machinations of Egidius' of Reims faction and their opposition to the young king Childebert II.

<sup>76</sup> See feudal concept of society above in chapter three.

<sup>77</sup> Cf. PLRE s.v. Magnulfus

<sup>78</sup> Interestingly, Romulf, contains the Germanic element \* *wulfaz*, a translation of the Latin Lupus for ‘wolf’, just like Lupus' brother Magnulfus. The continuation of this onomastic element within the family name across Germanic-Roman linguistic boundaries is particularly telling for the Romano-Frankish cultural integration of Merovingian Gaul.

<sup>79</sup> Flodoard, *Historia Remensis ecclesiae* 2.4

<sup>80</sup> PCBE, s.n. Leo 13.

Constantinople. In a letter, Gogo addresses the bishop Traseric stating they share a familial bond through their parents (*parentalia affectu*), likely implying they were cousins.<sup>81</sup>

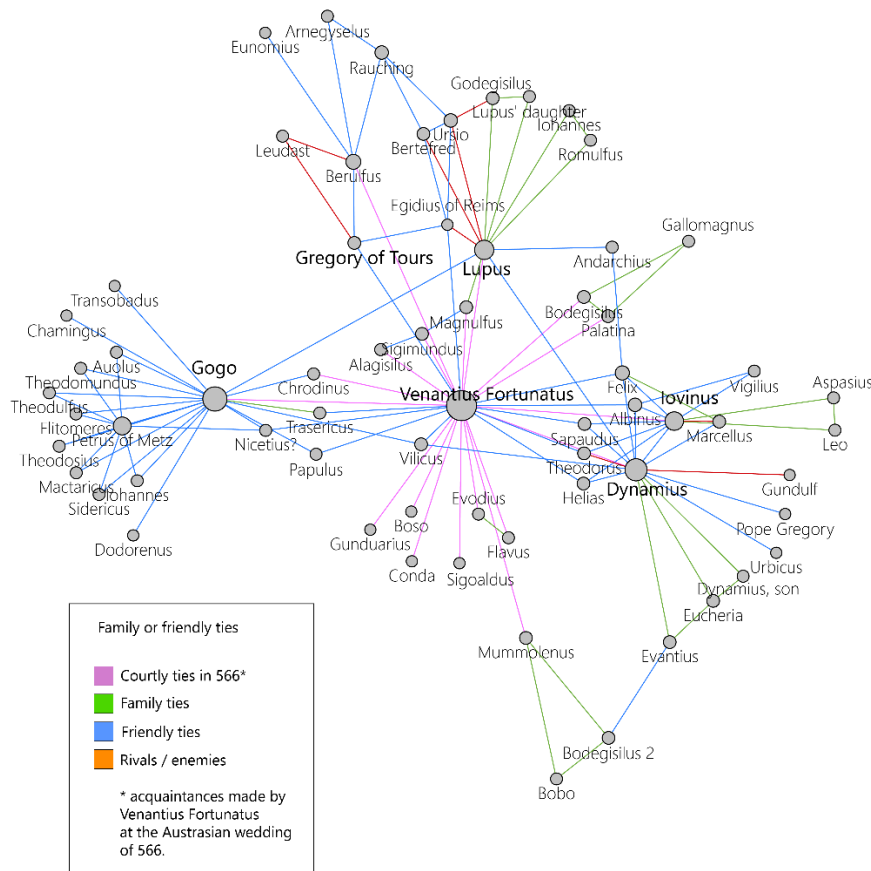


Figure 5.6. The character of the social ties in the networks. In purple are the ties that form the 'literary core' of the corpus, namely the pen-pals that made Fortunatus' acquaintance at Sigibert's and Brunhilde's wedding in 566.

Nevertheless, I believe the importance of family relations to the acquisition of a political career must not be overstated. After all, the importance of family connections is present even in the modern world. On the other hand, many of the nodes in the network have no clear family ties to explain their social status. In fact, some of the individuals come from relatively humble station in life. Gogo himself is probably one example of this, Venantius Fortunatus nowhere mentions a distinguished ancestry for Gogo, nor uses the term *nobilis* that he uses for others with notable ancestors. Dumézil concludes that Gogo was a member of 'le bas people, il n'était pas issu de la haute aristocratie'.<sup>82</sup> Gogo's station at birth must remain somewhat speculative, but we are on surer ground elsewhere in the network.

<sup>81</sup> Epistulae Austrasicae 16.2, 7-9

<sup>82</sup> Dumézil 2007, 555. Dumézil also refers to a preserved epitaph connected to Gogo's name, which makes no mention of a distinguished ancestry either. However, both the authenticity of the epitaph nor the absence of evidence make for a watertight argument. The same epitaph places Gogo's birthplace in *Belgica prima*, placing him squarely in the world of northern Gaul and the Rural Riches research area.

