

7 Mobility and networks from 976 to 991 in the letters of Gerbert of Reims. A quantitative approach

7.1 Introduction

Letters serve as a particularly invaluable medieval genre through which to explore mobility and networks. They bridge the gap between individuals who would be otherwise unable to communicate due to their geographical separation, thanks to messengers who undertake these journeys on their behalf. Additionally, letters often contain references to further mobility, whether it be through reference of travellers in the author's vicinity at the time of writing or mentions of assignments and tasks that necessitated physical movement.¹ This study uses the collection of letters mainly authored by Gerbert of Reims – the future Pope Sylvester II – as a case study through which to examine the potentials and limitations of employing quantitative analysis in the study of early medieval epistolary exchange.

Gerbert was probably born to free parents in Auvergne around 940/5 and entered the local monastery of St. Gerard in Aurillac as an oblate at an early age. His education was furthered after a visit by the Count Borell II of Barcelona to the monastery in 967, who took Gerbert to Catalan Spain. In December 970, Gerbert embarked on his first visit to Rome, accompanied by Bishop Hatto of Vich, who played a pivotal role in his advanced education. During this period, Gerbert resided in the vicinity of Pope John XIII where he encountered Otto I and his family. His allegiance remained firmly with the empire throughout his life. Although he spent the majority of his time in the western city of Reims, he considered himself an advocate of the empire, not of the Frankish kings of the western realm. In 972, on the occasion of Otto II's marriage to Theophanu in Rome, Gerbert encountered the archdeacon Gerannus of Reims and joined him in his episcopal see where he served as a teacher in the cathedral school. According to the historian Richer of St. Remis, Gerbert swiftly gained recognition for his scholarly excellence and his exceptional teaching skills.² Around 982, after a stint at Otto II's court in Ravenna, Gerbert was appointed as the abbot of the monastery of Bobbio. However, following the death of the emperor in December 983, he returned to Reims. Here, he assumed the role of a political advisor to Archbishop Adalbero of

1 On early medieval letter collections in Lotharingia, see, e.g., *Witzleb*, Briefe und Briefsammlungen (2017).

2 Richer, Hist. 3.43 and 3.55–3.57. Ed. Hoffmann, 191–191 and 198–200.

Reims and, later, became the defender of the young Otto III against his cousin, Henry of Bavaria, and the Frankish king Lothar. This period saw the capture of Verdun by the Frankish king and the imprisonment of Adalbero's brother, Count Godfrey. Gerbert continued to support Adalbero against the Frankish kings and played a pivotal role in the coronation of Hugh Capet in May 987 – the time at which the city of Laon was captured, leading to the imprisonment of Adalbero and Queen Emma. Although Gerbert was expected to succeed his archbishop after Adalbero's demise in 989, the king chose the Carolingian Arnulf for that role. Gerbert served briefly in Arnulf's service before siding with the Capetian faction. He ultimately assumed the position of archbishop of Reims in 991, and in this capacity, he travelled to Rome in 995, participating in the coronation of Otto III. Upon his return to Francia, he once again faced challenging circumstances, prompting him to align with Otto III, who appointed him as the archbishop of Ravenna in 998. In April 999, Gerbert ascended to the papacy, becoming Silvester II, a position he held until his death on 12th May 1003.³

7.2 Gerbert's letter collection

Letters from Gerbert of Reims and his addressees have been preserved from the time period between 976 and 1003, the year of his death. It appears that Gerbert himself initiated the collection, meaning that it was probably he who chose which letters to retain and which to omit. Gerbert's collection now comprises approximately 220 letters, the exact count varying depending on the criteria used by the respective edition. The majority of these were penned by Gerbert himself, primarily for his patrons, as we shall see.⁴ These epistles are preserved in two manuscripts: the first originates from Leiden and was written by different scribes on 136 leaves, dating back as early as between 999 and 1011. This particular manuscript is believed to correspond to a copy Gerbert sent to Constantine of Mincy (Ep. 86).⁵ The second manuscript is now

3 For further biographic information on Gerbert, see *Lattin*, Introduction (1961), 3–31; *Weigle*, Einleitung (1966), 1–3; *Riché/Callu*, Introduction (1993), vii–xi and xxx–xxxii; *Demouy*, Gerbert (2005), and the extensive treatment in *Flusche*, The life (2005). On his relation to Aurillac, see *Lauranson-Rosaz*, Entre deux mondes (1997); on his time in Spain, see *Gainet*, Le Voyage (1851) and *Gümpel*, Gerbert von Aurillac (2002); on his relation to Bobbio, see *Riché*, Gerbert d'Aurillac (2001), 49–64; on his role as a teacher in Reims, see *Darlington*, Gerbert, the Teacher (1947), *DeMayo*, The students (2012), and *Lake*, Gerbert of Aurillac (2013); on his relationship to the Ottonians, see *Fauvarque*, Gerbert-Sylvestre II (2005) and *Nuvolone*, Gerbert d'Aurillac (2007); and on his (confidential) epistolary network, see *Cousin*, Un réseau épistolaire (2020).

