

Venantius Fortunatus and his
Carolingian *Fortuna*





Lecture outline

- Paul the Deacon: a miracle story involving Fortunatus (envoi of the *Vita S. Martini*)
 - Which features of Fortunatus' life and works appealed to Carolingian culture?
 - Comparison of Paul's story with Fortunatus' own words
- Fortunatus in Carolingian reading lists
 - “Structural influence” of VF on Carolingian poetry
 - Case study: Alcuin's *Carm.* 4
- “Fortunatus outside Fortunatus”: reception as a channel of indirect tradition

❧ Text 1) Paul the Deacon, *Hist. Langobardorum* 2.13 (1/4)

- Date: 787–796
- Excursus on Fortunatus
- A Carolingian gaze on Fortunatus' life
- Libet quoque nos pauca **de venerabili et sapientissimo viro Fortunato retexere...**
- Born in Duplavilis (present-day Valdobbiate), raised in Ravenna → grammar, rhetoric, poetry





Text 1) Paul the Deacon, *Historia Langobardorum* 2.13

(2/4)

- A miraculous healing
- Felix (later bishop of Treviso) and Fortunatus suffer from a severe eye disease
- Altar of Martin in the Basilica of the Saints John and Paul in Ravenna, with a nearby window and a lamp (*lucerna*)
- Oil of the lamp applied on the aching eyes causes sudden healing!





Text 1) Paul the Deacon, *Hist. Langobardorum* 2.13 (3/4)

- A pilgrimage of gratitude
- Fortunatus leaves his homeland to pay homage to Martin at his tomb in Tours
- Fortunatus' journey is marked by numerous **rivers**
- Tiliamentum = Tagliamento → Reuna = Ragogna
Dravum = Drava / Drau
Byrrus = Rienza
Virdo = Wertach
Licca = Lech } Augsburg





1) Paul the Deacon, *Historia Langobardorum* 2.13

(4/4)

- Fortunatus in Poitiers: *Pictavis pertransiens, illic habitavit*
 - Deeds of saints, in prose and in verse
 - Verse *Life of St Martin* (*Vita S. Martini* = *VSM*)
Epic paraphrase of Sulpicius Severus' *Vita S. Martini* and *Dialogi*
 - Hymns
 - *Versiculi* for friends
- } 11 books of
miscellaneous
poems
(*Carmina*)
- ❖ G. Vinay: «Venanzio, poeta di santi di amicizia e di luce»





Text 2) Ven. Fortunatus, VSM 4.689-698: Comparison with Paul (1/4)

- Epilogue of the *VSM*: *envoi* to the personified book → pilgrimage to Ravenna → Fortunatus' old friends → disseminate Martin's cult
- Fortunatus' own miracle story: culmination of the poem → Fortunatus as beneficiary and promoter of the saint
 - Paul's story follows Fortunatus' own words very closely
 - Affinity between Paul and Fortunatus: same origin
 - But also: conspicuous **omissions!**



Text 2) Venantius Fortunatus, VSM 4.689-698 (2/4)

Where the lofty basilica of Paul and John stands, there a wall retains the portrait of the saint in the shape of an icon: (690) the image is to be embraced with its most sweet colour. At the feet of the righteous man, the wall has an artfully placed **window (fenestram)**. There is a **lamp (lychnus)**, whose fire floats in a glassy vessel. While I hurry towards it - the severe pain is excruciating, (695) – groaning as the light flees from the windows of my eyes, as soon as I **touched my eye (lumen tetigi)** with the **blessed oil (benedicto olivo)**, that burning exhalation vanished away from my withering face and that spiritually present physician wards off diseases with soothing ointment. My eyes did not forget the saint's grace, (700) for the faithful healing of my eyes returns before my very eyes, and I will remember this as long as I remain in my flesh and sight.



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Text 2) Venantius Fortunatus, VSM 4.689-698 (4/4)

- **VSM 4.689-690:**

hic paries retinet sancti sub **imagine** formam:
amplectenda ipso dulci **pictura** colore.

“there a wall retains the portrait of the saint in the shape of an icon:
the image is to be embraced with its most sweet colour”

- No mention of Martin’s image

- Where lies the thaumaturgic power?

For Paul, unequivocally in the oil; for Fortunatus, less clear.