A clearer example can be found in a man called Conda, presumably of Burgundian background, whose career at the Austrasian court is celebrated in a poem by Fortunatus.<sup>83</sup> The latter gives him high praise, stating that he has ennobled his family [*nobilitare genus*] and that ‘starting from humble beginnings, you [Conda] have always advanced to the heights and through all stages held to the lofty pinnacles’.<sup>84</sup> He then lists Conda’s advancement through the courtly *cursus honorum*. Sometime before 533 – in other words, decades before Fortunatus met him at the Austrasian wedding of 566 – he was appointed *tribunus* by King Theuderic, an office related to the gathering of tax income.<sup>85</sup> Theuderic’s successor, Theudebert, then promoted Conda to *comes*, and afterwards *domesticus*, one of the highest offices at the royal palace. Under Theudebald, Conda was entrusted with the tutorship of Theudebald’s young son; Fortunatus does not name the function, but it may well have been that of *nutricius*, the same role Gogo would later fulfil for Childebert II. Finally, king Sigibert appointed Conda as a table companion [*convivia regis*], perhaps the highest honour to be bestowed at the royal court.<sup>86</sup>

There are instances of even steeper social mobility. Two individuals in the network had managed to attain a high status in government despite their lowly social backgrounds as slaves. The first of these is the aforementioned Andarchius, who through his connections in the network managed to attain *Konigsnähe*, and subsequently, the king’s favour. The second is Leudast, the famous antagonist and rival to Gregory of Tours. Gregory reports that Leudast was born to the slave Leucadius, who worked on a vineyard. Leudast escaped servitude in the royal kitchens and then worked his way up towards a stable hand, before being appointed as Master of the Stables, and then *comes*, thanks to the favour of Queen Marcovefa.<sup>87</sup> Gregory looked down on Leudast’s social origins and chose to highlight the count’s servile origins, possibly in contrast with his own identity as originating from a distinguished family.<sup>88</sup> To me, it seems probable that Gregory felt distinctly threatened in his class consciousness by men such as Leudast, the old Gallo-Roman aristocratic class to which he belonged no longer held its former monopoly on socio-political power; *novi homines* such as Leudast could under the Merovingians enjoy steep social mobility when they enjoyed royal patronage.<sup>89</sup> Therefore, rather than seeing Leudast’s biography as exceptional, it seems to me indicative of a broader trend of social mobility that was at odds

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<sup>83</sup> Venantius Fortunatus, *Carm.* 7.16. On Conda’s Burgundian background, see Reimitz 2015, 113. Of course, most of his adult life Conda must have spent in northern Gaul, probably in and around Metz.

<sup>84</sup> *A parvo incipiens existi semper in altum perque gradus omnes culmina celsa tenes*; Venantius Fortunatus, *Carm.* 7.16.15-16, transl. by George 1992.

<sup>85</sup> See George 1992, 65, n. 45.

<sup>86</sup> Venantius Fortunatus, *Carm.* 7.16.17-42; cf. Murray 2015, 211, 212; Jones 2009, 105-106.

<sup>87</sup> *Greg.Hist.* 5.48.

<sup>88</sup> Halsall 2019, 19.

<sup>89</sup> Cf. Grahn-Hoek 1976, 87; 263-275.

with Gregory's received notions of *ordines* that he would read in the works of his Roman predecessors.<sup>90</sup>

There is one final question to be discussed: where in space could this network be placed (fig. 5.7)? Cross-referencing the social network with the attestation database, it is possible to compare a spatial map with the social map of the network. I have limited this analysis to the 'core members' of the network, the courtiers who made Fortunatus' acquaintance at the royal wedding of 566 (see fig. 5.2). For obvious reasons, there is a strong centre of gravity in Austrasia, since all members of the network were present at least at the wedding. But surprisingly, members of the network find themselves further afield, such as in the royal city of Paris, or in Gregory's vicinity at Tours. The Provençal group of Iovinus and Dynamius can clearly be distinguished around Marseilles.<sup>91</sup> Some of the members of the network find themselves further abroad. Sigoald escorted Fortunatus from Italy to Sigibert's court.<sup>92</sup> Gogo is normally based in Austrasia (see below) but is also recorded by Fortunatus to have escorted the princess Brunhild from her parental home in Spain to Sigibert's court for the wedding: 'Just now you bring the greatest joy for the noble king from the lands of Spain, through a myriad of dangers'.<sup>93</sup> The same journey is later recorded also in Fredegarius' chronicle (but it is curiously absent from Gregory's *Histories*).<sup>94</sup> and Bodegisil can be found in Carthage on his way to Constantinople.<sup>95</sup> Lupus can be located in the Austrasian heartland but is also recorded as having fought the Saxons at the river *Laugona*, possibly the Lahn?<sup>96</sup> In the next section I will look more closely at the spatiality of the Austrasian court proper; for now it can be observed that members of the network were geographically quite mobile on extraordinary occasions, but tended to stay mostly within their home region or around the Austrasian court most of the time. This way, the network not only linked people, but also regions. Friendship linked more distant locales such as Tours or the Provence to the Moselle valley of Sigibert's royal court.

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<sup>90</sup> Jones 2009, 112-113; Pizarro 2015, 361.

<sup>91</sup> Venantius Fortunatus, *Carm.* 6.9.5; Greg. Hist. 4.43; 6.7; 6.11.

<sup>92</sup> Venantius Fortunatus, *Carm.* 10.16.