4 *Riché/Callu*, Introduction (1993), xxii and xxvii–xxviii. See also *Riché*, Gerbert d'Aurillac (2014).

5 Leiden, Bibliotheek der Rijksuniversiteit, Vossianis lat. Q 54. See *Riché/Callu*, Introduction (1993), xxiii.

located in Rome and dates to the seventeenth century.⁶ While the chronological order of the letters is generally consistent between the two manuscripts, neither of them contains all of the known letters.⁷ The initial portion of the official collection encompasses letters from 983 to 991 and is found in the Leiden manuscript, extending from fols. 52^v to 82^v. These epistles are interposed with some omissions and are separated from the later letters – spanning from fols. 87^r to 97^v – by additional material, such as the acts of the synods held in Mouzon and Reims in 995.⁸

Most of the letters preserved from Gerbert's records were written between 983 and 991. The editor Fritz Weigle suggested differentiating the period under Adalbero's leadership – extending up to 23rd January 989 – during which he has identified 139 letters (Ep. 16 to 154). Following this, the period of Arnulf, from April/May 989 to June 991, includes 24 letters (Ep. 155 to 178). As noted, Gerbert did not write most of his letters in his own name, but in his role as the secretary of his respective patrons: firstly, Adalbero of Reims, with 72 letters, and subsequently Arnulf, with around 8 to 10 letters, depending on the edition. Rulers such as Otto III and Hugh Capet also received letters authored by Gerbert. Some of these were likely dictated to the scribe.⁹ Occasionally, Gerbert favoured oral messages, as evident in a letter to Otto II in which he recommended his trustee Rainier by emphasising that certain crucial information should not be conveyed in writing.¹⁰ A similar attitude is attested in reference to the Abbot Ayrard of St. Thierry, who was expected to return with oral messages.¹¹ Regrettably, this means we may be missing some vital information that was considered sensitive at the time.

Of the letters composed in Gerbert's name, approximately 80 are of a highly political nature, with more personal epistles being the exception.¹² In some cases, such as

⁶ Rome, Bibliotheca Vallicelliana, lat. G 94. *Riché/Callu*, Introduction (1993), with xi–xv, on the earlier, and xvi–xxi, on the later manuscript. Similar Weigle, Einleitung (1966), 8–16, with references to further manuscripts based on those mentioned above. See also Weigle, Studien (1958); Stoppacci, Costantino di Fleury (2018).

⁷ See the comprehensive overview in *Riché/Callu*, Introduction (1993), xxiv–xxv.

⁸ *Riché/Callu*, Introduction (1993), xxiii–xxvii.

⁹ Gerbert, Ep. 66. Ed. *Riché/Callu*, 166: *dum haec dictavimus*; Lake, Gerbert of Aurillac (2013), 278.

¹⁰ Gerbert, Ep. 2. Ed. *Riché/Callu*, 8: *Suscipite nus amici consilio et auxilio, et quid sit faciendum rescribite*. See also Gerbert, Ep. 30. Ed. *Riché/Callu*, 66: *totum non est credendum cartis*.

¹¹ Gerbert, Ep. 34. Ed. *Riché/Callu*, 82–84: *Multa cartis non credimus, quae legatis committimus*. [. . .] *Ut sibi, sic legato credite, et quaevobis placeant, si non est aptum scriptis, vel vivis rependite verbis*. Similar Gerbert, Ep. 38 and 49. Ed. *Riché/Callu*.

¹² The above follows the counts made by Weigle, Einleitung (1966), 3. See also *Riché/Callu*, Introduction (1993), who, in a list at pp. xxxv–xli, only make such differentiations for the period between 7th December 983 and 23rd January 989, referring to a total of 77 letters written for others, with 63 letters in the name of Adalbero and 5 for Hugh Capet, and 56 letters written in Gerbert's name. For a more thorough survey on earlier letters from the Lotharingian region, see Witzleb, Briefe und Briefsammungen (2017). Lake, Gerbert of Aurillac (2013), 282, counts 8 letters that would have been written in the name of Hugh Capet.