Fortunatus, Paul the Deacon, and the cult of images (1/2)

- Iconoclast controversy in the Eastern Roman Empire
→ legitimacy of the cult of sacred images → many cultic images destroyed over the 8th c.
- 2nd council of Nicaea (787):
iconoclasts (“destroyers of images”) vs iconodules (“servants of images”, i.e. those who favoured the veneration of images)
- veneration (veneratio - δουλειᾶ) vs worship (adoratio - λατρεῖα)
 - Restoration of, and approval to the veneration of sacred images (with support of Pope Hadrian II and Empress Irene)



Fortunatus, Paul the Deacon, and the cult of images (2/2)

- Pope Hadrian II sends a (poor) translation of the council acts to Charlemagne
- Carolingian response: **opus Caroli regis contra synodum** (Libri Carolini) (790–792, Theodulf of Orléans + aides)
 - rectification of the canons of Nicaea II
- Paul's *Hist. Langobardorum*: 787–796
- Cf. Ven. Fort., VSM 4.690: **amplectenda** ipso dulci pictura colore
“the image is to be embraced with its most sweet colour”
 - dangerously close to being read as an act of worship?

Text 3) Paul's epitaph for Fortunatus (1/2):▪

Ingenio clarus, sensu celer, ore suavis,
Cuius dulce melos pagina multa canit,
Fortunatus, apex vatum, venerabilis actu,
Ausonia genitus, hac tumulatur humo.

Cuius ab ore sacro **sanctorum gesta** priorum
Discimus: haec monstrant carpere **lucis iter**.
Felix, quae tantis decoraris, Gallia, **gemmis**,
Lumine de quarum nox tibi tetra fugit.

Hos **modicus** prompsi plebeio carmine versus,
Ne tuus in populis, sancte, lateret honor.

Redde vicem misero: **ne iudice spernar ab aequo**,
Eximiis meritis posce, beate, precor.

Parallels (database of Latin poetry: Musisque Deoque)

- Redeployment of Fortunatus tags (epitaphs and praise poems for bishops):

➤ *Carm.* 2.16.18: Sic dedit arta tibi semita **lucis iter**:

➤ *Gemma*: one of Fortunatus' poetic keywords

➤ *Carm.* 3.22.7: **modicus** haec parvula solvo.

➤ *Carm.* 1.7.12: **Redde vicem**



3) Paul's epitaph for Fortunatus: (2/2)

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Redde vicem misero: **ne iudice spernar ab aequo**,
Eximiis meritis posce, beate, precor.

- Fortunatus as exemplary hagiographic author
- Edifying value
- Fortunatus as a holy bishop
- Final prayer for intercession (customary in Fortunatus' episcopal epitaphs)



Fortunatus on his own biography

- *Carmina*, prefatory letter to Gregory of Tours (576 – 577), par. 4:

During my journey from Ravenna when I navigated the Po, Adige, Brenta, Piave, Livenza, **Tagliamento (Teliamentum)**, and traveled through the Julian Alps suspended on mountain passes, crossed the **Drava (Dravum)** in Noricum the **Inn (Aenum)** among the Breuni, the **Lech (Liccum)** in Bavaria, the **Danube (Danuvium)** in Alamannia, and the **Rhine (Rhenum)** in Germany, and after the Moselle, the Meuse, the Aisne, the Seine, passed the Loire and the Garonne, the greatest of Aquitaine's rivers.
(Transl. M. Roberts)

