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Brokerage, Compromise and Metropolitan Authority in Ambrose of Milan

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Abstract This article draws on Social Network Analysis to explore the structure of Ambrose of Milan's clerical ties in his letter collection. While this method has limitations for cases where data is limited, scattered, and edited, it can shed light on clerical politics in the region. I will argue that the relative centrality of Sabinus of Piacenza in the network of known connections suggests that Ambrose was not the sole dominant figure in the group. Ambrose's close relationship with the emperor and the imperial court gave him leverage that he could at times capitalize on. But a closer analysis of his participation in episcopal elections and his conflict with Bishop Syagrius of Verona shows that Ambrose often struggled to exercise his influence in the region.

Ambrose of Milan is one of the best-documented individuals of the late fourth century. In addition to a surviving biography by his contemporary Paulinus, testimony of his life and episcopacy (374–397) can also be found in his extensive corpus comprising 94 letters¹ and more than 30 moral, doctrinal and theological writings. Serving as governor of Aemilia-Liguria before becoming the bishop of what (in 381) became the imperial city of Milan, Ambrose had a close relationship (and some remarkable clashes) with three emperors and two usurpers. Considered a saint and a father of the church soon after his death, he attracted a great deal of attention among his contemporaries.²

In more recent times, Ambrose's life and writings have also been the subject of ample scholarly interest. Vast historiographical effort has concentrated on his astonishing authority over his Milanese community, his political maneuverings at the imperial court, his social and economic treatises, and his literary and theological endeavors.³

Much attention has also been devoted to studying Ambrose's relationships with his North Italian colleagues. Older scholarship tended to emphasize his capacity to impose his legally sanctioned ecclesiastical competences over other bishops. Hans von Campenhausen argued that Ambrose established Milan's ecclesiastical prominence by exerting his independence from Rome. Frederick Homes Dudden similarly contended that Ambrose used his metropolitan superiority to appoint his loyal friends as bishops and became the main judiciary authority in Milan, offering a firm alternative to the inefficient civil courts.⁴

More recently, however, historians have moved away from top-down institutional approaches and have instead placed the focus on socially constructed

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- 1 77 letters within his personal collection, two as part of his records for the Council of Aquileia in 381, and 15 so-called 'outside the collection' letters.
- 2 Aug. Conf. 8.2.3 (ed. J. J. O'Donnell, 1992, 3.13–15); Paulin. Med. *Vita Ambrosii*, 6–9 (ed. Pellegrino, 58–64); Hier. *De viris illustribus*, 124 (ed. Richardson, 53); Ruf. HE II.11 (GCS 9.2, 1018).
- 3 This is a very short sample of a scholarship that is too extensive to fit within a single footnote. On Ambrose's power in Milan see M. S. Williams 2017, Humphries 2000, 137–40; on his political maneuverings and influence, see Liebeschuetz 2005, Sordi 2000, D. H. Williams 1995, 177–184, Gottlieb 1973; on Ambrose's theological and pastoral treatises see Pizzolato 1998 and 1978, Savon 1997, Cattaneo 1984; Duval 1974; on Ambrose and the social history of late fourth century Northern Italy see Brown 2012, 120–134; Lizzi 1990 and 1989; Mazzarino 1977 and 1989; Cracco Ruggini 1976, 231–248.
- 4 Dudden 1935, 270, 390–392; Campenhausen 1929, 98. For a similar approach see also Gaudemet 1958, 384; Palanque 1933, 471–477.

authority. This more recent research has greatly enlarged our understanding of how aristocratic *savoir-faire* and intellectual ability supplemented Ambrose's clerical authority. In 1976, John Matthews argued that Ambrose extended his influence and affected the social and religious life of the cities of North Italy through a network of informal connections. Rita Lizzi has focused on Ambrose's cultural dominance in the region and contended that he used aristocratic letter writing and intellectual skill to strengthen his influence. For Lizzi, Ambrose developed a unique episcopal style that attracted the admiration and loyalty of North Italian aristocrats and clerics. Neil McLynn's seminal monograph adopted a more critical approach and argued that Ambrose exerted incomplete control over the regional church through a small but strident and well-coordinated minority. W. H. C. Frend, by contrast, saw Ambrose's close connection with the other North Italian bishops as a base from which he could exert authority beyond Italy itself. More recently, Camille Gerzaguët has argued that Ambrose used his strong connections with specific North Italian bishops to build a hierarchical and centralized network of clerics.⁵

This scholarship has shed light on how non-structured peer relationships could generate peer pressure, moral authority, and social capital, i.e., the potential resources – such as social recognition and authority – that are derived from their network of social connections.⁶ In recent decades, social scientists have similarly shown how ties of friendship, kinship, and social dependence can foster belonging, accountability, and compliance within social organizations.⁷ Research on social network analysis has also provided methods and conceptual tools to analyze the complexity of social connections. As we shall see, these tools have several limitations when applied to scant and scattered materials. But by rearranging our data and setting the focus on the patterns of connections, this approach can occasionally shed light on the nuances of power relationships by helping us to uncover hidden patterns in our sources and by prompting new research questions.

In what follows, I will argue that strong local networks of allegiance limited Ambrose's coercive authority and influence over his North Italian peers, but that he at times leveraged his close relationship with the emperor and with other well-connected peers such as Sabinus of Piacenza to shape the religious policy

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- 5 Gerzaguët 2014, 239; Frend 1998, 161–81; McLynn 1994, 287; Lizzi 1990, 154–176; Lizzi 1989, 15–36; Matthews 1975, 185. Mark Humphries 2000, 137–40 has similarly argued that Ambrose successfully established some form of episcopal hierarchy despite the low level of institutionalization of the North Italian church. See also Forlin Patrucco 2002, 30 and Cattaneo 1982, 181–183 on Milan and Aquileia's metropolitan authority.
 - 6 Burt 2005, 5–9; Burt 1992; Bourdieu 1983, 191–195. A paradigmatic study in prosopographical perspective is O'Donnell 1981, 31–72.
 - 7 Searle 2005, 1–7; Kilduff and Tsai 2003, 4–9; Scott 2001, 30–54; DiMaggio and Powell 1991, 1–39.

in his province of Aemilia-Liguria and beyond. Late fourth century North Italian bishops ruled over complex and competitive social environments and were subject to considerable pressure in their communities. Despite Ambrose's remarkable social and intellectual prestige, his regional peers showed a significant degree of independence from Milan.⁸ In his writings, however, Ambrose recorded his successes and reframed his concessions to fashion a model of metropolitan authority that would have a far-reaching influence on later historians. The fact that he himself was not able to fully implement his model made little difference to the grand narrative of the triumphal establishment of episcopal power, which was one of the most significant elements of his legacy.

1. Change and Adaptation in Northern Italy

During the third and fourth centuries, Northern Italy underwent deep social and political changes that transformed the social fabric of its communities. The establishment of troops in the region after the Alemannic and Marcomannic invasions of the mid third century and the creation of a new province of Italia Annonaria in the time of Diocletian brought new life to the towns and countryside of the region.⁹ Later in the fourth century, Milan intermittently hosted the imperial court, attracting numerous high-profile courtiers and careerists, many of whom bought estates and retired in ever grander villas.¹⁰ This landed aristocracy dominated the social life in the thriving North Italian countryside and frequently led the process of Christianization in rural areas.¹¹ The arrival of the court also fueled the resurgence of some medium sized cities, but also caused new social tensions within these communities. Bureaucrats and employees of the state-run industries enjoyed considerable privileges and advantages, while the traditional North Italian

8 North Italian clerics showed a certain degree of unity on theological matters, yet demonstrated remarkable independence in less partisan matters, as we shall see.

9 To meet the increasing demand for food, foreign laborers were also settled in the region. Fourth and fifth century cemeteries such as the one in Bologna described in Paul. V. *Ambr.* 28 also show the remarkable diversity of Northern Italy. For a more in-depth discussion see Bowes 2008, 270; de Blois 1976, 93; Hoffman 1969, 61; Cracco Ruggini 1959, 275.

10 Constantius II based his court in Milan from 352 to 357, Valentinian I resided in the city from 364 to 365, and Gratian from 379 to 383. For an extended discussion about the elites in the region see Matthews 1975, 183–5. On the large number of ostentatious fourth and fifth century villas concentrated on traditional aristocratic areas such as the shores of the lakes Como and Garda, see Porena 2017, 62–65; Lo Cascio 2010, 89–100; Christie 2006, 419; Cracco Ruggini 1961, 23–34; Passi Pitcher 1990, 266–276; Giardina 1986, 1–30.

11 Lizzi 2001, 93–95; Roncaglia 2018, 119–125; Bowes 2008, 170–174; Brogiolo and Chavarria 2005, 23–30; Cantino Wataghin 2000, 209–234; Scagliarini Corliata 1990, 257–8; Sena Chiesa 1990, 233–236.

civic elites, the *curiales*, were subjected to increasingly onerous burdens.¹² Milan itself experienced an urban revival that also affected the suburbs beyond the city walls.¹³ The transformation of the local nobility was also perceptible here; the long-established Milanese nobles and *curiales* were upstaged by newly arrived professionals and courtiers, and are scarcely visible in our sources, which barely reveal the remarkable complexity of the city's social fabric.¹⁴ Ambrose's Milan hosted a diverse community in ethnic and social terms, whose public life was dominated by foreigners, bureaucrats, and professionals.¹⁵

The fourth century was also a key moment in the development of North Italian churches.¹⁶ Managing these young bishoprics in such a context of social change and competition was not an easy task, and some North Italian bishops saw themselves enmeshed in the complex family and social politics that troubled the peace of these communities, as we shall see later in this article. In the mid fourth century, these churches were also affected by the theological conflict between Nicaeans and Homoians (referred to as "Arians" in our sources) over the relationship between the Son of God and God the Father. It was in Milan that the emperor Constantius II summoned an important council in 355. With an eye on imperial support, most clerics at the council subscribed to the Homoian formula favored by Constantius. However, three recalcitrant Nicene bishops, Dionysius of Milan, Eusebius of Vercelli, and Lucifer of Cagliari, refused to subscribe to the new creed and were consequently expelled from their sees and banished to the East.¹⁷

In Milan, the Homoian Auxentius was appointed to substitute Dionysius, who eventually died while in exile in Palestine. Auxentius ruled the church of Milan

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- 12 Morselli 2007, 138–139; Wickham 2005, 167; Cracco Ruggini 1961, 35–55. Similar socio-economic transformations have been observed in Egypt and the Eastern provinces. According to Banaji 2007, 102–115 the late empire revolutionized provincial landholding, signaling the decline of the traditional elites and the emergence of a new group of landowners.
 - 13 Sannazaro 2014, 79–94; Mirabella Roberti 1984, 75–93; Krautheimer 1983, 71.
 - 14 Ambr. *Ep.* 76.6; Cracco Ruggini 1961, 106–108 suggested that the Milanese *corpus negotiatorum*, an organization of North Italian traders who sold their surplus in Rome, roughly corresponded to the curia. McLynn 1994, 222, by contrast, has argued that the identity of the Milanese *curiales* was subsumed beneath their imperial function, which contrasts with what happened in other recent imperial capitals such as Antioch, whose local nobility fought back against the court; see also Liebeschuetz 1972, 126–132.
 - 15 Cecconi 2017, 87–90; Airoidi et al. 2017, 192–217; Brown 2012, 125; McLynn 1994, 220–225.
 - 16 The first documented episcopal see in the region is Milan, whose bishop, Mirocles, participated in the Lateran council of 313. Brescia and Verona are first documented at the Council of Serdica in 343 and soon after the see of Vercelli was created, with Eusebius as its first bishop, Optatus Milev., *De Schism. Donat.* 1.23 (CSEL 26, 26); Ambr. *Ep. extra coll.* 14.66–68 (CSEL 82.3, 270–272); Turner 1930, 550–557.
 - 17 Sulp. *Chron.* 2.39.4, (SC 441, 314); Mossong 2023, 247–266; D. H. Williams 1995, 69–89; D. H. Williams 1992, 7–13.

over the following two decades, but his episcopate was not free from opposition. Upon their return from exile around 362, Hilary of Poitiers and Eusebius of Vercelli supposedly met in Northern Italy to join forces against Auxentius.¹⁸ In the late 360s, Auxentius also faced the opposition of two clerics with Milanese connections, Filastrius and Sabinus, who later became the bishops of the nearby cities of Brescia and Piacenza, respectively.¹⁹ But the effectiveness of these initiatives was limited, and Auxentius remained the Bishop of Milan until his death in 374.