Ep. 28, 117, or 118, it remains unclear whether a particular letter was in fact dispatched.¹³ The number of letters post-dating Gerbert's ordination as the Archbishop of Reims in 991 is notably smaller, totalling only 42. After his election as the Archbishop of Reims in mid-June 991 and his consecration as pope in April 999, there is a noticeable decline in the number of preserved letters. This is not due to the brevity of these phases, as indicated in Figure 7.1. The post-991 section of the collection features significant gaps between individual letters, with some years without any surviving letters. In contrast to the earlier part of the collection, up to Ep. 180, these letters lack a chronological order.¹⁴ This reduction in the number of preserved letters is unexpected, as Gerbert's rise in status during these years should logically have led to an increase in the volume of his correspondence. The rationale for this discrepancy may be linked to the nature of his initial collection, as he appears to have made a first selection around 991.¹⁵

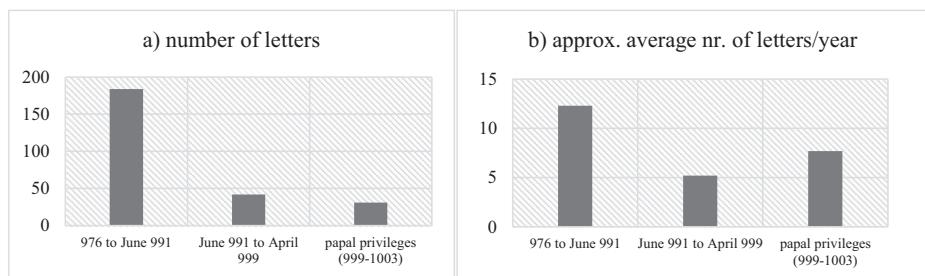


Figure 7.1: Comparing the total number of letters attested for the specified periods (including letters mentioned in these writings) to the approximate average number of letters per year.

In 1889, Julien Havet released a critical edition of Gerbert's letters, and Fritz Weigle edited another version for the *Monumenta Germaniae Historica* in 1966.¹⁶ Both scholars strove to reconstruct Gerbert's original collection. Accompanying these editions, further letters have been preserved, particularly within Gerbert's mathematical work, which has been edited by Nikolai Bubnov.¹⁷ Some additional letters are included in

¹³ Riché/Callu, Introduction (1993), xxiii–xxix.

¹⁴ Weigle, Einleitung (1966), 4; Riché/Callu, Introduction (1993), xxvii–xxxii, counting at p. xxviii, only 58 letters written in the name of Adalbero, and 8 letters in the name of Hugh Capet.

¹⁵ See also Lake, Gerbert of Aurillac (2013), 273–275; Witzleb, Briefe und Briefsammlungen (2017), 178–179.

¹⁶ Gerbert, Ep. Ed. Havet and Ed. Weigle.

¹⁷ Gerbert, Ep. Ed. Bubnov. See also Qandil/König, 984 (2021), access [wiki.uni-konstanz.de/transmeden/index.php/984:_Some_Letters_by_Gerbert_d'Aurillac_Dealing_with_“Arabic”_Mathematics_and_Astrology](http://wiki.uni-konstanz.de/transmeden/index.php/984:_Some_Letters_by_Gerbert_d'Aurillac_Dealing_with_‘Arabic’_Mathematics_and_Astrology) (accessed: 10.09.2024).

Havet's appendix. Moreover, there are 31 papal privileges also included – at least in part – in the English translation published by Harriet Pratt Lattin in 1961.¹⁸ In 1993, a bilingual edition (with a French translation by Pierre Riché and Jean-Pierre Callu) followed, encompassing a total of 214 letters. However, this edition omits Gerbert's writings to Constantin and Adelbod of Liège, which were edited by Bubnov (vol. II, pp. 6–8, 23–24, 25–28, 29–30, 32–35, 43–45), and his preface letter to his *Libellus de rationali et ratione uti* (as found in Havet's appendix II, pp. 236–238). Although Gerbert's papal documents are not included, this edition nevertheless incorporates Ep. 217 (Leiden, BR, Voss. lat. Q 54, fol. 41–52v), which was not present in Weigle's edition. The edition also features an appendix containing three letters to Pope John XV and extracts from a letter of Abbo to Gregory V (Rome, BV, lat. G 94), situated between the epistles 181 and 218.¹⁹

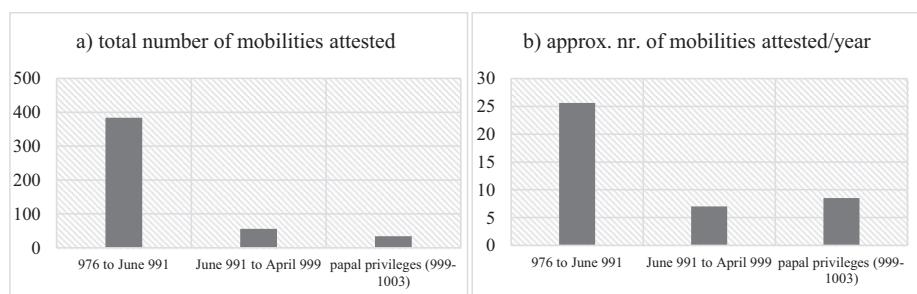


Figure 7.2: The mobilities attested in the letters of Gerbert of Reims.