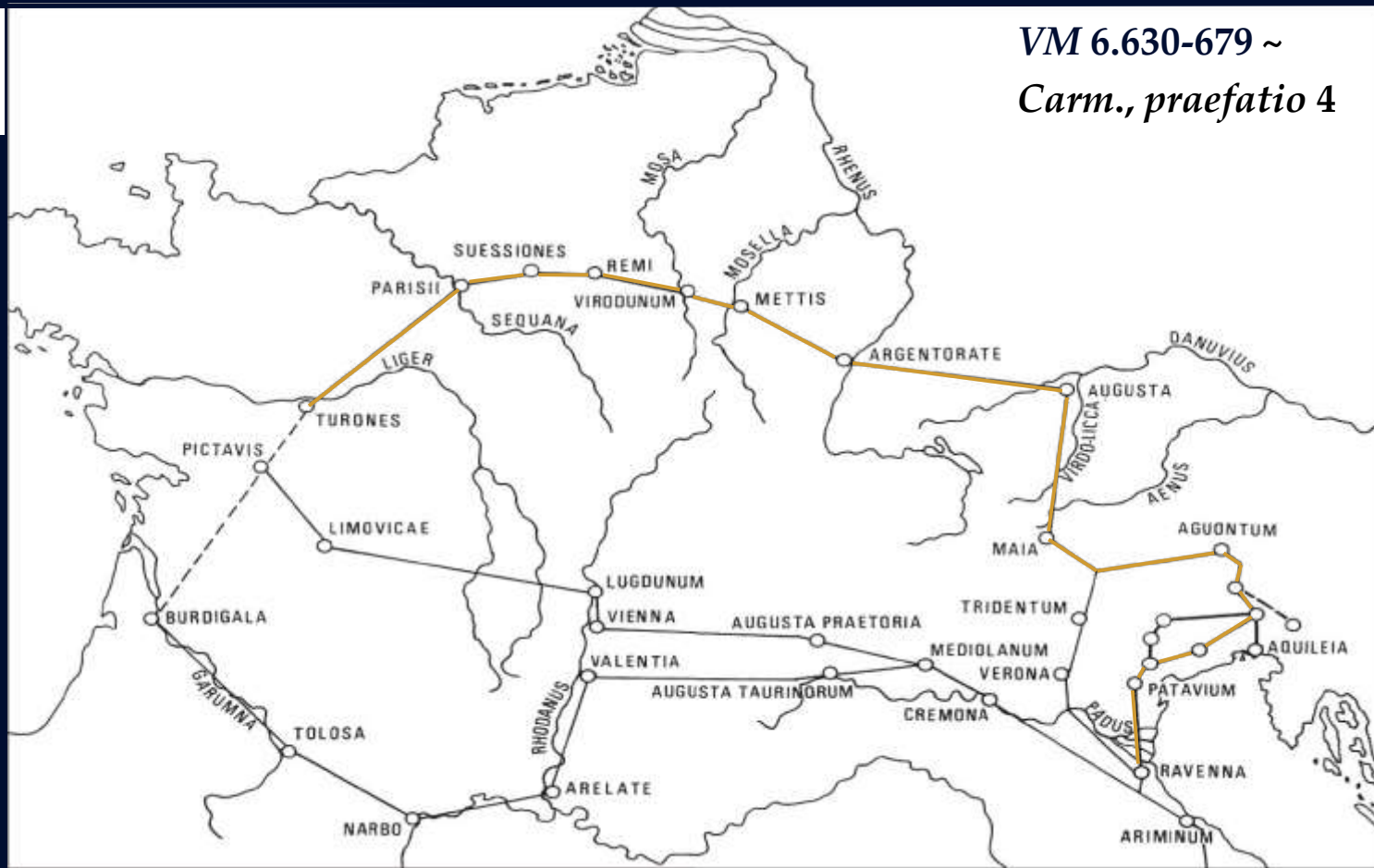
- Same route as the conclusion of *VSM* (marked by rivers)
→ does not match any other late antique pilgrim itinerary (e.g. *itinerarium Burdigalense*)