This is the context in which Ambrose became the Bishop of Milan. Of aristocratic pedigree, Ambrose had been a lawyer in Sirmium under the command of the Praetorian Prefect for Italy and Illyricum Sextus Petronius Probus (d. 388), a Christian senator and ex consul, and one of the richest men in the empire. Thanks to Probus's patronage, Ambrose was promoted to the post of governor of the province Aemilia-Liguria, whose capital was Milan. According to his hagiographer Paulinus, on the day of Auxentius' death, disagreement between the Homoian and Nicene factions of the city required the presence of the governor in the main Milanese Basilica. On his arrival, Ambrose was unanimously acclaimed as bishop by both groups. He also received the support of his mentor Probus and the emperor Valentinian I (d. 375).²⁰

Indeed, Ambrose's senatorial background and friends set him apart from the rest of his colleagues in Northern Italy, who were largely from the regional middle classes such as *curiales*.²¹ Years later, the disgruntled bishop Palladius of Ratiaria hinted at Ambrose's scant clerical support and mentioned that he had won favor because of "a previous error from a judge and an emperor" and had been elected "by the grace of his friends" and "human patronage."²²

Palladius' allusion, however, stands at odds with the image that Ambrose displayed in his later writings, and particularly in his letter collection, where he appears as a respected bishop who frequently resolved his peers' pastoral and theological doubts. This discrepancy prompts the questions of whether Ambrose's intellectual skills and relationships at the highest level sufficed to attract the loyalty of his peers and, more crucially, the extent to which these non-structured connections fostered more formal relationships of authority and dependence in Northern Italy.

18 Barry 2016, 156–159; Washburn 2009, 736–739; Beckwith 2005, 21–23; Zangara 1997, 257–259; Barnes 1992, 129–132.

19 Gaud. Brix. *Tract.* 21.6–7 (CSEL 68, 186).

20 Paul. *V. Ambr.* 6.

21 Claire Sotinel has convincingly argued that the bishops and clergy of Italy largely remained "middling" men, Sotinel 2006, 388–395; Gilliard 1984, 153–177.

22 Pal. *Apol.* 121 (SCh 267, 1980, 264–325). All translations are my own.

2. Ambrose's epistolary network

Social scientists have long sought to explain under what conditions social ties foster trust, belonging, and authority in low-institutional settings.²³ Social Network Analysis has provided tools to assess the quality of social relationships and the relevance of social actors within a group according to four main centrality measures.²⁴ This approach has become increasingly popular among late antique historians, who have adopted different levels of methodological engagement.²⁵

In this section, I will build on this scholarship to conduct a network analysis of Ambrose's clerical connections attested in his ten-book letter collection, which was published just before his death, and the letters *Outside the Collection*, which were only circulated after his death. From a thematical point of view, the collection can be divided into two different parts. Book Ten and the letters *Outside the Collection* discuss politically relevant matters addressed to several distinguished individuals, including three emperors, one imperial usurper, and Pope Siricius, among others. However, most of the information on Ambrose's relationship with his ecclesiastical colleagues comes from the first nine books of the epistolary.²⁶ This part of the collection displays a mosaic of theological explanations and pastoral advice, and consistently portrays Ambrose as the recipient of his colleagues' queries – with one exception, as we will see in the next section.

The Ambrosian sources pose some limitations on the application of network analysis methods. First, most of the evidence on his connections comes from his own writings, particularly from his letter collection, which is the result of a care-

23 Clerical competencies and ecclesiastical hierarchy and geography were poorly defined during the period under study. In defining fourth century clerical relationships as a low-institutional setting, I follow Elsner 2012, Ostrom 2005, and Aoki 2001 who defined institutions as collective devices for governing individual behavior which result from patterned, predictable interactions among individuals. Scott 2001, 30–54; Searle 2005, 1–7; Watts 1999, 493–494; DiMaggio and Powell 1991, 1–39.

24 *Degree* is defined by the number of connections of a node (each of the elements in the network); *weighted degree centrality* considers the number and frequency of connections of a node; *eccentricity* is the distance between a node and the node that is furthest from it; *closeness centrality* is the sum of the shortest distances between a node and the rest of the nodes in the network; and *betweenness* refers to the number of times a node acts as a bridge using the shortest path between two nodes. See Golbeck 2013, 25–44.

25 This approach has been used to explore and visualize late antique and Byzantine letter collections, as well as other themes such as patterns of dissemination of religious cults and long-distance religious conflicts, among others. See for instance Ruprecht 2021, Mascoli 2016; Collar 2013; Schor 2011; Brughmans 2010, 277–303; Preiser Kapeller 2008; Ruffini 2008; Kilduff and Tsai 2003, 4–9; Mullett 1997; Clark 1992; Rebenich 1992.

26 According to Michaela Zelzer, Ambrose followed the model of Plinius' epistolary, devoting nine books to his friends and one to his political endeavors, Liebeschuetz 2005, 31; Zelzer 1989, 203–208; Zelzer 1987, 224–225; against this, see Savon 1995, 3–17.

ful process of editing and selection reflecting the bias of its author.²⁷ Second, most of the letters are not dated, so the collection neither shows us a snapshot of Ambrose's connections at a given date nor reflects the changing reality of his relationships throughout his 23-year-long episcopate. In addition, with a few exceptions, these letters are only one-sided conversational records. Finally, this corpus was not designed as a representative sample of Ambrose's actual interactions. The personal collection was an anthology ruled by the principle of *variatio* (diversity) of topics and addressees, while the letters outside the collection offered precedents for how later bishops and authors might interact.²⁸

For all its deficiencies, this letter collection nonetheless offers a unique window for us to peer into the ecclesiastical connections in fourth century Northern Italy. Ambrose's epistolary gives us an idea of the part of his social entourage that he wanted us to know about. Exploring these patterns can cast some light on, or at least trigger new questions about, ecclesiastical relations and politics in the region.

I have thus analyzed Ambrose's letter collection using Gephi. The visualization of the data (see Fig 1) unsurprisingly shows a star-shaped network in which Ambrose is the most central and best-connected individual. This graph does not come close to reflecting the complexity of clerical relationships at the time. First, it includes addressees who shared different levels of affinity with Ambrose, from mild hostility, such as Syagrius as we shall see, to fraternal love, such as his sister Marcellina. Second, the graph does not represent the connections that most likely existed but are not attested in our sources, such as relationships among the members of the Milanese clergy, or between the Bishops Sabinus and Filastrius, two anti-Arian champions with Milanese connections.

Network analysis software also allows us to visualize communities according to individuals' attributes. In Fig 2, I have used different colors for emperors, individuals of consular rank, members of the Milanese church, North Italian bishops, other bishops, and individuals of unknown rank. This graph also plots the frequency of interaction, which in this case corresponds to the number of letters sent to each individual and included in the collection. Despite its limitations, this visualization helps us to instantly identify the most abundantly represented individuals. Remarkably, as mentioned above, more than a third of his letters were addressed to three Milanese presbyters: Orontianus, Simplicianus and Ireneus.

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- 27 Nauroy, 2016, 146–160; Liebeschuetz 2015, 97–112; Zelzer 2011, 187; Savon 1995, 3–5. Ancient and late antique letter collections have received a great deal of historiographical interest lately; Sogno, Storin and Watts 2019; Neil and Allen 2015; Van Hoof 2014; Gibson and Morello 2012, among others, have shown the complexities of a notionally private form of literary exchange that was nonetheless intended to be read by a wide audience.
- 28 Zelzer 2011, 188–189; Savon 1995, 3–10.

The content of these letters, as well as other existing written evidence, further confirms the high level of cohesion and pressure toward conformity that ruled this group and how deeply rooted in the local community it was. We know, for instance, that (at least a fraction of) the tightly knit Milanese presbyterium and community offered Ambrose support during difficult moments, such as the so-called Conflict of the Basilicas, in which he was confronted by the court of Valentinian II in 386.²⁹ Such loyalty was also rewarded: Simplicianus was chosen as Ambrose's successor, while other members of the Milanese church, such as Bassianus and Felix, were respectively appointed Bishops of Lodi and Como, in Milan's hinterland.³⁰ But the Ambrosian church left little room for dissent. In his *De Officiis*, a philosophical treatise and a manual of behavior addressed to the members of his presbyterium, Ambrose encouraged his clerics to report to and request advice from their superiors and warned them against the dangers of undermining the established order.³¹ In 396, Ambrose had the opportunity to put his advice into practice as two Milanese monks were expelled from the city for defending controversial views on the value of Christian asceticism.³² This is the only case of dissension in the Milanese church contained in the letter collection.

By contrast, the analysis of Ambrose's episcopal connections in the region shows a more sparse and less frequent set of recorded letter exchanges.³³ The only exception is Sabinus of Piacenza, who is the third most frequent and longest-lasting addressee of the collection with six letters. Sabinus is also the only case in which Ambrose is seen asking for a favor, instead of resolving the doubts and issues of his peers. But is Sabinus' prominence in the collection attributable to a more fluid conversation between Milan and Piacenza? As mentioned above, the graph of letter correspondents represents a partial and non-proportional sample of Ambrose's social relations in Northern Italy. We can nonetheless infer that Ambrose did want his readers to know about his special relationship with Sabinus.

To gain more insight into the network of ecclesiastical connections in the region, I have analyzed information from three council acts that involved North Italian clerics from 368 to 393. While council attendance is less overtly dictated by the editorial choices of Ambrose, their inclusion in the analysis presupposes that council attendees shared some relationship beyond being present at the

29 On that occasion, Milanese citizens and clergy confronted armed imperial troops to defend their bishop; see M. S. Williams 2017, 226–237; Liebeschuetz 2005, 124–135; McLynn 1994, 181–196.

30 Camille Gerzaguët 2014 has compellingly studied Ambrose's dominance over these bishops.

31 Ambr. *De Off.* 1.7; 1.30.151; 2.8.41; 2.24.123; 2.29. Davidson 2001, 61 argues that, in his *De Officiis*, Ambrose justified his despotic power over his bishops and clerics.