<sup>93</sup> 'nuper ab Hispanis per multa pericula terris egregio regi gaudia summa vehis'; Venantius Fortunatus, *Carm.* 7.1.41-42 (transl. George 1995, 58).

<sup>94</sup> Fred.Chron. 3.57.

<sup>95</sup> Greg.Hist. 10.2.

<sup>96</sup> Venantius Fortunatus, *Carm.* 7.7.49-60.

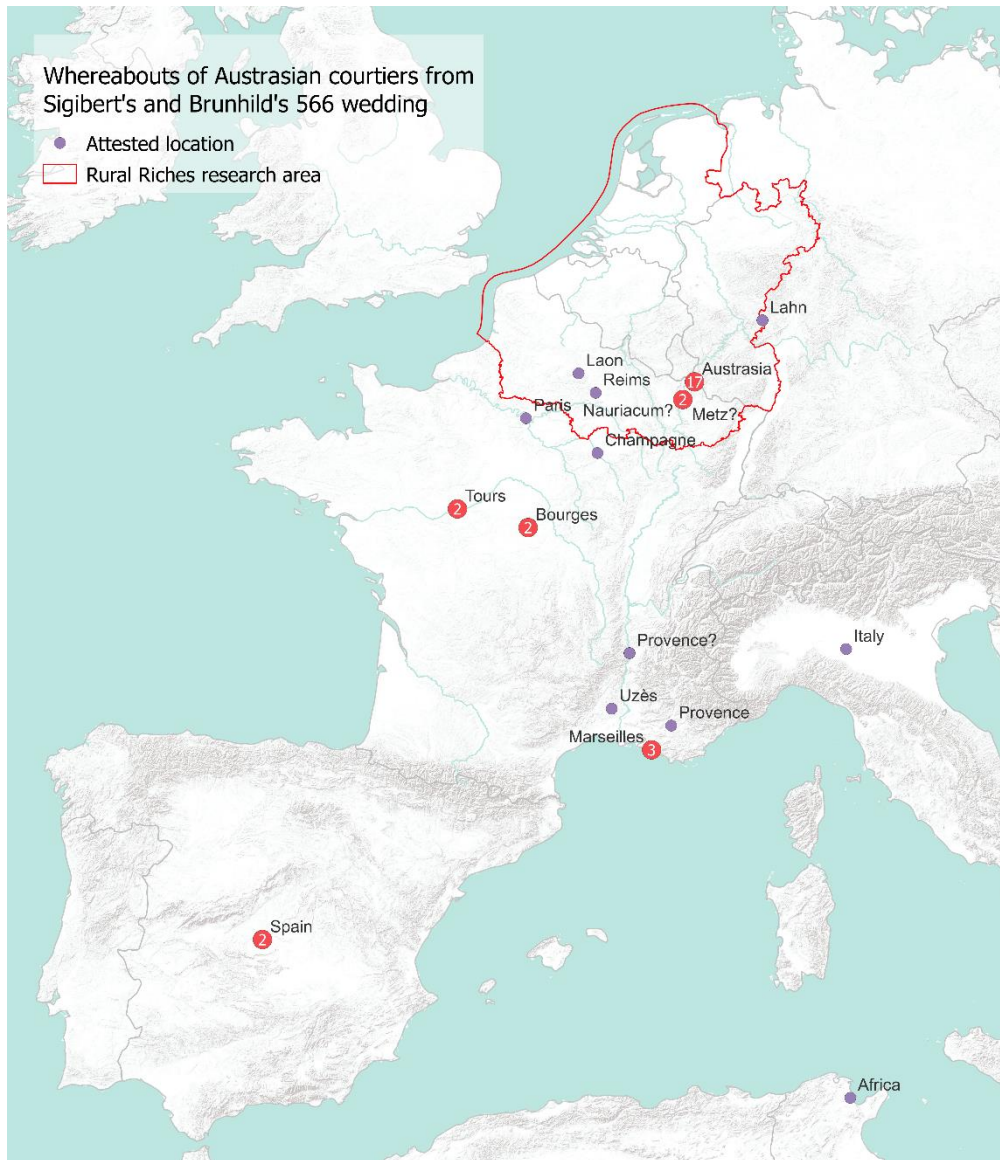


Figure 5.7. Attested whereabouts of core members of the network, namely those present at the Austrasian wedding of 566, see table 1.

To conclude, using SNA and the attestation database, it is possible to gain a deeper understanding of a particular faction of friends, allies, patrons and clients orbiting the Austrasian court of Sigibert and Childebert II. The network shows a diverse cast of characters, from social climbers to individuals of distinguished ancestry. The network allowed these various individuals to acquire mutual aid in the games of high politics, to achieve royal favour and attain office. While we can certainly discern hierarchy, it was seemingly a fluid and open hierarchy, with social climbers and competing sources of power (ecclesiastical, royal, literary, and so on). Thus, the network reveals a more heterarchical landscape of competing and interlocking ladders of socio-political power.