Fortunatus the wandering poet

VM 6.630-679 ~

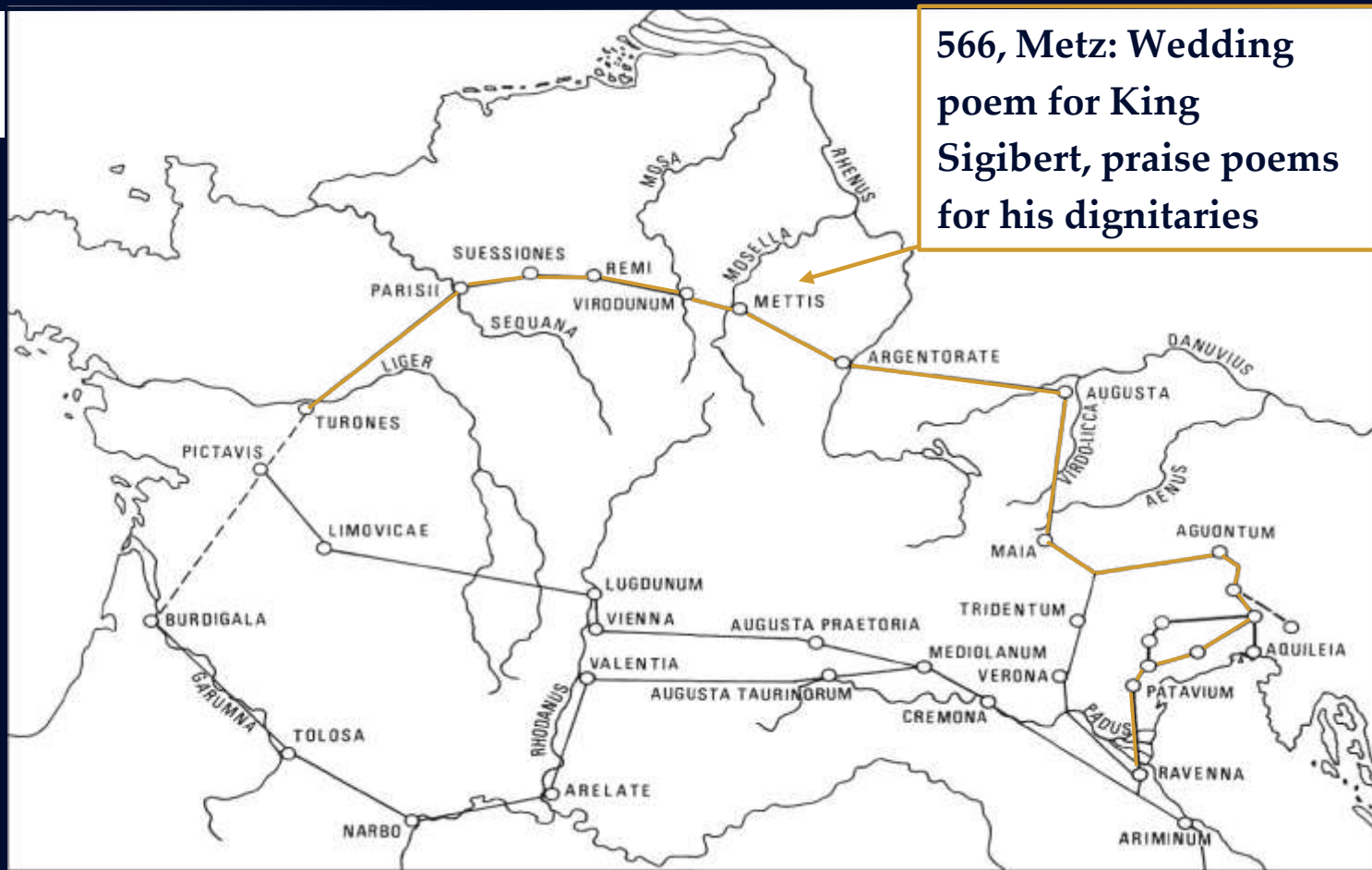
Carm., praefatio 4





Fortunatus the wandering poet

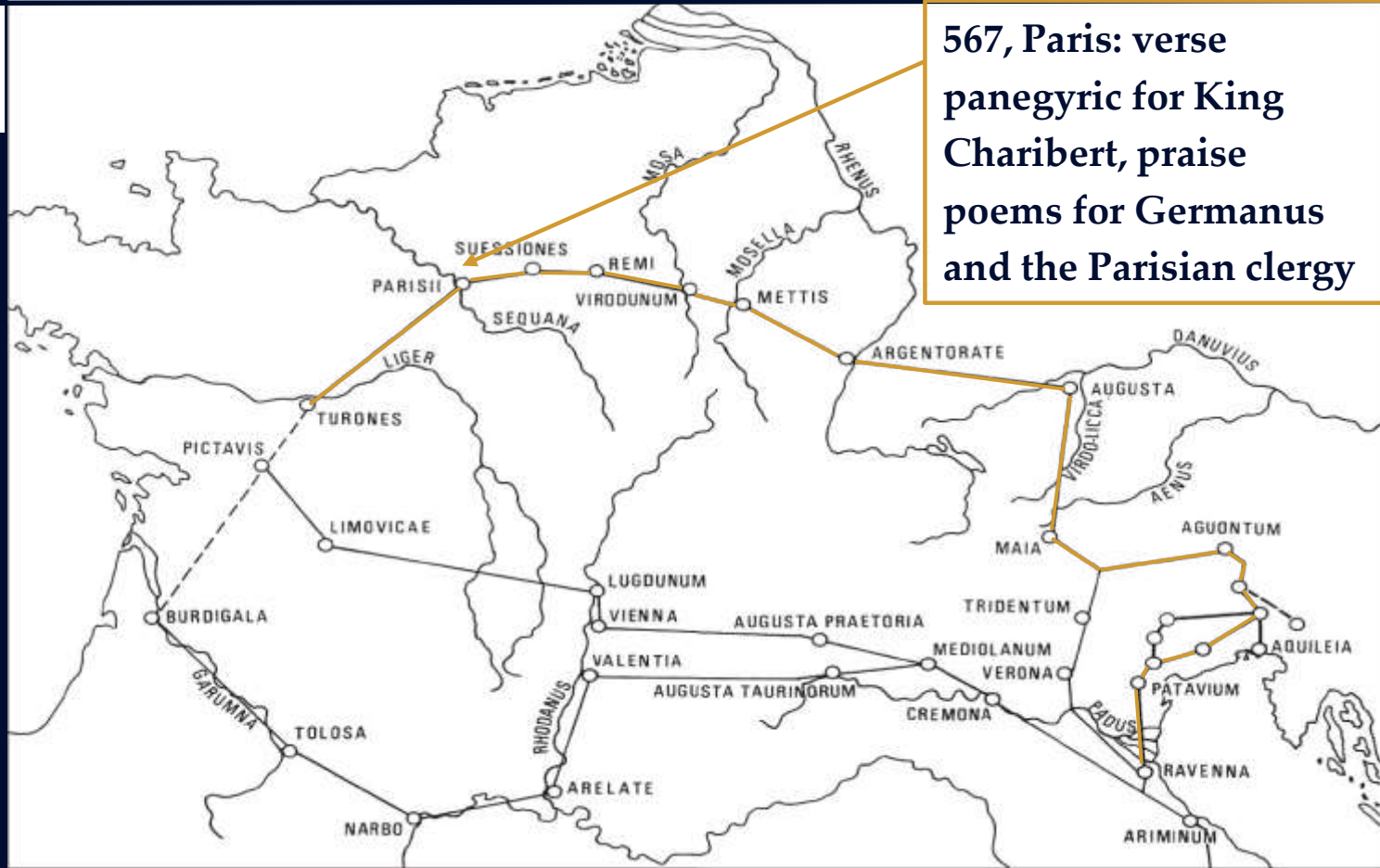
566, Metz: Wedding poem for King Sigibert, praise poems for his dignitaries