32 Ambr. *Ep. Extra coll.* 14.7; Liebeschuetz 2005, 292–295.

33 For a different interpretation see McLynn 1994, 278; Lizzi 1989, 52–57.

same meeting. Nonetheless, these were not routine gatherings among bishops of the same province. The councils were called to address the Arian and Jovinianist schisms and, accordingly, participation in these synods implied a strong level of ideological affinity among participants. Indeed, many bishops attended more than one of these synods. Fig. 3a in the Appendix below offers a glimpse of the documented relationships among council attendees during this period. The graph shows a very tight network of undirected connections, divided into three communities which roughly correspond to attendees of the synod in Rome (368–373) (orange), the Council of Aquileia (381) (purple), and the Council of Milan (393) (green). The centrality measures (Fig. 3b) show that Ambrose was not the most central player in this group. This is not surprising considering that he was not yet a bishop when the synod of Rome took place. In contrast, Sabinus of Piacenza emerges as a pivotal figure within this network, boasting the greatest number of connections and occupying the most central positions among all the interactions. The same would be true for Theodorus of Martigny if we accept, as I have for this study, that he is the ‘Theodulus’ who appears in Damasus’ synodal letter. However, the identification of both individuals remains uncertain.³⁴

To gain a more complete picture of the network of attested clerical connections in Northern Italy in the last quarter of the fourth century, I have merged the networks of council attendees and ecclesiastical letter correspondents into a mixed network encompassing directed and undirected connections. As expected, considering how prolific a writer he was compared with his contemporaries, the resulting network (Fig 4a) still shows Ambrose at the center. However, in contrast to the network solely based on letter recipients, the merged graph reveals a more intricate structure, with two distinct clusters around Ambrose and Sabinus and Theodorus. The analysis of the centrality measures (Fig. 4b) similarly shows that, after Ambrose, Sabinus is the second most connected and central member of this aggregated network.

These values possess partial reliability. As mentioned above, there is no definitive confirmation that Theodorus of Martigny attended the Synod of Rome, so this study potentially inflates his centrality within the network. Moreover, SNA methods have inherent limitations when dealing with small, partial, and meticulously curated datasets like this one. Nonetheless, considering the letters’ a priori focus on Ambrose, Sabinus’ relevance is remarkable. Furthermore, the distinct reverence shown towards him by Ambrose warrants a more thorough investigation into his life and influence.

34 See PCBE Italie, 2185.

3. Sabinus the broker

More than thirty years ago, Rita Lizzi suggested that Sabinus played an important role in Ambrose's ecclesiastical career. Her insightful reading of the Ambrose's letters showed that, like Simplicianus, Sabinus mentored and sharpened Ambrose's theological knowledge during his early episcopate.³⁵ A network-focused approach confirms Lizzi's argument and provides an additional nuance: Sabinus was a respected intellectual and a central and well-connected figure within the North Italian episcopal network.

Sabinus is first recorded during the period of intense theological division that followed the Council of Milan in 355. Most of the existing contemporary sources focus on the initiatives of big players such as Eusebius of Vercelli and Hilary of Poitiers who, after their return from exile in 362, gathered a council that condemned Auxentius of Milan. Considered confessors who had been banished for their faith, Eusebius and especially Hilary attracted a great deal of attention among believers and scholars during the following centuries. By contrast, Sabinus was only a presbyter in Milan in the 360s, before becoming the Bishop of Piacenza at an unknown date before 381. He did not leave any writings, and the only sources that mention him are six Ambrosian letters and three council acts in which he participated.³⁶

Nonetheless, such a discreet presence in the sources hides a remarkable career. While still a presbyter, Sabinus became involved in a series of initiatives against Auxentius. At some point between 368 and 373, he participated in a synod summoned by Pope Damasus in Rome, which was attended by ten clerics from Gaul and Venetia, including Theodorus of Martigny, Abundantius of Trento, and Valerianus of Aquileia, among others. After the Roman synod, pope Damasus sent him to the East, where he met the Nicene champions Basil of Caesarea and Athanasius of Alexandria. He then returned to the west with a synodic letter signed by 33 eastern bishops in support of the Nicene cause, and soon after became the Bishop of Piacenza.³⁷

During such a prominent early career, Sabinus had acquired a solid theological education that soon gained his peers' attention. In 378, Ambrose asked him to correct one of his theological treatises, most probably the *De Fide*.³⁸ But his trips across the Roman world also turned Sabinus into a very well-connected individ-

35 Lizzi 1989, 36–41.

36 In 1982 (CSEL 82.3, xv), Michaela Zelzer considered Sabinus the addressee of seven Ambrosian letters, but in 1990 she reassigned one of them to Ambrose's close collaborator, Irenaeus (CSEL 82.2, xxxii).

37 Basil Ep. 92; M. S. Williams 2017, 96–97.

38 Ambr. Ep. 32.7 (CSEL 82.1, 228).

ual with acquaintances in Gaul, Venetia and other North Italian communities, Rome, and the East. Social connections are the basis of social capital in any given community, but in an institution with scantily defined tools of policy making and enforcement such as the fourth century North Italian Church, there was real strength in numbers. Sabinus' own career shows how clerics often collaborated and appealed to distant colleagues to reinforce their positions. There was one occasion in Ambrose's early episcopate when garnering the support of loyal clerics became an even more crucial matter: the Council of Aquileia.

In 380, Gratian announced the celebration of an ecumenical council in Aquileia for the following year. The meeting sought to put an end to the doctrinal divide in the West, which had been revived by Ambrose's *De Fide*.³⁹ In his treatise, Ambrose urged the emperor to deal with the Homoian bishops of Illyricum, which prompted Bishop Palladius of Ratiaria to publish a pamphlet refuting Ambrose's position.⁴⁰ This theological conflict threatened Gratian's religious leadership at precisely the time when his eastern colleague, Theodosius, was advancing his spiritual authority. In early 381, Theodosius had summoned the ecumenical Council of Constantinople, at which 150 eastern bishops restated the Nicene faith and settled the relationships between the Church and the Empire.⁴¹ Disgruntled by Theodosius' independence, Gratian wanted to reaffirm his authority as a senior imperial colleague, and Ambrose helped him to justify the celebration of a smaller council during the same year, which eventually took place in Aquileia. According to the proceedings, the new synod did not intend to change the arrangements of Constantinople, but rather sought to enact them more effectively "following Ambrose's advice".⁴² Ambrose, however, had his own agenda: he saw this meeting as a golden opportunity to condemn his opponents at a public hearing. And if we are to trust Palladius, Ambrose conspired with the prefect Syagrius so that only Westerners who opposed the Homoian positions were invited to the council.⁴³

Indeed, despite relying on imperial backing, the list of attendees is rather low-key. Only 34 Western bishops attended the meeting, of which only 21 can be identified with certainty.⁴⁴ Eight were from Aemilia-Liguria, four from Venetia, five

39 Zelzer 2002, 439–447; D. H. Williams 1995, 141–145; McLynn 1994, III–13.

40 The pamphlet only survives in extract Pall. *Apol.* 81–87; D. H. Williams 1995, 150; McLynn 1994, III–13; McLynn 1991, 34–58.

41 The decisions of the council were legally sanctioned in the law of 31 July 381 *CTh* 16.1.3.

42 *Acta Concilii Aquileiensi* 4 (CSEL 82.3, 328–329); Liebeschuetz 2005, 221–222; McLynn 1994, 102–37.

43 Pall. *Apol.* 121 (SC 267, 303–5); Gerzaguët 2014, 236; Liebeschuetz 2005, 13; D. H. Williams 1995, 169; McLynn 1994, II, 126.

44 An imperial rescript which survives as part of the acts of the council (transmitted among Ambrose's letters) devoted two paragraphs to justifying the limited attendance, see *Acta Conc. Aquil.* 3–4.

came from southeastern Gaul, two from Illyricum, and two from Africa. Among the signatures, there are three of Ambrose's addressees: Justus of Lyon, the future Bishop Chromatius of Aquileia, and Sabinus, although only in the latter case can we confirm that the letter exchange predates the Council. The other group that can be identified among the signatories are Sabinus' old peer associates since the late 360s: Theodorus of Martigny (Gaul), Abundantius of Trento (Aemilia-Liguria), and Valerianus of Aquileia (Venetia).⁴⁵

Supported by these direct and indirect acquaintances, Ambrose dominated the discussions during the council, cornering the Homoian bishops Palladius of Ratiaria and Secundianus of Singidunum with theological arguments and procedural technicalities that ultimately led to their unanimous condemnation. Ambrose was also in charge of communicating the decisions of the gathering to the emperors in five letters.⁴⁶ It is difficult to determine the juridical effectiveness of the council; we do not know if Palladius of Ratiaria and Secundianus of Singidunum were effectively expelled from their sees. Nonetheless, Aquileia shows the extent to which the skillful management of two types of social relationships helped Ambrose to intervene in the religious policy of the empire.⁴⁷

Social network scholarship has long distinguished between two varieties of interpersonal relationships: strong and weak ties. Strong ties are frequent and sustained relationships among individuals who often interact in multiple social contexts (i.e., multiplexity in SNA terminology) and form a dense and relatively closed cluster. Weak ties, by contrast, are more sporadic and loose connections that typically emerge between distinct clusters in specific social contexts. The latter had escaped deep scrutiny until 1973, when Mark Granovetter formulated his seminal theory on the strength of weak ties.⁴⁸ Granovetter argued that weak ties play a key role in the diffusion of influence and information, mobility opportunity, and community organization. More recently, Ronald Burt has built on Granovetter's model to analyze how an individual's position in a social network determines their social capital, i.e., their potential ability to use their social connection to obtain social resources such as prestige or authority.⁴⁹ According to Burt, clusters of strong connections are ruled by reputation and trust and present strong uniformity. By contrast, the so-called gateways or brokers – individuals who share weak ties with different clusters – have access to more information and

45 Valerianus of Aquileia attended the synod of Rome (368–373). The Theodorus and the Abundius who attended the same synod were most likely Theodulus of Martigny and Abundantius of Trento, who also took part in Aquileia, see PCBE Italie, 2, 2185.

46 Ambrose, *Epp. Extra coll.* 4–6, 8, and 9.

47 Liebeschuetz 2005, 221–222; McLynn 1994, 125, 141–147.

48 Mohr 2013, 305–307; Granovetter 1973, 1365–1368.

49 Burt 2005, 5–9; Burt 1992.

opportunities, and therefore accumulate more social capital.⁵⁰ These two well-known approaches help us to understand the nature of Ambrose's social environment.

Ambrose shared strong connections with some of the most powerful aristocrats in the empire.⁵¹ The son of a prefect, he had been born within the select and reduced group of patricians with access to the emperor. The transfer of the imperial court to the city in 381 further favored his frequent interaction with the exclusive group of courtiers and imperial aristocrats. Evidence of these relationships is preserved in Ambrose's writings; more than a third of his ninety-four letters were addressed to members of the Roman elite, including seventeen letters to three emperors and one imperial usurper, and ten to high-ranking bureaucrats. Ambrose also corresponded with Symmachus, a blue-blooded pagan aristocrat who also counted the prefect Syagrius among his friends and was urban prefect in 384 and consul in 391. Eight letters to the Bishop of Milan have been preserved in Symmachus' letter collection, which present Ambrose as a member of a distinguished network of connections that included two *praefecti urbi*, one *vicarius Africae*, two *virī spectabiles* and one *praefectus Annonae*.⁵² This old boys' club was a closed and endogamic clique, in which reputation was highly important and reciprocity was expected, as Symmachus frequently reminded Ambrose.⁵³ But belonging to such a illustrious group also entailed some potential privileges. Ambrose's close connections and geographical proximity to the court helped him obtain imperial imprimatur for the Council of Aquileia. According to Palladius, Ambrose also used his strong connection with the prefect Syagrius to ensure that most attendees supported his theses against the Illyrian bishop.⁵⁴

But Ambrose still needed to garner the support of his western peers. To do so, he relied on his social prestige and his network of close collaborators, but also on indirect acquaintances, such as those around well-connected friends such as Sabinus. Remarkably, Sabinus' advantageous structural position partly resulted from his long clerical career. Unlike Ambrose, Sabinus had been a presbyter in the region since the 360s. As a presbyter he was sent to missions which included visiting distant communities and establishing relationships with other clerics.⁵⁵

50 Burt 2005, 227–237.

51 Ambrose was notoriously known for his tight friendship “with consuls and prefects,” Sulp. Sev. *Dial* 1.25.6.

52 Symm *Epp.* 3.30–3.37; Forlin Patrucco and Roda 1976, 287–294.

53 Symm *Ep.* 3.30: *Nunc adjice quae supersunt, ut ego quoque partem beneficii adeptus existimer.* *Ep.* 3.32: *Nam etsi Dorotheus probatus est, cupio tamen, ut eum majorem in modum iudicii mei praerogativa conciliet, quod futurum non ambigo, cum affectio boni animi capax sit augmenti, quotiens meritis provocatur.*

54 See note 41 above.

55 Sabinus was not the only case; Filastrius, who later became Bishop of Brescia, provides another example. According to his successor Gaudentius, sometime in the 360s Fila-

Together with his spiritual and intellectual acumen, these connections made Sabinus a strong asset in Ambrose's network.⁵⁶ Ambrose recognized the importance of Sabinus in his epistolary. In the published letter collection, no other bishop received more letters than Sabinus – he is Ambrose's longest-lasting attested correspondent whose relationship spanned at least fifteen years.⁵⁷ As mentioned above, Sabinus is also the only person in the entire collection from whom Ambrose openly asked a favor.⁵⁸ But despite his relevance, Sabinus left very few traces of his deeds, and was soon forgotten; he is nowadays mainly remembered in Piacenza, where the discovery of the relics of Antoninus, the city's patron saint, has been traditionally attributed to him.⁵⁹ Ambrose, by contrast, made sure that his key participation in the council of Aquileia would be remembered, and almost everything we know about Aquileia comes from his five letters on the matter.