In this study, I initially included all of Gerbert's letters, but eventually narrowed my focus for further analysis, as I will elaborate shortly. Based on the data collected, it became evident that Gerbert's letters reached a total of 110 individual recipients spanning the years 976 to 1003, with 42 individuals receiving multiple correspondences. For the purposes of this analysis, my primary focus is directed towards the letters dated between 976 and 991. Although there is no compelling reason to assume that the mobility of Gerbert and his vicinity decreased after 991 – if anything, it likely increased – the number of documented journeys described in his letters nevertheless wanes notably during this period (as illustrated in Figure 7.2). Beyond the reduction in the volume of letters, potential explanations may revolve around the more politicised nature of the preserved letters from June 991 onwards. They tend to be less informative concerning the author's surroundings. This observation is further validated by the fact that even when a journey is mentioned in these later letters, the relevant information is often so vague that any attempt to discern the journey's details re-

18 Lattin (Ed.), The Letters of Gerbert (1961).

19 Riché/Callu, Introduction (1993), xlvi.

quires much speculation, rendering it less suitable for a comprehensive study. As a result, only the letters predating June 991 – which comprise a more consistent set of epistles, encompassing each year and referencing a broad array of journeys – are included in the current study.

In addition to the letters contained within the official collection, my research also incorporates the epistles known from Gerbert's other work mentioned above, provided they are dated to the period before 991. With this addition, a total of 184 letters have been preserved for said period. This excludes epitaphs and other writings that were likely never intended for dispatch.²⁰ A quantitative analysis of the 184 letters was conducted utilising an Excel database, gathering various data pertaining to the journeys documented in these correspondences. Starting with just over ten personal letters dating from 976 onwards, the official collection commences with Gerbert's residence in Bobbio in 983. During this period, 15 letters were dispatched, with a significant portion addressed to Otto II and his court. Subsequent letters were predominantly penned in Reims and were directed towards high-ranking individuals representing a cross-section of the medieval elite across various regions of Europe. The bulk of the recipients were members of the clergy, particularly (arch)bishops and abbots. Notably, approximately 8% of the letters were addressed to prominent women (see Figure 7.3).

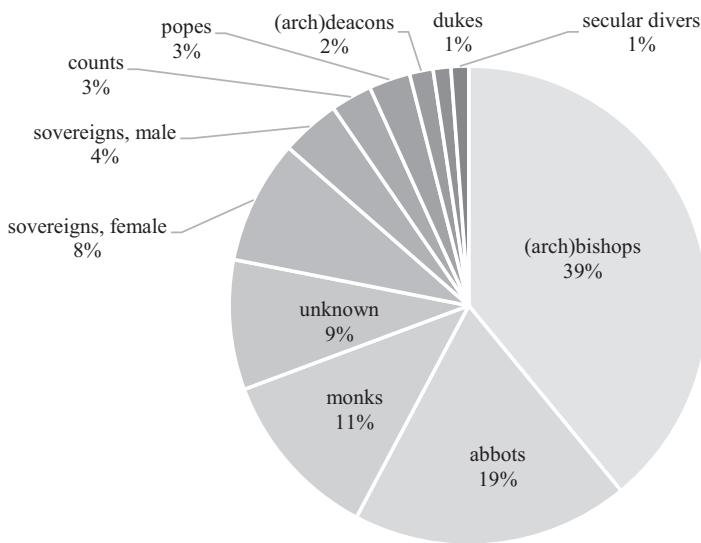


Figure 7.3: Relative proportions of the groups of letter recipients attested in Gerbert's letters (976–991).

²⁰ This applies to Gerbert, Ep. 75 to 79 and Ep. 90. Ed. *Riché/Callu*.