Fortunatus the wandering poet

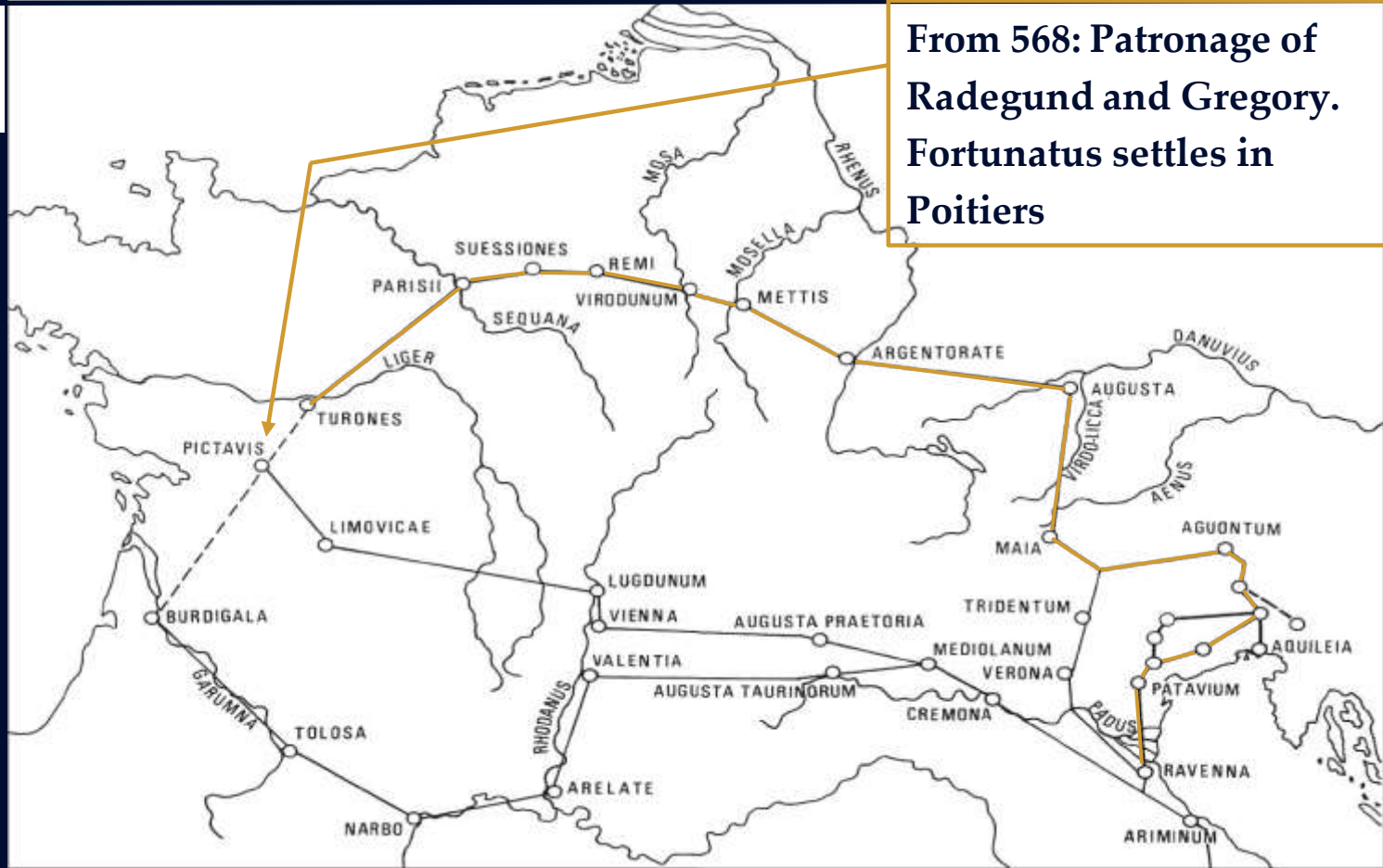
567, Paris: verse panegyric for King Charibert, praise poems for Germanus and the Parisian clergy





Fortunatus the wandering poet

From 568: Patronage of Radegund and Gregory. Fortunatus settles in Poitiers





Ecclesiastic writer or *Gelegenheitsdichter*?