Ambrose's key role in implementing the religious policy of the empire shows the benefits of having friends in high places, including the emperor himself, but also the importance of being able to mobilize a network of collaborators in distant communities and at lower levels of the social and ecclesiastical hierarchy. As we will see in the next section, however, attracting the loyalty of his peers occasionally proved more difficult than expected for Ambrose.

4. The limitations of aristocratic power

In 378, a Council in Rome reaffirmed metropolitan bishops' formal judicial powers over the other clerics of their provinces and reserved the ultimate jurisdiction to the Bishop of Rome. Most probably, Ambrose attended the gathering and was entrusted with presenting its results to the emperor Gratian, who corroborated its decisions in an imperial letter.⁶⁰ As far as we know, however, Ambrose never im-

strius preached "in the mountains and towns" of Northern Italy to mobilize support for the Nicene cause. Gaud. Brix. *Tract.* 21.6–7 (CSEL 68, 186).

56 Twelve years after Aquileia, in 393, Ambrose presided over the synod of Milan, which excommunicated Jovinian for denying the spiritual value of asceticism and celibacy. The council gathered eight bishops, including three of Ambrose's close friends from Milan's hinterland, Bassianus of Lodi, Felix of Como, and Eventius of Pavia, as well as Sabinus and his old acquaintance Theodulus of Martigny. *Sirici Epistula*, 6 (CSEL 82.3, 300); *Ambr. Ep. Extra Coll.* 15 (CSEL 82.3, 302–11); Liebeschuetz 2005, 336–337; McLynn 1994, 280.

57 Ambrose also discussed with Sabinus the publication of his letter collection on two occasions *Ambr. Epp.* 32.7; 37.2.

58 In all the other letters to his colleagues Ambrose resolved the pastoral, theological or liturgical doubts of his peers. See Lizzi 1989, 36–40.

59 Remarkable exceptions are Lizzi 1989, 18, 20, 36–40; M. S. Williams 2017, 96.

60 *Coll. Avell.* 13 (CSEL 35, 54), see Barnes 1999, 164–175. The metropolitan power had already been established at the Council of Nicaea (325), Canons 5, 6 and 20, and re-

plemented this judicial superiority, which might explain why he preferred not to publish this document during his lifetime.⁶¹

Late antique scholars have long been aware of the limitations of legally sanctioned authority in organizations with limited tools of coercion such as the late antique church. Instead, historians of this period have focused on patronage relationships, i.e., the vertical relationships of loyalty and dependence that linked the plebs with the aristocracy, and ultimately the emperor. The hierarchical nature of late antique society led its members to put themselves under the protection of more prominent individuals, who acted as earthly and celestial mediators of the community. In turn, these powerful individuals obtained loyalty, social prestige, and authority. This approach has greatly enlarged our understanding of the social, political, and religious fabric of late antiquity.⁶²

There is little doubt that Ambrose's aristocratic background and direct access to the court made him a uniquely well-positioned figure among his colleagues in Northern Italy. As mentioned above, we know through Symmachus that Ambrose participated in patronage networks that involved top Roman aristocrats. Ambrose's letter collection also contains one example, in which he helped an unnamed civil servant out of a legal case at the request of Bishop Eusebius of Bologna. Eusebius, it should be noted, was one of Ambrose's closest related collaborators as he was the uncle (or grandfather) of a Milanese cleric called Faustinus, and the grandfather of Ambrosia, a virgin who was related to Ambrose's sister Marcellina (see Fig 2).⁶³

But Ambrose's privileged social position did not always translate into unchallenged authority over his peers. On many occasions, Ambrose had to compromise with clerical networks at the local level.⁶⁴ While the lack of information on connections at the community level prevents a more detailed analysis of local clusters, our sources offer some hints about the strength that nobles and presbyters exerted over the incumbent and future bishops of their cities.⁶⁵

stated in subsequent councils such as Antioch (341), Canon 16 and Carthage (390), and Canon 12. Against the idea of Milan as a metropolitan center, see Cattaneo 1972, 467–484; Cattaneo 1982, 176.

61 Ambr. *Ep. Extra Coll.* 7 (CSEL 82.3, 191–197); Liebeschuetz 2005, 244–245; Barnes 1999, 164–175; McLynn 1994, 100.

62 Brown 2012, 93; Brown 2000, 321–246; Saller 1982; Forlin Patrucco 1979, 1103–1104; Brown 1971; On the dangers of applying “patronage” as a template see Schor 2009, 274–276; Millar 1984, 1–3.

63 Ambr. *Epp.* 8, 26, 38; Bodin, 2019, 43–48; McLynn 1994, 66 n. 47.

64 On the local focus of North Italian bishops at the time see Sotinel, 2006, 388–395; McLynn 1994, 277.

65 Gaud. Brix. *Praef. ad Benivolum* 4–5 (CSEL 68, 3–4); Ambr. *Ep.* 76.6, 26.

This is particularly evident in the episcopal elections in which Ambrose was involved during his episcopate. As Rita Lizzi has perceptively noted, Ambrose participated in several successions and wrote letters to confirm the ordination of certain newly elected bishops of the province. On one occasion, he even took the liberty of offering some practical advice on how to manage the episcopal office.⁶⁶ But in none of these cases can it be confirmed that Ambrose unilaterally imposed his candidate; in every documented instance, the successful contestant was a senior member of the local church.

This was the case with Chromatius, who became the Bishop of Aquileia in 388. Chromatius, however, had long served in the local church and had attended the Council of Aquileia in 381 together with Bishop Valerianus, who groomed him as his successor. Almost 400 km east of Milan, Aquileia was the capital of the province of Venetia et Histria. Ambrose's participation in Chromatius' election has thus been interpreted as largely ceremonial.⁶⁷ But a similar pattern appears in the two other recorded episcopal elections in Ambrose's own province of Aemilia-Liguria, those of Gaudentius of Brescia and Honoratus of Vercelli, which have nonetheless received a different interpretation.

In the case of Gaudentius, all the extant information comes from one of his sermons. According to this text, after the death of his predecessor Filastrius at some point between 387 and 396, "Ambrose and other bishops" sent a legation to Jerusalem, compelling Gaudentius to end his pilgrimage and return to Brescia, where he was forced to accept the episcopacy against his will. Nonetheless, Gaudentius' emphatic renunciation to assume the episcopacy should not be taken too literally; staging their refusal was a commonplace that allowed aspirants to emphasize their suitability and downplay their ambition to hold ecclesiastical office.⁶⁸ Similarly, we should not overstate Ambrose's role in selecting Gaudentius. Like Chromatius, he too was a member of the local clergy, a disciple of his predecessor, and well-known among the Brescian community, who "refused to accept any bishop other than himself".⁶⁹

66 Ambr. *Ep.* 64.1. Ambrose's guidelines (the so-called *institutionis insignia*) to the newly elected Bishop of Trento imitated contemporary imperial procedures, see Lizzi 1988, 3–13; Lizzi 1989, 54.

67 McEachnie 2017, 48–49; Sotinel 2005, 181–185. Against this see Zelzer 2011, 190–91.

68 Gaud. Brix. *Serm.* 16–17 (CSEL 68, 137–139). Ambrose staged one of the most memorable cases of *nolo episcopari* when he sought to avoid his ordination by successively putting some people to torture, declaring his intention to devote his life to philosophy, inviting prostitutes to his house, and unsuccessfully trying to escape Milan at night, Paul. *Vita Ambr.* 7–8, Duval 1976, 243–284. Another famous instance is provided by Synesius of Cyrene (d. 413), see Bregman 1982, 74. For other cases see Rapp 2005, 167–171; Leyser 2000, 24–6, 142; Mathisen 1989, 88.

69 Gaudentius referred to Filastrius as *pater* and, just as his predecessor, he too shared a close relationship with the *magister memoriae* and local magnate Benivulus. Gaud. Brix. *Serm.* 16.2 (CSEL 68, 137); McLynn 1994, 286.

Gaudentius' case shares some similarities with Ambrose's most famous and controversial episcopal appointment, namely that of Honoratus of Vercelli in 396. After the death of Bishop Limenius, the city of Vercelli was deeply divided, and its episcopal see remained vacant for a while. At that point, Ambrose wrote a letter to the clergy of Vercelli, urging them to choose a fitting candidate. A large proportion of the central paragraphs of this long document is devoted to a second and seemingly unrelated theme: two Milanese monks had come to Vercelli to propagate the teaching of Jovinianus, who denied the spiritual superiority of asceticism and celibacy.⁷⁰ The relationship between both topics, however, becomes more evident towards the end of the letter, as Ambrose exhorts his addressees to avoid electing wealthy individuals, which could be a veiled attack against an unnamed noble candidate.⁷¹

The episode has been understood as one of Ambrose's major successes at the regional level, as he was able to impose the authority of Milan over the other main see in the province.⁷² Indeed, Ambrose omitted the name of the defunct Bishop Limenius, which has been interpreted as proof of their enmity, and made an oblique reference to the waning prestige of the Vercellian episcopal see, which according to Ambrose had customarily been involved in past episcopal ordinations throughout the region.⁷³ More importantly, the successful candidate, Honoratus, was one of Ambrose's closest friends, to the point that he was present at Ambrose's deathbed only a year later.⁷⁴

Other evidence, however, nuances Ambrose's success. The author not only omitted the name of Limenius but also that of his friend Honoratus. Instead, Ambrose devoted some attention to their common predecessor, the exiled Bishop Eusebius (d. 369). Upon his return in 362, Eusebius was by far the most prestigious Nicene bishop in the region, while Milan was still under the Homoian Auxentius. Ambrose's allusion to Vercelli being involved in episcopal ordinations throughout the province probably refers to this period. It is also significant that the description of Eusebius' exile in this letter shares some striking similarities

70 See n. 32 above.

71 Ambr. *Ep. Extra coll.* 14.86–96; Liebeschuetz 2005, 294–295; McLynn 1994, 285–6; Lizzi 1989, 48.

72 Rita Lizzi has perceptively set this episode in the context of the ecclesiastical and socio-economic rivalry between the two main centers of Christianity of the province, Lizzi 1989, 48. Neil McLynn has argued that the dispute between Ambrose and Limenius originated when Ambrose ordained the first Bishops of Ivrea and Novara, two former parishes which had previously been under Vercellian influence *Eus. Verc. Ep.* 2 (CCSL 9, 104); McLynn 1994, 285–286. See also Cracco Ruggini 1997, 105–106; Gryson 1968, 219–220; Dudden 1935, 489, n. 3.