## 5.5. Where is Gogo? Mapping the Austrasian royal zone

For the last part of this chapter, I want to look in more detail at one particular friendship verse letter written by Fortunatus to Gogo. A close reading of this particular poem reveals the imaginative world of Austrasian courtly life, the contours of its topographic setting and the activities of its members. The poem, *carmen* 7.4, inquires after Gogo's whereabouts, which Fortunatus then answers with a series of possible locations and occupations. While the poem is obviously hyperbolic, it does offer crucial insights into what Fortunatus and his audience expected to be conceivable and expedient ways and places for an Austrasian magnate to spend his time.<sup>97</sup> The poem is structured into four parts: the introduction or opening question inquiring after Gogo's whereabouts (l. 1-4); possible locations summed up as a series of rivers (l. 5-16); a number of activities Gogo could be performing on land (l. 17-30); and finally Gogo's activities at court (l. 31-36).<sup>98</sup>

The opening, then, does not simply ask Gogo for his whereabouts directly. Rather, Fortunatus applies a literary conceit of asking the clouds after his friend's well-being:

Clouds who come on the blast of the fierce north wind,  
who, suspended on high, move with the sun in the starry heavens,  
tell me what health my dear Gogo enjoys.  
What occupies his carefree mind in tranquil times?<sup>99</sup>

Fortunatus often employs clouds and the wind as a stylistic conceit in his other poems as well.<sup>100</sup> The poem continues with possible answers to his own question, describing the Austrasian landscape almost as if looking down from the aforementioned clouds:

What occupies his carefree mind in tranquil times?  
If he lingers by the banks of the wave-driven Rhine  
to catch with his net in its waters the fat salmon,  
or roams by the grape-laden Moselle's stream,  
where the gentle breeze tempers the blazing sun,  
where vine and river moderate the midday heat:

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<sup>97</sup> Michael Roberts treats the poem as an 'idealized picture of the life of an educated Germanic court official who aspires to the traditional values of the Gallo-Roman ruling classes'; Roberts 2009, 259. Note Robert's dichotomy between Germanic:Roman and, implicitly, idealised:realistic and past:present. If we let go of the first distinction, it is possible to recognise men like Gogo as active recipients of (late) classical tradition and actors of *Romanitas*. In such a light, the poem still presents an idealised picture, but not one that is fundamentally at odds with the world outside of the text.

<sup>98</sup> Roberts 2009, 259.

<sup>99</sup> *Nubila quae rapido perflante Aquilone venitis,/pendula sidereo quae movet axe rota,/dicite qua vegetet carus mihi Gogo salute*; translation of these and following citations from Roberts 2009, 258.

*Quid placidis rebus mente serenus agit?*

<sup>100</sup> Roberts 2009, 255.

shade under the knitted tendrils, water with fresh flowing waves.  
 Does the Meuse, sweetly sounding, haunt of crane, goose, gander, and swan,  
     rich in its threefold wares, in fish, fowl, and shipping,  
     hold him, or where the Aisne breaks on grassy banks  
     and feeds pastures, meadows, and fields with its waters?  
 or the Oise, Saar, Cheir, Escaut, Sambre, Somme, or Sauer,  
     or the river by Metz, named after salt [the Seille]?<sup>101</sup>

The poem enumerates twelve rivers as possible locations of Gogo's whereabouts, but four major rivers of northern Gaul receive special attention: the Rhine, Moselle, Meuse and the Aisne. They are depicted almost schematically, with each river enjoying a special attribute that makes it noteworthy. Thus, the Rhine stands out for the abundance of salmon; the Moselle for its gentle weather and vineyards; the Meuse particularly for its fowl; the Aisne for its meadows and pastures. Each of those attributes adds up to create an idealised picture of the Austrasian landscape of bountiful prosperity.<sup>102</sup> Especially in his description of the Moselle River, Fortunatus closely follows the model of his fourth-century predecessor, the Romano-Gallic poet Ausonius and his poem *Mosella*.<sup>103</sup> In following the Ausonian model, Fortunatus is casting the north Gallic landscape in a light of *Romanitas*. 'Gogo is imagined strolling in a landscape that evokes Ausonius' *Mosella* and the Gallo-Roman world of the fourth century, a cultural model to which Fortunatus' Germanic correspondents and addressees aspired'.<sup>104</sup> The next few lines of the poem continue with two more geographical locations for Gogo's whereabouts, this time moving on to forests:

Or else does he wander the sunny groves and glens  
 and with his net snare wild animals, with his spear kill them?  
 Does the forest crack and thunder in the Ardennes or Vosges  
 with the death of stag, goat, elk, or aurochs, shot by his arrows?<sup>105</sup>

Again, the poem is depicting Gogo as a Roman gentleman, engaging in the traditional favourite pastime of Roman aristocrats: hunting. Roberts draws parallels to Ausonius' depiction of the hunt, noting that the motif is also popular more broadly in Roman literature

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<sup>101</sup> *Si prope fluctivagi remoratur litora Rheni,/ut salmonis adeps rete trahatur aquis,/an super uviferi  
 Mosellae obambulat amnem,/quo levis ardentem temperet aura diem,/pampinus et fluvius medios ubi  
 mitigat aestus:/vitibus umbra rigens, fluctibus unda recens./Aut Mosa dulce sonans, quo grus, ganta, anser,  
 olorque est,/triplice merce ferax—alite, pisce, rate—/?an tenet herbosis qua frangitur Axona ripis,/cuius  
 aluntur aquis pascua, prata, seges?/Esera, Sara, Cares, Scaldis, Sate, Somena, Sura?/seu qui Mettis adit de sale  
 nomen/habens?*

<sup>102</sup> Cf. Roberts 2009, 259.