- Not just presbyter: also *Gelegenheitsdichter* = poet for occasions (W. Meyer, 1901) → Undertones of opportunistic, insincere flattery
- **Gregory of Tours** (*sedit* 573 – 594)
 - Poems for occasions; Gregory grants Fortunatus the use of a small estate
 - *Carm.* 8.20.1-2:
Munifici **reparans Martini gesta**, Gregori,
Textit ut ille habitu nos alis ipse cibo.
 - Fortunatus recasts himself as the pauper who was famously helped by Martin (division of the cloak)



Ecclesiastic writer or *Gelegenheitsdichter*?

- Radegund (518 – 587)

- *Carm. 8.3.21*:

- ‘eager for Martin, I have attached myself to the wishes of Radegund’

- Fortunatus as “publicist” of Sainte-Croix: *Carm. 8.1* (ex nomine suo ad diversos)

- Patron behind the *Vita S. Martini*

- Short poetic letters for her and the abbess of Sainte-Croix, Agnes → spiritualisation of language of love elegy

- Monastic Rule of Caesarius of Arles: contacts between nuns and male clergy severely regulated
→ verse letters mostly meant for internal consumption



Lawrence Alma-Tadema, Venantius Fortunatus reading his poems to Radegund and Agnes
(1862)



Ecclesiastic writer or *Gelegenheitsdichter*?

- Both Radegund and Gregory of Tours are conspicuously absent from Paul's account on Fortunatus
- Vita Radegundis vs *elegidia* for Radegund : public image vs private *conversatio*
- Cf. epitaph by Paul the Deacon for Fortunatus
- Cf. Alcuin, *Carm.* 99.3–4
Plurima qui fecit sanctorum carmina metro,
Concelebrans sanctos laudibus hymnidicis.





Fortunatus the new classic

- Inclusion of Fortunatus in lists of canonical authors
- **Alcuin**, *Versus de patribus regibus et sanctis Euboricensis ecclesiae*, 1551–1554 (between 781 and 792):
quid quoque Sedulius vel quid canit ipse Iuvenus,
Alcimus et Clemens (= Prudentius), Prosper, Paulinus, Arator,
quid **Fortunatus** vel quid Lactantius edunt,
quae Maro Virgilius, Statius, Lucanus et auctor.
- Cathedral library of York:
“all the poetry of Sedulius and Iuvenus, of Alcimus Avitus and Prudentius,
Prosper (of Aquitaine), Paulinus (or Nola), Arator, the works of **Fortunatus** and
Lactantius (i.e. *De ave Phoenice*), the authoritative writings of Virgil, Statius, and
Lucan...”



Fortunatus the new classic

- **Theodulf of Orléans, *De libris quos legere solebam*, 13–16:**
 - List of personal readings → canon of Christian Latin poets
 - “Shining Sedulius, Paulinus, Arator, Avitus, **Fortunatus**, and you, Juvencus with a thundering voice; And you, wise in evoking many things in various meters, Prudentius, my kinsman by blood.”
 - Juvencus, Paulinus (of Nola), Prudentius, Sedulius, Arator, Avitus, Fortunatus
- **Rabanus Maurus, *De institutione clericorum*, 3.18:**
 - Handbook on the education of clergy → list of edifying reads
 - “many Christian men wrote outstanding writings in this art and sought to please God, such as Iuvencus, Sedulius, Arator, Alcimus, Clemens, Paulinus, **Fortunatus** and many others.”



Text 4) cf. Ven. Fort., VSM 1.14-23

Primus enim docili distinguens ordine carmen		✓ Juvencus
Maiestatis opus metri canit arte Iuencus .	15	✓ Sedulius
Hinc quoque conspicui radiauit lingua Seduli		Orientius
Paucaque perstrinxit florente Orientius ore,		✓ Prudentius
Martyribusque piis sacra haec donaria mittens		✓ Paulinus (of
Prudens prudenter Prudentius immolat actus.		Périgueux, but here
Stemmata corde fide pollens Paulinus et arte	20	VF implies Paulinus
Versibus explicuit Martini dogma magistri.		of Nola)
Sortis apostolicae quae gesta vocantur et actus		✓ Arator
Facundo eloquio sulcauit vates Arator .		✓ Alcimus (Avitus) of
Quod sacra explicuit serie genealogus olim,		Vienne
Alcimus egregio digessit acumine praesul.	25	



4) cf. Ven. Fort., VSM 1.14-23

- For the first time, Christian poetry emerges as a self-standing tradition
 - Classical/pagan models of *VSM* are not explicitly acknowledged
- Influence of Fortunatus in consolidating this canon
 - Fortunatus' canonical status emerges also in the different ways Carolingian poets engage with him