73 Ambr. *Ep. Extra coll.* 14.1, McLynn 1994, 285–286.

74 Paul. V. *Ambr.* 47 (ed. Pellegrino, M. 1961, 119).

with Ambrose's account of his own clash with the court of Valentinian II during the Conflict of the Basilicas.⁷⁵ In his long letter to the church of Vercelli, which was probably the last letter he wrote before his death, Ambrose was not only concerned with his episcopal authority but also with his legacy and spiritual prestige. The omission of Limenius (and Honoratus) should thus not be construed as proof of Ambrose's competition with his contemporaries, but rather with past local heroes. More importantly, we should not overlook the fact that, like Limenius, Honoratus was also a senior member of the Vercellian church and had accompanied Eusebius in exile in the 350s.⁷⁶ Thus, the extent to which Ambrose imposed his candidate or participated in the ordination of a local cleric with strong support among his presbyterium and community is very much open to question.

Ambrose's rhetorical skill and prominent afterlife have also encouraged scholars to overstate his ability to appoint his cronies in newly founded sees. One example is provided by Carlo Fedele Savio, who in 1898 argued that Ambrose founded the bishoprics of Como, Lodi, Ivrea, Novara, Aosta, Alba, Asti and Acqui. Savio did not provide evidence to support this claim, and his work has been rightly questioned in later analyses, such as Francesco Lanzoni's seminal study on the origin of the Italian bishoprics, which only considered Como, Lodi, Ivrea, Novara, Aosta and Turin as Ambrosian foundations.⁷⁷ Based on a more critical analysis of the limited evidence, more recent research has reduced the list of Ambrosian foundations to Como, Lodi, Ivrea and Novara.⁷⁸ But the extant sources do not offer the same level of certainty for each of these four cases. Allusions contained in a letter to Bishop Felix of Como seem to imply that Ambrose created the episcopal sees of Como and Lodi.⁷⁹ The extant evidence, however, suggests that the first Bishop of Novara had Vercellian connections, and there is no conclusive proof of the existence of the bishopric of Ivrea at that time.⁸⁰

There is no doubt that episcopal elections were highly competitive occasions which often involved a plurality of candidates among the presbyterium and the flock. Being recognized as a valid mediator who could settle local conflicts demonstrated the relevant role that Ambrose played in the region. Even if we accept

75 Ambr. *Ep. extra coll.* 14.68 (CSEL 82.3, 271); Ambr. *Serm. contra Aux.* 4 (CSEL 82.3, 84); Natal 2017, 278.

76 See *CIL* 5.6722.

77 Lanzoni 1923, 767–820; Savio 1898, 5–8, 281–298.

78 Gerzaguët 2014, 223–224; McLynn 1994, 278, n. 108, 285, n. 138.

79 Ambr. *Ep.* 5 (CSEL 82.1, 38) alludes to the lack of personnel, which fits with a newly created bishopric, Sotinel 1997, 193–205.

80 A ninth century hagiography described Gaudentius of Novara as Eusebius' aide in banishment, although the text's late composition prompts questions about its accuracy, *Acta Sanctorum*, January 2 (BHL 3278, 418–421); Courcelle 1973, 101–102. On Ivrea see, Lizzi and Cracco Ruggini 1998, 43–74.

that Ambrose did not choose many of the candidates, he still held special symbolic status as their consecrator.⁸¹

But for all Ambrose's prestige in the region, the existing evidence does not conclusively show that the North Italian church underwent a process of unification and hierarchization during his episcopate. In the second half of the fourth century, some local churches in the region developed a distinct Christian identity that manifested in the consolidation of specific architectural traditions and rituals.⁸² Ambrose's attempts to create symbols of common North Italian belonging also had limited results during his lifetime. A paradigmatic example is his letter to the Bishops of Aemilia-Liguria in 387. In this document, Ambrose invited his North Italian colleagues to celebrate the Passover on the date proposed by the church of Alexandria, instead of following Rome's calendar as had been customary in the region. The letter, however, has been rightly described as a "literary exercise," which might explain why Ambrose preferred not to publish this document during his lifetime.⁸³

More trumpeted episodes also seem to have had limited impact in Northern Italy. This was the case with the relics of Gervasius and Protasius. Ambrose discovered the bodies of the two martyred soldiers in the construction site of a new basilica in Milan in 385 or 386.⁸⁴ The ceremony of translation of the relics to another basilica became a multitudinous celebration in Milan that lasted two days amidst miracles and public displays of faith. This was one of Ambrose's highlights in the construction of his power in Milan.⁸⁵ The relics soon made their way to Africa and Gaul. However, they were far less prominent in Northern Italy, being solely attested in Brescia five years after Ambrose's death.⁸⁶ At times, the relics were deliberately ignored in the region. This was the case with Chromatius' consecration of a new episcopal church in the nearby town of Concordia in the Spring of 389. For the occasion, Chromatius imported relics from all over the Roman world, with one conspicuous absence: the bodies of Gervasius and Protasius that Ambrose had discovered a few years earlier.⁸⁷

81 Bishops often regarded their consecrators as their spiritual fathers. This was the case with Gaudentius; see Gaud. Brix. *Tract.* 17.12 (CSEL 68, 144) and, possibly, Ambrose himself; see Ambr. *Ep.* 2 [65].10; Aug. *Conf.* 8.2.3. Williams 1995, 117–119.

82 Vercelli and its surrounding dioceses cultivated a specific homiletic tradition (Zangara 1997, 257–322), while Aquileia and its hinterland developed a distinctive architectural and decorative style, McEachnie 2017, 48–49; for a different interpretation see Tavano 1986, 251–256; Bertacchi 1980, 230–44; Forlatti Tamaro 1976, 9–11.

83 Ambr. *Ep. Extra Coll.* 13; Liebeschuetz 2005, 280; see also McLynn 1994, 281.

84 Ambr. *Ep.* 77; Chrom. *Sermo* 26 (SC 164, 92–101).

85 M. S. Williams 2017, 288–289; Liebeschuetz 2005, 204–6; McLynn 1994, 212–216.

86 Victricius, *De laude sanct.* 6 (CCSL 64, 78); Aug. *Serm.* 286.5.4 (NBA 33.3, 148–9); Gaud. Brix. *Tract.* 17.12 (CSEL 68, 144).

87 Chrom. *Sermo* 26 (SC 164, 92–101). Lemarie and Zelzer have supported Ambrosian authority over Aquileia Zelzer 2011, 190–191; Lemarié 1969–71, 103–108. Against this, see

As these cases show, late fourth century North Italian churches were unlikely to accept a subordinate status, despite Ambrose's extraordinary prestige and authority. Apart from some punctual collaborations and compromises, regional bishops did not seem to feel part of a larger clerical community bound by hierarchical chains of accountability and patronage. As we shall see in the next section, this relative independence of local churches not only limited Ambrose's power to select his future peers, but also his ability to shape and monitor the behavior of his incumbent colleagues. Nowhere is this more true than in his relationship with Syagrius of Verona, a uniquely documented case of episcopal conflict in Ambrose's letter collection.

5. A Bishop, a Virgin, and a Difficult Paterfamilias: The Case of Indicia

Ambrose's two letters to Syagrius revolve around an accusation against Indicia, a virgin who had lived in Rome before moving in with her sister and brother-in-law in Verona, a city in Aemilia-Liguria, halfway between Milan and Aquileia. Ambrose's depiction shows that Indicia was not just a devout Veronese, but also a member of the local nobility: while in Rome, she had shared a house with aristocrats such as Ambrose's sister Marcellina, and her brother-in-law's house in the Veronese countryside was big enough to accommodate two independent dwellings. While previous studies have taken the episode as evidence of Milan's coercive power in Northern Italy, it will be argued here that it should rather be understood as evidence of Ambrose's willingness to pull rank on a member of the local Christian nobility.⁸⁸

The background of the case is explained in the first of Ambrose's two letters to Syagrius (letter 56), which narrates how Indicia, a consecrated virgin who had lived with Ambrose's sister Marcellina in Rome but then came to the Veronese countryside to live with her married sister and brother-in-law, was accused of having given birth and subsequently killing the baby (*Ep.* 56.12). Syagrius had offered a ruling (*judicium*) in response to an anonymous accusation, and in the absence of firm evidence to support the accusation had requested a gynecological examination of Indicia (*Ep.* 56.2).

At the time of writing, Indicia was in Milan. Although Ambrose's letters do not specify what prompted her relocation, the close relationship between Indicia and Marcellina seems to indicate that the virgin had requested his assistance. Follow-

McEachnie 2017, 48–49; Ramelli 2008, 274–279; Sotinel 2005, 181–185; Lizzi 1990, 158–159; Nauroy 1989, 117–149.

88 Gerzaguët 2014, 219–220; McLynn 1994, 286–287.

ing Indicia's arrival in Milan, Syagrius sent two letters, to her and to Ambrose. The content of these now-lost documents is partially described in letter 56. If we may believe Ambrose's summary (*Ep.* 56.1, 2, 17, 18), Syagrius had revealed to Ambrose that Maximus, Indicia's brother-in-law, had protested that Indicia had been accused of a grave crime. Ambrose complained that Syagrius, in his vehement defense of Maximus, had mentioned that the latter "was not the accuser but regretted with parental sorrow the acrimony of the rumor that had been spread".⁸⁹ After reading both letters, however, Indicia and Ambrose concluded that the accuser could only be Maximus (*Ep.* 56.18).

The two letters also differed on the details of the charge. While the one to Ambrose referred to an unspecified "serious crime", the one to Indicia implied that she had delivered and buried the child.⁹⁰ Disturbed by the inconsistency between both letters, Ambrose requested clarification from Verona, although there is no firm evidence that Syagrius reported back to Milan.⁹¹

It was at this point that Ambrose, who as a former provincial governor had vast legal expertise, arranged his own investigation, during which the witnesses and accusers provided discordant details (*Ep.* 56.20). He set a day for a trial, but "no one made a formal accusation, and no witness came forward."⁹² Ambrose mentions that, after this failed trial, he told his sister that Syagrius had requested a physical examination of Indicia, with Marcellina as a witness (*Ep.* 56.21). Marcellina refused to allow the examination to go forward, adding that she had no doubt of Indicia's chastity, which was also corroborated by Paterna, a family friend and also a consecrated virgin (*Ep.* 56.21–22). In the last two paragraphs of letter 56, Ambrose reports that after consulting a nurse, he pronounced in favor of Indicia and excommunicated Maximus and his accomplices, Renatus and Leontius.⁹³

89 Ambr *Ep.* 56.17: *te miror, frater, qui tantopere defendas Maximum non fuisse accusatorem, sed parentis dolore doluisse invidiam sparsi rumoris.*

90 Ambr. *Ep.* 56.18: *Qui igitur sibi vult illa argumentatio, qui illud detulerit, quod ad me scripseras, delatam videlicet eam in turpi crimine; ita ut editum et obrutum partum dici asserta? Quasi vero istud ad Indiciam, non ad me scripseris.*

91 Ambrose uses the singular *epistola* (plural *epistolae*) for Syagrius' letter to Indicia but prefers the synonym *litterae* (always plural when referring to a missive) to refer to the letter or letters that he received from Verona. A second communication between both bishops could also have occurred through a different channel and Ambrose's retort "I decided to consult you, not to blame you" (*et tamen cum epistolae tuae sibi non convenirent consulendum te, non arguendum putavi*, *Ep.* 56.18) might indicate that Syagrius had adopted a more defensive tone this time. Ambrose's letter 56, however, does not provide explicit confirmation that Syagrius replied to Ambrose's request.