<sup>103</sup> Roberts, 1994, 2-3.

<sup>104</sup> Roberts 1994, 3.

<sup>105</sup> *Aut aestiva magis nemorum saltusque pererrans/cuspide, rete feras hinc ligat, inde necat?/Ardenna an  
 Vosagus cervi, caprae, helicis, uri/caede sagittifera silva fragore tonat?*

and art, recurring often on late antique villa mosaics.<sup>106</sup> Again, the poem sketches an idealised landscape of abundance in the Ardennes and Vosges forests of Gaul and presents Gogo as a man of some distinction. Through the poem's imagery, we may almost imagine Gogo in a scene like that of a villa mosaic, and expect him to dwell regularly in a corresponding countryside estate that would display such a mosaic, to which the poem moves next:

Or does he cultivate his property, furrowing the dried-out tilth,  
as the bull groans at the plow's weight on his untrained neck?<sup>107</sup>

This time, the poem leaves out the location, although we know from Gogo's letter to bishop Petrus that he was in possession of an estate in the vicinity of Metz.<sup>108</sup> Neither does the poem tell us anything about the material setting of Gogo's estate. To put it bluntly, should the reader imagine Gogo the Roman gentleman on a late classical *villa urbana*, or as a Frankish farmer inhabiting a humble wooden house?<sup>109</sup> The implication that Gogo was doing his own farming need not be taken literal here, but easily fits into the idealisation of rural estate life of classical literature.<sup>110</sup> It also reinforces the georgic theme of the first half of the poem, cultivating a landscape of agricultural prosperity. Finally, the poem moves to Gogo's duties as a royal official:

Does he now sit joyfully in the palace hall  
with an attendant retinue that rejoices in their love for him?  
Or does he join with my dear Lupus to dispense merciful justice,  
to create by their common counsel a soothing honey,  
by which the poor are fed, widows gain comfort,  
the young receive a guardian, and the needy aid?<sup>111</sup>

Two more whereabouts for Gogo are inferred in this last part of the poem. The first is at the royal court, in the palace hall [*palatina aula*], although no toponym is given for us to determine the precise location – Fortunatus either assumes the audience already knows, or considers the information superfluous. Since the Austrasian court has a tradition of limited itinerance (see chapter four), the royal court simply was wherever the king went. Again,

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<sup>106</sup> Roberts 2009, 259-260; Ausonius, *Epistulae* 13.28-31. Cf. Brown 2012, 198-200.

<sup>107</sup> An sua rura colens exusta novalia sulcat/et rude cervici taurus aratra gemit?

<sup>108</sup> It is also possible that the estate was not Gogo's personal property, but land attached to his office providing him with a salary; Dumézil 2007, 575; *Epistolae Austrasicae* 22.

<sup>109</sup> See also section 2.3 and 2.4 above. Of course, it is not my aim here to re-iterate a Roman:Germanic dichotomy. Rather, it is salient to note how the poem constructs a world heavily reliant on the cultural and material idiom of the Late Roman world.

<sup>110</sup> E.g. for the ideal of the Roman soldier-farmer living off his own land: Cato, *De Agricultura*, Introduction to book I. Cf. Applebaum 1992, 580.

<sup>111</sup> Sive palatina residet modo laetus in aula,/cui scola congregiens plaudit amore sequax?/An cum dulce Lupo pietatis iura retractant/consilioque pari mitia mella creant,/quo pascatur inops, viduae solacia praestent,/parvus tutorem sumat, egenus opem?

the poem provides no architectural detail on the physical setting of the palace hall, although the Latin conjures the image of a Roman basilica more than a Beowulfian mead hall.<sup>112</sup> Another ambiguity is present in Gogo's 'retinue'. The Latin *scola* could in a more traditional sense be translated as palace school, corresponding with Gogo's literary talents and role as tutor to Childebert II. It is conceivable that Gogo was surrounded by a group of young literary students, just like he was once taught by a certain Dodoreus. This interpretation has been considered anachronistic by some, suggesting instead the translation of 'retinue', as in a sense of warriors or *antrustiones* or the Late Roman *scholae palatinae* (imperial bodyguard).<sup>113</sup> Once again, what version the scholar prefers depends on prior notions of supposed "Romanness" or "Germanicness" of the Merovingian period.<sup>114</sup> However, the classical interpretation definitely fits the tone of the poem and fits with the lifestyle Gogo and his companions strove to exude, at least in the poetic world of *amicitia*-poetry. It is even possible that Fortunatus purposefully played with the ambiguity, depicting Gogo both as a "Germanic" warlord and a "Roman" literatus.<sup>115</sup> In any case, the poem moves on to provide the last possible answer, namely somewhere in the provincial administration (without specifying where), in the company of the *dux* Lupus, speaking law and caring for the poor and weak. Here, the poem most clearly embodies a Christian value-system, and praising Gogo for his charitable virtue of protecting the meek. But the Edenic landscape of rivers portrayed earlier imbue the rest of the poem with a Christian layer of meaning as well, finely crafting an image of Gogo as not just a Gallic gentleman, but also as a blessed Christian.<sup>116</sup>