Different modes of intertextuality

- G. B. Conte, *Memoria dei poeti e sistema letterario / The Rhetoric of imitation* (Anno)
 - **Example-model** (“modello esemplare”)
Redeployment of terms / phrases from the source text into a new context → transformation of meaning
 - **Code-model** (“modello codice”)
Source text considered representative of a genre *as a whole*
→ e.g. Homer for Vergil: not just example-model, but also code-model
→ Homer encompasses all elements and rules of the epic genre



Fortunatus as code-model: Alcuin's *Carm.* 4 (778 – 780)

- *Cartula, perge cito pelagi trans aequora cursu...*
 - Apostrophe to the personified letter
 - Cf. Pindar (Nemean 5), Horace (*Epist.* 1.21), Ovid. (*Trist.* 1.1), Martial, Optatian Porphyry... (see Citroni, *Le raccomandazioni del poeta*, 1986)
 - Function: self-presentation (book as alter ego of the poet), networking, seeking patronage
 - Sidonius Apollinaris, *Carm.* 24: propempticon = *envoi* to the personified book → circulation of S.' poems among his friends
 - Cf. *envoi* of Fortunatus' *VSM*



The journey of Alcuin's *chartula*

- Itinerary of Alcuin's *chartula*
 - Rhine → Utrecht, Dorestad, Cologne
 - Moselle → Echternach (memory of Willibrord) → Beornard (Samuel)
 - The book is introduced to the court of Charlemagne → seeks the king's protection
 - Speyer → Paul the Deacon
 - Saint-Denis → Fulrad (Paris BNF MS Latin 528 f.140v)



Fortunatus as code-model: Alcuin's *Carm.* 4

- Verbal echoes:

- 31–32: Fusa solo **supplex** plantas tu lambe sacratas,
Dicque 'Valeto, pater Samuhel', dic 'Vive **sacerdos**'.

“Go down on your knees as a suppliant to kiss his holy heels, and say, ‘Farewell, father Samuel’, say, ‘Live well, priest’”

~ Ven. Fort., *VSM* 4.630–631:

Contentus tantum Turonum pete moenia **supplex**,
Qua Martinus habet ueneranda sepulchra **sacerdos**,

Just humbly go to the walls of Tours as a suppliant, where the
Bishop Martin has his venerable grave.

Fortunatus as code-model: Alcuin's *Carm.* 4

- Verbal echoes: ➤ Libellus / Charta as **suppliant**
- 31–32: Fusa solo **supplex** plantas tu lambe sacratas,
Dicque 'Valeto, pater Samuhel', dic 'Vive **sacerdos**'.

“Go down on your knees as a suppliant to kiss his holy heels, and say, ‘Farewell, father Samuel’, say, ‘Live well, priest’”

~ Ven. Fort., *VSM* 4.685:

Fusus humi **supplex**, et templa per omnia curre

“Prostrated to the ground as a suppliant, roam through the whole church”

Fortunatus as code-model: Alcuin's *Carm.* 4

- Like Fortunatus' *envoi*, the route of the book is marked by rivers
 - Several places are associated with the local bishop and/or memory of a saint → Ecclesiastic network leading up to Charlemagne's court
 - How to address clerical colleagues and fellow courtiers → structural model for formulating epistolary friendship → circular poetry



Differences Fortunatus / Alcuin

➤ Ven. Fort., VSM 4.668–671, 702–703:

Per Cenetam gradiens et amicos Duplauenenses,
Qua natale solum est mihi sanguine, sede parentum,
Prolis origo patrum, frater, soror, ordo nepotum,
Quos colo corde fide, breuiter peto redde salutem.

[...]Promptius affectu, precor, inde require sodales:

Si sociis loqueris, ueniam pietate mereris.

→ Nostalgic *reverie* / one-sided dialogue with no repercussions in the real experience

“While you pass by Cènedà and my friends in Duplavilis, where I have my native land due to blood ties and to the dwelling-place of my parents, and the origin of my ancestors’ descendance, my brother, my sister, and my nephews, whom I honour in my heart and faith – I beg you, give them my greetings. [...] Then – I urge you – seek out my friends eagerly with love: if you speak to my companions, you receive a favorable welcome thanks to their piety.”



Differences Fortunatus / Alcuin

~ Alcuin, *Carm.* 4.41-44:

Invida ne valeat me carpere lingua nocendo
Paulini, Petri, Albrici, Samuelis, Ione,
Vel quicumque velit mea rodere viscere mursu:
Te terrente procul fugiat, discedat inanis.

Lest jealous tongues seize me to do me harm – Those of Paulinus, Peter, Albricus, Samuel and Jonah or of anyone who wishes to gnaw my flesh with biting. Let him flee away from you in terror; let the fool depart.