92 Ambr. *Ep.* 56.21: *nullo accusante, nullis testimoniis perurgentibus.*

93 Ambr. *Ep.* 56.23–24: *Indiciam inoffensi virginem muneris pronuntiavimus.*

The three accusers had left before the end of the trial and were consequently condemned *in absentia*. It is therefore unknown how Syagrius and Maximus learned about Ambrose's verdict. McLynn sees this as evidence that Syagrius gained his information from a third party in the first sentence of letter 56: "You have mentioned in your letter that we need to beware that our beloved Veronese do not oppose our verdict." (*Ep.* 56.1) On this reading, according to McLynn, "Syagrius was understandably aggrieved to learn that Ambrose had not only heard an appeal (without any obvious authority to have done so) but also reversed the original verdict."⁹⁴

However, there is no firm evidence that Syagrius knew of Ambrose's decision before receiving letter 56, and Ambrose's allusion may have been a response to concerns that Syagrius had expressed in his earlier communications with Milan. Nonetheless, after letter 56 there is a shift in tone. Ambrose wrote letter 57 to Syagrius, which opened with an implicit reference to his colleague's irritation: "You know what has happened and is established in my tribunal, and therefore I come now in dialogue with you almost with a part of my soul." This second document contains a further explanation of Ambrose's motivations and justifies his decision by patronizingly lecturing Syagrius on the special status of chastity in the Old Testament.⁹⁵

If my presentation of events is correct, Syagrius' concern about how Indicia's relocation to Milan and her connection with Ambrose might damage his relationship with Maximus was justified. After all, the latter was no ordinary citizen but a member of the Veronese Christian nobility. Other contemporary sources have left ample evidence of the influence that local aristocracy exerted over North Italian bishops.⁹⁶ Ambrose himself confirmed in letter 56 that his colleague was under considerable pressure: "who are those who want to tell us, the bishops, the rules to follow? [...] What will happen to us, who have not complied with their desires?"⁹⁷ Ambrose, however, was more concerned with the Veronese nobles than he dared to admit; of the three accusers, Maximus was the only one who was offered the possibility of being readmitted to communion once he corrected his error (*Ep.* 56.24).

Ambrose also gives evidence that he was not reversing a formal verdict made by his colleague: "We have thus liberated you from the need of conducting a most

94 McLynn 1994, 287, n. 140.

95 Ambr. *Ep.* 57.1: *habens apud te pro castitatis contumelia familiarem et dolentem querelam.*

96 See Gaud. Brix. *Praef. ad Benivolum* 4–5 (CSEL 68, 3–4); Brown 2012, 142–143; Lizzi 1990, 163–8; Matthews 1975, 185–202; Cracco Ruggini 1961, 84–103.

97 Ambr. *Ep.* 56.15: *Quales illi, qui volunt praescribere sacerdotibus quid sequi debeamus? ... Quid nobis futurum est, qui eroum studiis non obtemperavimus?*

serious trial so that you do not need to follow the ‘commanded formula’.”⁹⁸ To have done so would indeed have been a flagrant breach, since episcopal trials were not subject to appeal. As McLynn has rightly pointed out, however, Syagrius had only conducted a preliminary hearing.⁹⁹ Ambrose was therefore legally entitled to adjudicate this case, even if such a prerogative did not emanate from his supposed legal superiority in Aemilia-Liguria.¹⁰⁰

In his letter, however, Ambrose skillfully used the case to rhetorically exaggerate his claim over Verona. He did so by equating his *trial* (*hoc iudicium nostrum*) with Syagrius’ *hearing* (*hoc iudicium tibi*) (Ep. 56.1), so that the former seemed an appeal to a higher authority, presenting Syagrius as a subordinate bishop with a poor grasp of the legal technicalities and the Christian doctrine. Ambrose was aware that, by accepting Indicia’s examination, the Bishop of Verona was trying to appease her accusers (“we do many things for appearance’s sake and not for the sake of truth,” Ep. 56.14), yet he bluntly exposed Syagrius’ lesser legal competence in letter 56. The superiority of Milan is further emphasized in the last paragraph of this document (Ep. 56.24), where the abundant use of legal terminology such as “we declared” (*pronuntiavimus*) and “verdict” (*sententia*) allowed Ambrose to frame himself as having imposed his hierarchical supremacy over Syagrius.

Nonetheless, despite Ambrose’s best efforts to emphasize his formal authority in the sphere of a lesser bishop, his account of the incident reflects the inconsistency of relations among North Italian clerics, as well as the strong influence that local elites exerted over the churches. Syagrius is not among the cast of bishops who joined the suite of councils in the 360s–380s. Perhaps he was too young, but he nevertheless missed the later social benefits of those experiences. It is likely that Syagrius was less deeply connected to Ambrose’s episcopal networks than to the local community. To please Maximus, Syagrius had gone as far as to admit a denunciation against a consecrated virgin without a formal charge by a named plaintiff. Indicia’s strategy proved successful, as she used her indirect relationship with Ambrose to thwart Maximus’ links with Syagrius. Ambrose, however, found himself forced to judge Maximus *in absentia*, and decided to temporarily excommunicate him. But without any other tools of enforcement, the Bishop of Milan depended on Syagrius’ compliance to impose his decision in Verona.¹⁰¹ His second letter to Syagrius, however, does not confirm that Maximus’ excommunication had been implemented. There is no indication that Syagrius replied to the

98 Ambr. Ep. 56.15: *Liberavimus itaque te a cognitionis gravissimae necessitate, ne necesse haberes formulam mandatam exsequi.*

99 McLynn 1994, 287.

100 See n. 58 above.

101 On the complex and conflicting nature of the Roman court system see Humfress 2013, 225–250.

first letter, which probably indicates that he did not happily accept Ambrose's choice of punishment (*Ep.* 57.1).

The conflict with Syagrius shows the extent to which local and imperial aristocratic networks operated on two scales of complexity. Maximus' accusation against Indicia had been designed to be conducted in Verona and relied on the collaboration of his local network, which included friends, slaves, and Bishop Syagrius. By contrast, Indicia expected that by involving Christian nobles from Rome and Milan, the case would turn into an issue of wider concern beyond the city limits. Her strategy proved partially successful; Ambrose adjudicated in her favor, but his ability to punish Maximus in Verona was somewhat limited. Conscious of the difficulties, Ambrose avoided a direct conflict with Syagrius by offering him an easy way to reintegrate Maximus into the community and a second, more deferential explanation of his decision.

More importantly, the case shows the extent to which Ambrose accepted local autonomy as the default setting in Northern Italy. Despite his personal interest in the case (Indicia was a family friend), Ambrose's ability to impose his personal and ecclesiastical authority over Syagrius is uncertain. And yet, Ambrose himself chose these two letters to perpetuate his memory as a prominent figure in the region, even though these documents did not unquestionably prove his metropolitan authority.

6. Conclusions

"Better a neighbor nearby than a friend far away?"¹⁰² Ambrose's strong links with the court placed him in a privileged position from which he could seize critical moments of institutional change to try and steer the embryonic organizational structure of the North Italian Church to his own benefit. Relying on direct and indirect acquaintances, Ambrose garnered support for one of his most renowned ecclesiastical initiatives, the Council of Aquileia. However, Ambrose found it more difficult to influence his North Italian colleagues on other occasions, whose communities hosted complex ecosystems. As the cases of Honoratus and Syagrius demonstrate, clerical communities and urban nobilities exerted great influence over episcopal candidates and incumbent bishops. Ambrose himself was more strongly connected to his Milanese community than to his regional colleagues, whose feelings of belonging and accountability were rather tenuous.

What I hope to have shown in this article is that episcopal authority was more dynamic, volatile, and dependent on the structure of interpersonal relations. In

102 Proverbs 27:10.

an incipient institution with poorly developed tools of enforcement such as the late antique church, the clerics' capacity to monitor and modify the behavior of their peers largely depended on their contingent ability to convince or pressure a sizable number of their colleagues. In other words, authority was not an attribute that resulted from personal qualities and inherited status, but rather a temporary relationship that depended on the roles and frames mooted by clerics at specific moments, as well as the extent to which these were accepted by their peers.

Nonetheless, although Ambrose frequently saw himself compromising and negotiating his authority in Northern Italy, he was indubitably a uniquely prestigious cleric during his time. Contemporary sources eloquently attest his popularity among his Milanese community and how highly regarded he was by bishops elsewhere.¹⁰³ Ambrose also left a strong mark on the North Italian episcopate, and many of its later members fashioned themselves as his inheritors.¹⁰⁴

When exploring clerical authority, historians are at the mercy of the representational strategies of these sources. Late antique Christian champions, including Ambrose and his later followers and commentators, understandably sought to emphasize their authority and prestige and, in doing so, exaggerated the effectiveness of ecclesiastical tools of enforcement and coercion. The limited number of late antique sources further played in their favor; only on rare occasions do we have evidence that their authority was negotiated, disputed, or ignored. But reading Ambrose's writings in light of his social connections allows us to appreciate nuances and patterns that are difficult to spot amidst his florid rhetoric. The potential of Social Network Analysis to provide major breakthroughs is limited for small written collections such as this, but the approach can nonetheless help us to move away from the notion of inherent authority and concentrate on how social capital and soft power were negotiated in informal and more contingent interactions.

Ambrose's case demonstrates that social conventions and implicit patterns of behavior often challenged legally sanctioned ecclesiastical authority.¹⁰⁵ Key to the cohesion and survival of this poorly regulated and informal organizational structure were the everyday negotiations and undertakings of individual players such as Sabinus. And yet, these less conspicuous actors were soon forgotten. Later Christian intellectuals and copyists focused on authors who, just like Ambrose, portrayed the late antique church as an increasingly cohesive and stratified sys-

103 Gerzaguët 2014, 223–224; Humphries 2000, 137–140; Frend 1998, 161–180; Pricoco 1998, 473–474; Lizzi 1990, 154–157; Matthews 1975, 185.

104 This was the case with Gaudentius of Brescia, Vigilus of Trento, and Maximus of Turin. Lizzi 1989, 52–56.

105 Ambrose's *De Officiis*, a manual on idealized ecclesiastical behavior and relationships, offers an interesting counterpoint, see Davidson 2000, 422–423

tem of fully functioning offices. These narratives possess strong generative power and have contributed to molding and legitimating the prevailing centralized and hierarchical structure of the catholic church.¹⁰⁶ However, the extent to which the main characters of the present story lived up to this model is still open to question.

106 This was a formative period in the construction of the legal and organizational structures of the Church and later bishops and popes frequently referred to Ambrose to justify a hierarchical and centralized structure of ecclesiastical offices; see Green 2008, 93; Vocino 2015, 135–137; Bauer 2020, 173–174. On how narratives contribute to the emergence and survival of institutions see DiMaggio and Powell 1991, 53; Mohr and Duquenne 1997, 305–356; Scott 2001, 71–73; North 1990, 7.