It is interesting to observe that the courtly culture portrayed in Fortunatus' poems, in typical Late Antique fashion, idealises a classical past but through a Christian lense. There is no notion in Fortunatus of a sharp break with the Late Roman past, in fact one may well imagine themselves to wander through the hallowed halls of imperial Trier of the year 400, not the Merovingian Metz of the year 600. Furthermore, there is no "Germanic" past remembered in Fortunatus' and Gogo's poems, no notion of an independent oral or cultural tradition as found in in the Old-English Beowulf. That is not to say that this was not an available cultural repertoire to them, but one that was actively *not* selected in our surviving texts. It seems to me that for Merovingian magnates, it was a much more attractive option

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<sup>112</sup> See above, section 2.3.

<sup>113</sup> P. Riché, 1962:, *Éducation et culture dans l'Occident barbare. Vie-VIIIe siècles* (Paris) 282.

<sup>114</sup> Or equally, a clash between what I conceptualized in chapter three as the heroic and bureaucratic models of society, which tends to follow the scholarly dichotomy of respectively Germanicising and Romanising interpretations of the early medieval world.

<sup>115</sup> For Fortunatus' intentional usage of ambiguity, albeit in slightly different contexts, cf. Pucci 2010, xxxvi-xxxviii. In this sense, Fortunatus can be considered a 'cultural broker', Reimitz 2015, 18-19.

<sup>116</sup> Roberts 1994, 3.

to (re)produce texts in the tradition of the classifying late antique cultural repertoire of the Christian Empire.

So where exactly is this idealised landscape that Gogo moves through? Using the toponyms offered by the poem, we can gain a sense of where Fortunatus thought Gogo could likely be. Mostly, these are the rivers from the second part of the poem: the Rhine, Moselle, Meuse and Aisne, as well as a number of smaller rivers: the Oise, Saar, Cheir (or Chier), Scheldt, Sambre, Somme, Sauer and the Seille. Besides these, Fortunatus' clues consist of two forests: the Ardennes and the Vosges. Drawing out these rivers gives a framework in which to map this space, although the resulting area is exceedingly large and includes the riverine delta in the Low Countries, which (as seen in chapter four) is otherwise absent of royal or courtly activity. It is possible to draw a smaller space that still includes all the rivers in the poem (fig. 5.8). The resulting map has the Ardennes in the middle and the Vosges on its southeast border inside the zone of Gogo's whereabouts, since the poem mentions him hunting there. This zone also includes many of the important Austrasian *civitates* such as Reims, Metz, Trier, Cologne and Maastricht. Although none are mentioned explicitly in the poem, many of these are places that are important in Fortunatus' network.<sup>117</sup> This is a conceivable space in which Gogo would have moved around in his capacity as a royal official, whether on his own or as part of the (itinerant) royal court. The map of Gogo's whereabouts, then, is not just a map of Gogo as an individual, but of Gogo as a courtier; by extension, it maps the conceivable whereabouts of the Austrasian royal court, the Austrasian members of the network studied in this chapter, and the Austrasian royal family members. Note that the borders must be, by definition, fuzzy. They can be drawn even smaller depending on how much we want to "skim" off Gogo's possible whereabouts. This rendition at least covers all the rivers mentioned in the poem, as well as the entirety of the Ardennes and Vosges forests as Gogo's hunting grounds. The "Via Belgica" running from Cologne-Maastricht-Boulogne must surely represent its northernmost frontier, however.

At the heart of this Austrasian royal zone lay the Moselle and middle Rhine rivers. One of Fortunatus' other Moselle poems highlights this zone, coinciding mostly with the Roman Belgica Prima, in particular. It narrates a royal boat trip down the Moselle, where Fortunatus and the Austrasian court accompanied Brunhild and her son Childebert II in 588. The poem takes the royal mother and son down from Metz to Andernach via Trier.<sup>118</sup> Like the poem of Gogo's whereabouts, it presents an idealised, Romanesque landscape of fertile vineyards, bountiful fishing, tilled fields and chimney smoke rising from villas [*villarum fumantia culmina*]. Again, as Roberts remarks, it is filled with parallels to

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<sup>117</sup> Venantius Fortunatus, *Carm.* 3.14 (Cologne), 6.8 (Metz) 7.3 (Reims), 10.9 (Trier).