→ Guarded attitude, new colleagues and new environment

→ Single direction
of Fortunatus'
envoi vs Alcuin's
circular poetry

Text 5. Fortunatan material in later sources?

- Aimoinus of Fleury, *Historia Francorum*: Frankish history from the origins up to Pepin the Short (before 1004)
→ 3.16: epitaph for Bishop Germanus of Paris composed by King Chilperich (!) (*regnavit* 568–584)

➤ Gregory of Tours on Chilperic's poetic "exploits":

Greg. Tur., *Libri Decem Hist.* 5.44: *Scriptis alios libros idem rex versibus [...] ; sed versiculi illi nulla paenitus metricae conveniunt ratione.*

6.44: *Conficitque duos libros [...], quorum versiculi debilis nullis pedibus subsistere possunt [...]* et alia opuscula vel ymnus sive missas, quae nulla ratione suscipi possunt.

→ Cf. Chilperich's hymn for Medard (MGH *Poetae* 4 p. 455):
Deus mirande, virtus alma in sanctis proceribus!

Fortunatan parallels

Ecclesiae speculum, patriae vigor, **arra reorum**,

Et pater et **medicus**, pastor **amorque gregis**,

Germanus, virtute, fide, corde, ore, beatus

Carne tenet tumulum, mentis honore **polum**.

Vir cui dura nihil nocuerunt fata sepulchri.

Vivit enim: nam mors quem tulit, ipsa timet.

Crevit adhuc potius iustus post funera: nam qui

Fictile vas fuerat, gemma superba micat.

Huius opem ac meritum, **mutis data verba** loquuntur, ➤ *Vita Germani* 45

Redditus et **caecis** praedicat ore **dies**.

➤ *Vita Germani* 25, 33, , 55, 63

Nunc vir apostolicus **rapiens de carne trophaeum**,

Iure triumphali considet arce throni.

➤ *Carm.* 2.6.11: Humani victor
vitiū super astra triumphas

➤ *VSM* 4.578 (Martin)

➤ Bishop as a physician

➤ *Carm.* 3.6.16: medella gregis

➤ *Carm.* 4.14.16:

*Carne tenet tumulum,
spiritus igne polum*



Fortunatan parallels

Crevit adhuc potius iustus post funera: nam qui
Fictile vas fuerat, gemma superba micat.

“The righteous man has risen even higher after death, for he who was an earthen vessel, now shines as a lofty jewel.”

- *Vas* = metonymy for human being:
 - 2Cor 4:7 habemus thesaurum **in vasis fictilibus**
 - Acts 9:15: Paul as **vas electionis**





Fortunatan parallels

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Fictile vas fuerat, **gemma** superba micat.

“The righteous man has risen even higher after
death, for he who was an earthen vessel, now
shines as a lofty jewel.”

- *gemma* = synecdoche: “bejeweled vessel”
→ VSM 2.339: **gemma** una fuit quae cuncta
in vasa valeret
(= Jesus Christ as ransom of humankind)





Fortunatan parallels

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→ VSM 3.475–476:

Prima ministerii radiantia **vasa** superni
Aurea, pulchra nimis, **gemma** venusta corusca)
(= Peter and Paul, “consuls” of heavenly senate





Fortunatan parallels

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➤ *gemma* = synecdoche: “bejeweled vessel”

→ *Carm.* 3.7.56:

Munere martyrii **gemma superba nitet.**

(S. Ferreolus)





Another poem transmitted outside of Fortunatus' corpus

- Appendix Carm. 34: De Magnerico Treverensi episcopo
- Transmitted by Eberwin, *Vita Magnerici* (c. 1000) BHL 5149. Explicitly ascribed to Fortunatus
- Either lost in the archetype of Fortunatus' *Carmina* (book 4) or deliberately excluded
- New weight to le Blant's suggestion that the epitaph for Germanus should be ascribed to Fortunatus



Conclusion

- Reception of one crucial passage (envoi of Fortunatus' *Life of St Martin*)
 - Fortunatus: from *miraculé* to holy bishop
 - Paul the Deacon: canonization and omissions (cult of images, patronage)
 - Alcuin, Carm. 4: Envoi of Fortunatus' *Life of St Martin* as code-model: epistolary friendship and networking
- Fortunatan material in later sources?



Conclusion

- G. Vinay, *Alto Medioevo Latino* (2003²) p. 142: apparentemente antico, trasborda un classico già cucinato, rientra nel sistema e risponde ad un tempo a molteplici attese sentimentali senza la monotonia unidirezionale della tradizione cristiana più autentica o i groppi indecifrabili di Sidonio.
- “Seemingly ancient, he (viz. Fortunatus) conveys an already cooked classicism, fits into the system and responds at once to multiple sentimental expectations without the unidirectional monotony of the most authentic Christian tradition or the indecipherable tangles of Sidonius.”