Annexes

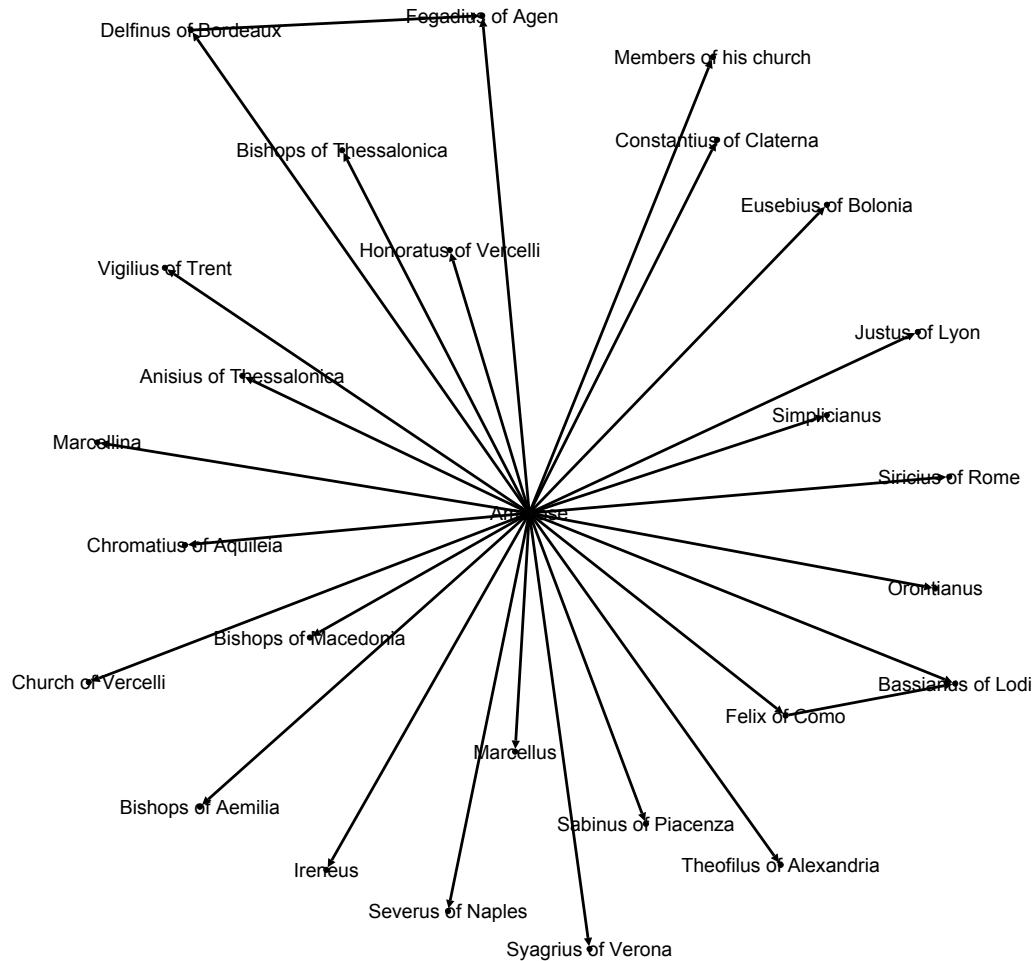


Fig. 1 Visualization of the correspondents of Ambrose's letters

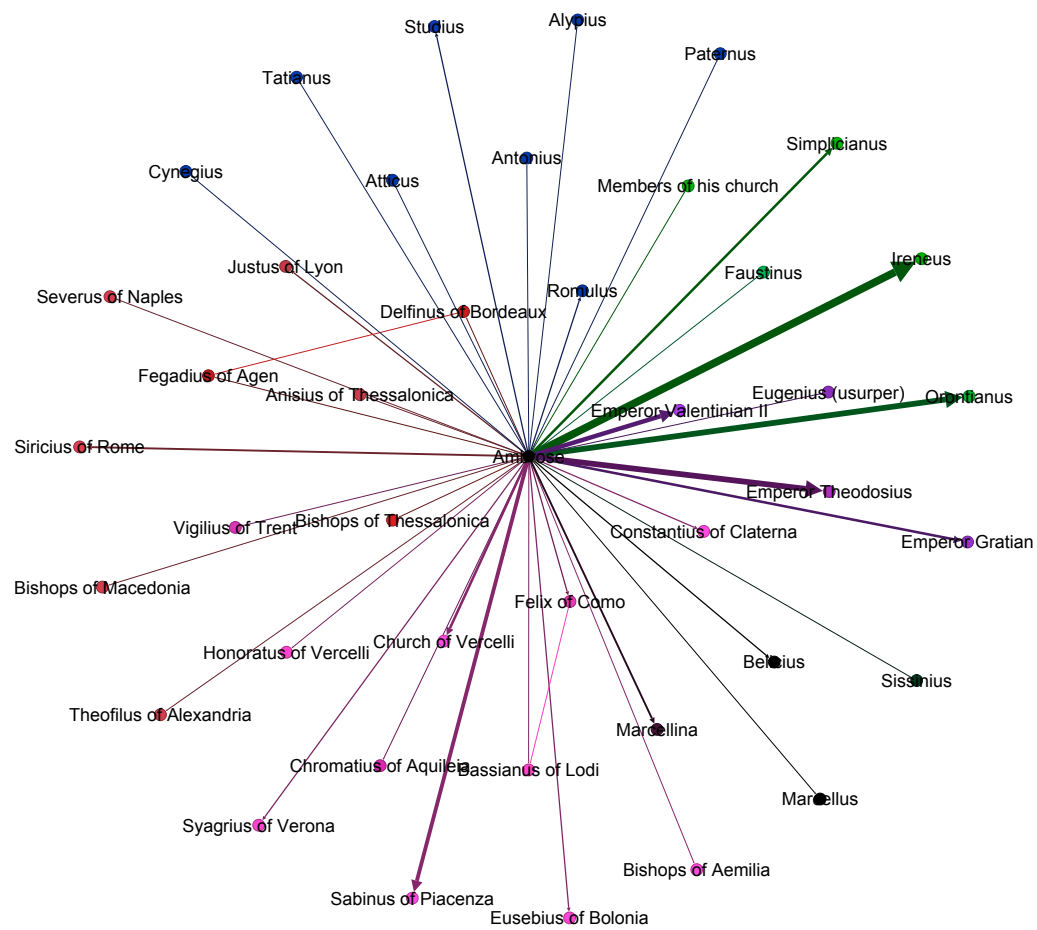


Fig. 2 Ambrose's letters plotting the frequency of interaction (number of letters) and sub-communities

Purple: emperors and usurper
 Pink: North Italian bishops
 Green: members of the Milanese Presbyterium
 Red: other bishops
 Black: addressees of unknown rank and Ambrose's sister
 Blue: individuals of consular rank

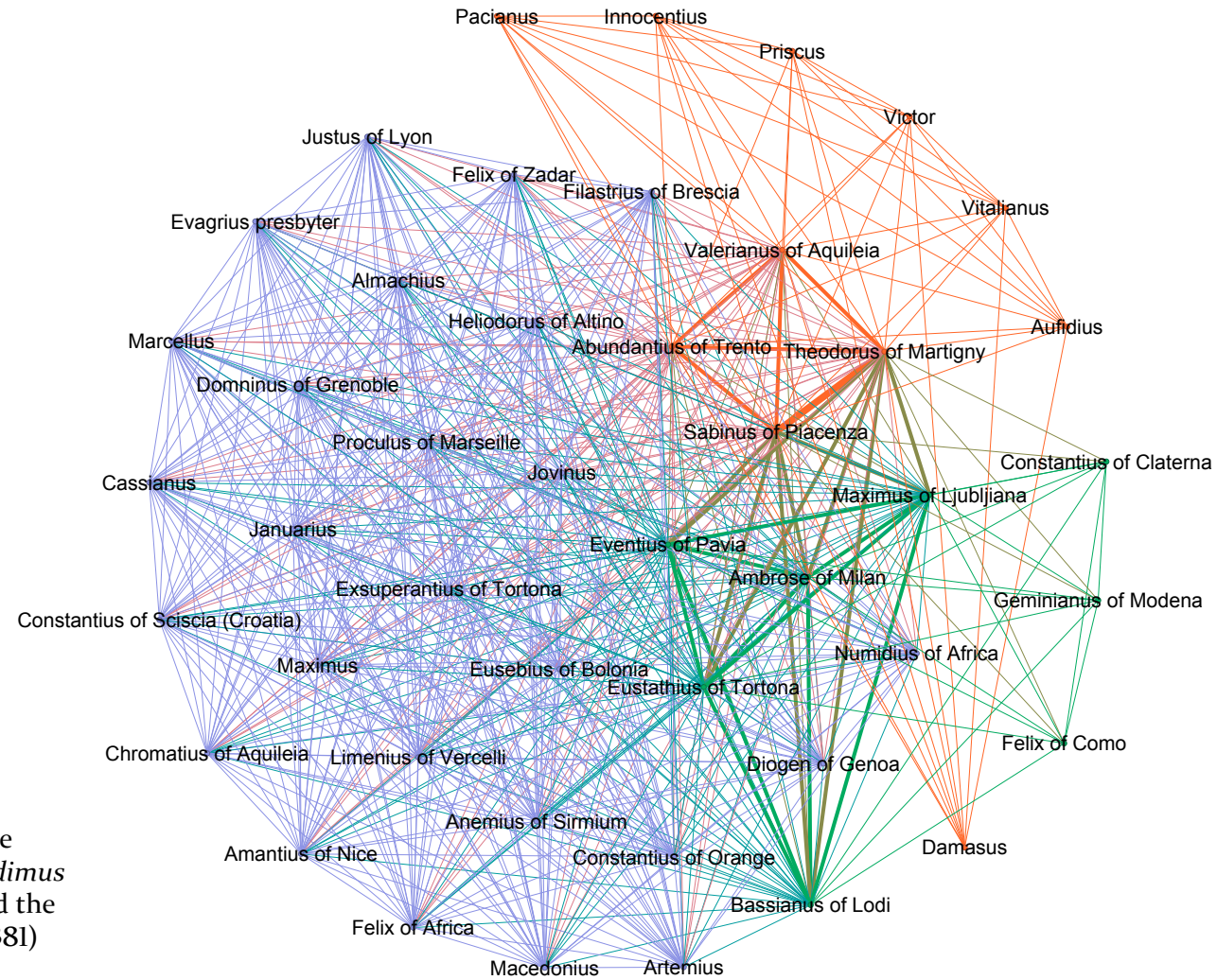


Fig. 3 Attendees at the Synod of Rome (*confidimus quidem*, 368–373), and the councils of Aquileia (381) and Milan (393)