<sup>118</sup> Venantius Fortunatus, *Carm.* 10.9

Ausonius. The poem ends with a royal banquet at the royal hall [*aulae*] at the *castellum* of Andernach, displaying the fruits of the Moselle landscape and the prosperity that is secured by Merovingian rulership.<sup>119</sup> Like the Gogo poem, this poem is deeply layered with meaning and nostalgia for a Roman past and is thus not necessarily a realistic portrayal of the sixth-century landscape. It portrays an itinerant Merovingian monarch travelling between central places in a Roman landscape of villas, city walls and agricultural prosperity. Perhaps, even, if the royal landscape was one of itinerations between “Roman” centres, it can be characterised as one of “islands” of royal display of *Romanitas*, within a sea of peasants that lived beyond the classicising décor of Fortunatus’ poetry, much like the Roman *civitas* of the Early Empire had been an island in a landscape of Iron Age of days gone by.<sup>120</sup>

This ‘Austrasian heartland’ was under-represented in the attestations of royal whereabouts but confirms the same trend that was visible in the limited evidence available for north-eastern Gaul; that of (extensive) royal presence in the quadrangular area between Cologne, Maastricht, Reims and Metz. Whether the material structures of central places and elite sites as described in Fortunatus’ poetry corresponded with the idealised Gallo-Roman world of Fortunatus’ poetry remains a problem that cannot be answered by the poems alone.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> Roberts 1994, 12-18; Roberts 2009, 93-102.

<sup>120</sup> Woolf 1998, 135.

<sup>121</sup> For some considerations on this topic, see above, section 2.3 and 2.4.

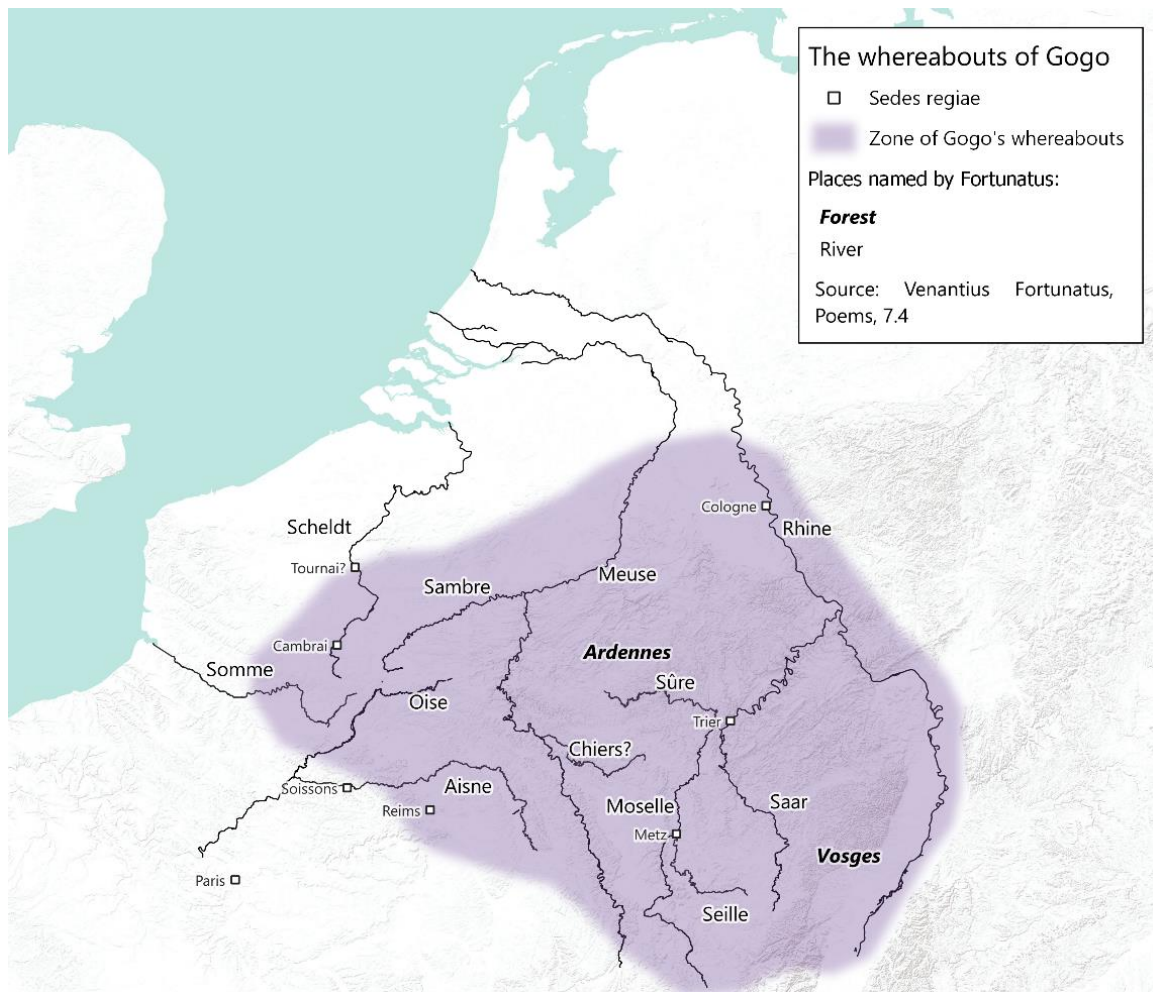


Figure 5.8. The whereabouts of Gogo, mapping the rivers and forests from Fortunatus' *Carmen* 7.4.