Id	Label	Degree	Weighted Degree	Eccentricity	Closeness Centrality	Harmonic Closeness Centrality	Betweenness Centrality	Eigenvector Centrality	Component ID	Modularity Class	Clustering Coefficient	Number of triangles
7	Sabinus of Piacenza	44	53.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	76.75	1.0	0	0	0.659619	624
37	Theodorus of Martigny	44	53.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	76.75	1.0	0	0	0.659619	624
29	Valerianus of Aquileia	41	44.0	2.0	0.93617	0.965909	54.25	0.981032	0	0	0.735366	603
36	Abundantius of Trento	41	44.0	2.0	0.93617	0.965909	54.25	0.981032	0	0	0.735366	603
1	Ambrose of Milan	37	43.0	2.0	0.862745	0.920455	12.0	0.967886	0	1	0.873874	582
25	Bassianus of Lodi	37	43.0	2.0	0.862745	0.920455	12.0	0.967886	0	1	0.873874	582
44	Maximus of Ljubljana	37	43.0	2.0	0.862745	0.920455	12.0	0.967886	0	1	0.873874	582
46	Eventius of Pavia	37	43.0	2.0	0.862745	0.920455	12.0	0.967886	0	1	0.873874	582
60	Eustathius of Tortona	37	43.0	2.0	0.862745	0.920455	12.0	0.967886	0	1	0.873874	582
2	Eusebius of Bologna	34	34.0	2.0	0.814815	0.886364	0.0	0.948918	0	2	1.0	561
3	Felix of Como	9	9.0	2.0	0.556962	0.602273	0.0	0.213351	0	1	1.0	36
8	Chromatius of Aquileia	34	34.0	2.0	0.814815	0.886364	0.0	0.948918	0	2	1.0	561
21	Justus of Lyon	34	34.0	2.0	0.814815	0.886364	0.0	0.948918	0	2	1.0	561
26	Constantius of Claterna	9	9.0	2.0	0.556962	0.602273	0.0	0.213351	0	1	1.0	36
30	Vitalianus	10	10.0	2.0	0.564103	0.613636	0.0	0.145147	0	0	1.0	45
31	Auridius	10	10.0	2.0	0.564103	0.613636	0.0	0.145147	0	0	1.0	45
32	Pacianus	10	10.0	2.0	0.564103	0.613636	0.0	0.145147	0	0	1.0	45
33	Victor	10	10.0	2.0	0.564103	0.613636	0.0	0.145147	0	0	1.0	45
34	Priscus	10	10.0	2.0	0.564103	0.613636	0.0	0.145147	0	0	1.0	45
35	Innocentius	10	10.0	2.0	0.564103	0.613636	0.0	0.145147	0	0	1.0	45
38	Damasus	10	10.0	2.0	0.564103	0.613636	0.0	0.145147	0	0	1.0	45
39	Constantius of Orange	34	34.0	2.0	0.814815	0.886364	0.0	0.948918	0	2	1.0	561
40	Constantius of Sciscia...	34	34.0	2.0	0.814815	0.886364	0.0	0.948918	0	2	1.0	561
41	Diogen of Genoa	34	34.0	2.0	0.814815	0.886364	0.0	0.948918	0	2	1.0	561
42	Dominus of Grenoble	34	34.0	2.0	0.814815	0.886364	0.0	0.948918	0	2	1.0	561
43	Amantius of Nice	34	34.0	2.0	0.814815	0.886364	0.0	0.948918	0	2	1.0	561
45	Felix of Zadar	34	34.0	2.0	0.814815	0.886364	0.0	0.948918	0	2	1.0	561
47	Numidius of Africa	34	34.0	2.0	0.814815	0.886364	0.0	0.948918	0	2	1.0	561
48	Felix of Africa	34	34.0	2.0	0.814815	0.886364	0.0	0.948918	0	2	1.0	561
49	Proculus of Marseille	34	34.0	2.0	0.814815	0.886364	0.0	0.948918	0	2	1.0	561
50	Hellodorus of Altino	34	34.0	2.0	0.814815	0.886364	0.0	0.948918	0	2	1.0	561
51	Filastrus of Brescia	34	34.0	2.0	0.814815	0.886364	0.0	0.948918	0	2	1.0	561
52	Jovinus	34	34.0	2.0	0.814815	0.886364	0.0	0.948918	0	2	1.0	561
53	Januarius	34	34.0	2.0	0.814815	0.886364	0.0	0.948918	0	2	1.0	561
54	Almachius	34	34.0	2.0	0.814815	0.886364	0.0	0.948918	0	2	1.0	561
55	Artemius	34	34.0	2.0	0.814815	0.886364	0.0	0.948918	0	2	1.0	561
56	Maximus	34	34.0	2.0	0.814815	0.886364	0.0	0.948918	0	2	1.0	561
57	Macedonius	34	34.0	2.0	0.814815	0.886364	0.0	0.948918	0	2	1.0	561
58	Cassianus	34	34.0	2.0	0.814815	0.886364	0.0	0.948918	0	2	1.0	561
59	Marcellus	34	34.0	2.0	0.814815	0.886364	0.0	0.948918	0	2	1.0	561
61	Geminianus of Modena	9	9.0	2.0	0.556962	0.602273	0.0	0.213351	0	1	1.0	36
62	Evagrius presbyter	34	34.0	2.0	0.814815	0.886364	0.0	0.948918	0	2	1.0	561
66	Limenius of Vercelli	34	34.0	2.0	0.814815	0.886364	0.0	0.948918	0	2	1.0	561
67	Anemius of Sirmium	34	34.0	2.0	0.814815	0.886364	0.0	0.948918	0	2	1.0	561
68	Exsuperantius of Torto...	34	34.0	2.0	0.814815	0.886364	0.0	0.948918	0	2	1.0	561

Fig. 3a centrality measures for Fig 3 (Gephi)

Id	Label	Degree	Weighted Degree	Eccentricity	Closeness Centrality	Harmonic Closeness Centrality	Betweenness Centrality	Eigenvector Centrality	Modularity Class	Inferred Class	Clustering Coefficient	Number of triangles
1	Ambrose	57	109.0	2.0	0.901408	0.945312	1081.0	0.990465	0	0	0.365288	583
7	Sabinus of Piacenza	44	59.0	2.0	0.761905	0.84375	111.75	1.0	0	2	0.659619	624
37	Theodorus of Martigny	44	53.0	2.0	0.761905	0.84375	111.75	1.0	1	1	0.659619	624
29	Valerianus of Aquileia	41	44.0	2.0	0.735632	0.820312	89.25	0.980888	1	3	0.735366	603
36	Abundantius of Trento	41	44.0	2.0	0.735632	0.820312	89.25	0.980888	1	2	0.735366	603
25	Bassianus of Lodi	37	44.0	2.0	0.703297	0.789062	12.0	0.968049	0	12	0.873874	582
44	Maximus of Ljubljana	37	43.0	2.0	0.703297	0.789062	12.0	0.968049	0	4	0.873874	582
46	Eventius of Pavia	37	43.0	2.0	0.703297	0.789062	12.0	0.968049	0	12	0.873874	582
60	Eustathius	37	43.0	2.0	0.703297	0.789062	12.0	0.968049	0	16	0.873874	582
2	Eusebius of Bologna	34	36.0	2.0	0.680851	0.765625	0.0	0.948937	2	18	1.0	561
3	Felix of Como	9	11.0	2.0	0.537815	0.570312	0.0	0.214476	0	1	1.0	36
4	Honoratus of Vercelli	1	1.0	3.0	0.477612	0.489583	0.0	0.029523	0	0	0.0	0
5	Marcellus (addressee)	1	1.0	3.0	0.477612	0.489583	0.0	0.029523	0	0	0.0	0
6	Bishops of Aemilia	1	1.0	3.0	0.477612	0.489583	0.0	0.029523	0	0	0.0	0
8	Chromatius of Aquileia	34	35.0	2.0	0.680851	0.765625	0.0	0.948937	2	17	1.0	561
9	Severus of Naples	1	1.0	3.0	0.477612	0.489583	0.0	0.029523	0	0	0.0	0
10	Syagrius of Verona	1	2.0	3.0	0.477612	0.489583	0.0	0.029523	0	0	0.0	0
11	Siricius of Rome	1	3.0	3.0	0.477612	0.489583	0.0	0.029523	0	0	0.0	0
12	Vigilius of Trent	1	1.0	3.0	0.477612	0.489583	0.0	0.029523	0	0	0.0	0
13	Ireneus	1	12.0	3.0	0.477612	0.489583	0.0	0.029523	0	0	0.0	0
14	Marcellina	1	3.0	3.0	0.477612	0.489583	0.0	0.029523	0	0	0.0	0
15	Orontianus	1	9.0	3.0	0.477612	0.489583	0.0	0.029523	0	0	0.0	0
16	Simplicianus	1	4.0	3.0	0.477612	0.489583	0.0	0.029523	0	0	0.0	0
17	Members of his church	1	1.0	3.0	0.477612	0.489583	0.0	0.029523	0	0	0.0	0
18	Anisius of Thessalonica	1	1.0	3.0	0.477612	0.489583	0.0	0.029523	0	0	0.0	0
19	Delfinus of Bordeaux	2	2.0	3.0	0.481203	0.497396	0.0	0.030772	0	0	1.0	1
20	Fegadius of Agen	2	2.0	3.0	0.481203	0.497396	0.0	0.030772	0	0	1.0	1
21	Justus of Lyon	34	36.0	2.0	0.680851	0.765625	0.0	0.948937	2	14	1.0	561
22	Theofilus of Alexandria	1	1.0	3.0	0.477612	0.489583	0.0	0.029523	0	0	0.0	0
23	Bishops of Macedonia	1	1.0	3.0	0.477612	0.489583	0.0	0.029523	0	0	0.0	0
24	Bishops of Thessalonica	1	1.0	3.0	0.477612	0.489583	0.0	0.029523	0	0	0.0	0
26	Constantius of Claterna	9	11.0	2.0	0.537815	0.570312	0.0	0.214476	0	1	1.0	36
27	Church of Vercelli	1	4.0	3.0	0.477612	0.489583	0.0	0.029523	0	0	0.0	0
28	Faustinus	1	1.0	3.0	0.477612	0.489583	0.0	0.029523	0	0	0.0	0
30	Vitalianus	10	10.0	3.0	0.463768	0.526042	0.0	0.144805	1	3	1.0	45
31	Aufidius	10	10.0	3.0	0.463768	0.526042	0.0	0.144805	1	3	1.0	45
32	Pacianus	10	10.0	3.0	0.463768	0.526042	0.0	0.144805	1	3	1.0	45
33	Victor	10	10.0	3.0	0.463768	0.526042	0.0	0.144805	1	3	1.0	45
34	Priscus	10	10.0	3.0	0.463768	0.526042	0.0	0.144805	1	3	1.0	45
35	Innocentius	10	10.0	3.0	0.463768	0.526042	0.0	0.144805	1	3	1.0	45
38	Damasus	10	10.0	3.0	0.463768	0.526042	0.0	0.144805	1	3	1.0	45
39	Constantius of Orange	34	34.0	2.0	0.680851	0.765625	0.0	0.948937	2	13	1.0	561
40	Constantius of Sciscia ...	34	34.0	2.0	0.680851	0.765625	0.0	0.948937	2	9	1.0	561
41	Diogen of Genoa	34	34.0	2.0	0.680851	0.765625	0.0	0.948937	2	4	1.0	561
42	Domninus of Grenoble	34	34.0	2.0	0.680851	0.765625	0.0	0.948937	2	10	1.0	561
43	Amantius of Nice	34	34.0	2.0	0.680851	0.765625	0.0	0.948937	2	11	1.0	561
45	Felix of Zadar	34	34.0	2.0	0.680851	0.765625	0.0	0.948937	2	7	1.0	561
47	Numidius of Africa	34	34.0	2.0	0.680851	0.765625	0.0	0.948937	2	16	1.0	561
48	Felix of Africa	34	34.0	2.0	0.680851	0.765625	0.0	0.948937	2	15	1.0	561
49	Proculus of Marseille	34	34.0	2.0	0.680851	0.765625	0.0	0.948937	2	14	1.0	561
50	Heliodorus of Altino	34	34.0	2.0	0.680851	0.765625	0.0	0.948937	2	13	1.0	561
51	Filastrus of Brescia	34	34.0	2.0	0.680851	0.765625	0.0	0.948937	2	10	1.0	561
52	Jovinus	34	34.0	2.0	0.680851	0.765625	0.0	0.948937	2	11	1.0	561
53	Januarius	34	34.0	2.0	0.680851	0.765625	0.0	0.948937	2	6	1.0	561
54	Almachius	34	34.0	2.0	0.680851	0.765625	0.0	0.948937	2	9	1.0	561

Fig. 4a centrality measures for Fig 4 (Gephi)

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