## 5.6. Concluding remarks: political culture at the royal court

Where previous chapters looked at narrative sources to locate the Merovingian kings, this chapter turned to poetry and verse letters to study the social layer just below that of royalty; the magnates and courtiers that populated the royal court. Using the tools of social network analysis, the exchange of verse letters reveals a closely-knit small world of courtly friends. Coming from diverse social backgrounds, they found support in this network of *amicitia*, underpinned by a shared literacy and training in classical rhetoric. It reveals a shared sense of *Romanitas* among the courtly elite; men like Lupus, Gogo and Dynamius sought to engage with and be identified with the old value system of the Late Roman aristocracy. In the wandering poet Fortunatus they found a talented writer who could delight with his honeyed words and classical learning derived from the schools of Italy, but they did not depend on him to validate their own *Romanitas*. The *Epistulae Austrasicae* show that Gaul had its own literary talent and production. A shared participation in this written, Latinate

culture linked the southern Provence with the northern world of the Moselle-Rhine area.<sup>122</sup> The 'whereabouts of Gogo' show a broad space in northeastern Gaul where such displays of Romanitas were part and parcel of courtly elite culture.

This reinforces my point in the last chapter, that from historical evidence northern Gaul, south of the line Cologne-Maastricht in any case, is in many ways culturally associated with the more southern regions of Gaul. From Marseilles, to Tours, to Metz and Cologne, elites participated, or could participate, in the same displays of literary erudition and Romanness. Crucially, access to this courtly elite group did not depend on the privilege of birth. As becomes visible in the network, only for some individuals are family ties evident, counterpoised by a number of "social climbers" like Gogo and Conda. Instead, a sense of shared cultural mores was important – although presumably it would be easier to acquire for children from wealthy families, education was not exclusive to the rich and powerful; the slave Andarchus was noted for his education.<sup>123</sup> Furthermore, it affirms my belief that, at the level of high politics surrounding the Merovingian king, the concept of a bureaucratic society is most appropriate for understanding the cultural world of the governing class of sixth-century Gaul. Thus, in his letters to foreign rulers on behalf of the Austrasian king, Gogo used the diplomatic language of the Late Roman Empire. As Walter Pohl notes in his analysis on Gogo's correspondence with the Lombard Duke Grasulf: 'Frankish diplomacy was almost as sophisticated as the imperial one; and it operated with the continuing notion of being in some ways part of the *sacra res publica*, the Empire'.<sup>124</sup>

Reading the poetry of Fortunatus and the Austrasian Letters, the world of sixth-century Gaul is represented much like that of the fourth century. Fortunatus leans, of course, on his fourth-century predecessor Ausonius, in sketching an idealised world of Gallo-Roman gentlemen. However, such a world seems fundamentally at odds with the one uncovered by archaeologists, where no lavish banquet halls, Roman villas or royal *palatinae aulae* have been excavated. Is this a difference between *le mot* and *le chose*?<sup>125</sup> Did Gogo and his friends listen to Fortunatus' songs sitting around a hearth fire in a wooden longhouse, all the while imagining themselves to be in a Constantinian basilica? I find it hard to believe that this shared literary world was completely illusory and fictional – clearly both the authors and the audience of our surviving sources felt a sense of continuity with

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<sup>122</sup> Personal connections between "aristocrats", therefore, were key to the functioning of government and maintaining links between central and regional administration; Wood 2023, 564.

<sup>123</sup> The question is, of course, whether children from humble freemen could acquire to get an education. If we follow Dumézil's hypothesis that Gogo himself came from a relatively humble background, this may certainly have been the case (see above, note 82). Perhaps this explains why Gogo was taught by Dodorenius, rather than the more acclaimed Parthenius, as he mentions in his letter to Traseric (*Epistulae Austrasicae* 16); cf. Williard, 2022, 218-219.

<sup>124</sup> Pohl 2023, 216-217.

<sup>125</sup> Cf. Theuws 2018, 56 n. 169.

the Roman order to a sufficient degree that they could imagine their own physical space rendered visible by Fortunatus' poetic descriptions.<sup>126</sup> In so far as the poetic world was anachronistic, it was still conceivable and recognisable to members of Merovingian elite culture. As a hypothesis, then, I suggest that not only does Gogo's network suggest a continuity in late Roman political culture, but also – no matter how ephemeral – a continuity with late Roman physical space. How, and to what extent, is the subject to which I must now turn. The former Roman cities of northern Gaul, in which much of the political life of the poems in this chapter was acted out, present the problem of a nostalgic landscape most abruptly and allow me to look more closely at the relationship between Merovingian actors and the landscape of the Roman past.

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<sup>126</sup> In the end, it remains an exercise in subjectivity in how we evaluate the relationship between the textual and 'real' worlds of sixth-century Gaul. As a historian, I am inclined to afford the sources at least some kind of credibility. In any case, while Fortunatus' poetry constructed an idealised world, there are to my mind sufficient similarities to the material world (see chapter two) found in other sources to sketch out common elements of the Merovingian landscape as depicted in a variety of sources, poetic *and* prosaic.