7.3 Deficiencies in the textual transmission

Gerbert's collection of letters presents an excellent choice for the study of early medieval mobility due to its volume and comparably heterogenic set of correspondences. However, it is not without substantial challenges, difficulties that are common for the correspondence of this era. As such, this collection is also a good example for discussing potential issues and their impact on the utility of this type of historical source. One notable issue here is the absence of preserved responses to the dispatched letters.²¹ In fact, there are only four exceptions – Epp. 143, 220, 218, 186. To address this in the context of an Excell research database, responses (and the journeys they implied) have been incorporated whenever a missing letter was referred to or when a letter suggested that a messenger was expected to return after his or her mission. Still, the absence of responses means that we are left with less than half of the correspondence known to have actually circulated. A closer examination of the collection further reveals that it contains only a comparably small selection of letters, as alluded to above in the discussion of Gerbert's role as the compiler. Consequently, the collection does in no way correspond to the sum of letters initially dispatched from Gerbert's desk.

A second issue relates to the lack of explicit dates in Gerbert's letters, in the condition they have reached us. Often, even information about the location and/or recipients is missing.²² Although the editions and translations mentioned above tend to suggest otherwise at first glance, typically providing at least approximate dates, these are usually conjectures built on disputable assumptions. As a result, different publications regularly offer notably variable dates for the same letter. For instance, Lattin dates Ep. 25 to 25th March 984,²³ while Weigle estimates a date around March or April of the same year;²⁴ Riché and Callu, meanwhile, suggest a more general timeframe of spring 984.²⁵ Consequently, these letters can, at best, only tentatively support inquiries into travel frequency or speed when offering more specific dates related to these journeys. Occasionally, we do find rare instances of specific dates, such as in Ep. 43, which mentions Notger of Liège's voyage to the ordination of Adalbert of Verdun – planned to commence on 28th December 984, with an estimated arrival on 3rd January 985.²⁶ Assuming that Notger was in Liège and that the ordination took place in Verdun, as Weigel presumed,²⁷ this journey

²¹ Lake, Gerbert of Aurillac (2013), 274.

²² Weigle, Einleitung (1966), 4. Gerbert, Ep. Trans. *Lattin*, 117, suggests that Ep. 71 (counted as Ep. 78) is the only one bearing a date. However, as Weigle, Einleitung (1966), 4, n. 13, with further references, makes clear, this was only added to the register at a later date.

²³ Trans. *Lattin*, 70, counted this letter as Gerbert, Ep. 33.

²⁴ Gerbert, Ep. Ed. Weigle, 47.

²⁵ Gerbert, Ep. Ed. Riché/Callu 51.

²⁶ Gerbert, Ep. 43. Ed. Riché/Callu, 104: *Secundum promissa Treverensis archiepiscopi ordinationem A[dalberonis] nostri III non. jan. inspecturi, ubi adhuc decreverit, ducem itineris vestri V kl. praemitemus, et quae certiora cognoverimus, denunciabimus.* It corresponds to Gerbert. Ep. 49, in Trans. *Lattin*.

²⁷ Gerbert, Ep. Ed. Weigle, 71, n. 2.

would have covered 190 kilometres in six days, averaging about 32 kilometres a day²⁸ – a speed that corresponds to the usual average during that period.²⁹ Another example, demonstrating notably faster travel, can be found in Ep. 94. Penned in Reims, likely on or shortly after 24th September 986, it invited Adalbert of Reims – who may have been either in Mouzon or Charleville-Mézières at the time – to visit Hautvilliers, a monastery near Epernay, approximately 23.5 kilometres south of Reims, on 27th September. This letter implies that the messenger either traversed 84 kilometres (if the destination was Charleville-Mézières) or 93 kilometres (if it was Mouzon) from Reims to convey the message. Assuming no significant delays for packing, Adalbert would have covered an additional 104 kilometres (Charleville-Mézières) or 114 kilometres (Mouzon) thereafter. In total, this suggests that both the messenger and the archbishop would have had to cover around 69 kilometres (Mouzon) or 63 kilometres (Charleville-Mézières) each day in order to meet the three-day timeframe mentioned. This was the upper limit of what was typically achievable on horseback.³⁰ However, it is important to note that these calculations remain unreliable since the letter does not specify the month, leaving room for alternative dates.³¹

Further complications emerge when considering that the letters do not consistently mention the addressee. While, in 27 cases, relevant names are spelled out, abbreviations are much more frequent and, in 42 cases, this section is omitted entirely.³² In such instances, we must rely once again on inferences drawn from a letter's content and context. A similar challenge is posed by the location of the respective recipient, which can often be deduced thanks to additional information, but certainty remains elusive. The same uncertainty applies to whether a letter was actually sent and whether the plans articulated in writing were ever realised.

7.4 Methodology

Gerbert's letters reveal a multifaceted view of mobility, which can be categorised into two distinct groups. The first category encompasses journeys undertaken by messengers, attested by every letter dispatched. Regrettably, Gerbert's correspondence only offers spo-

²⁸ However, the letter does not explicitly confirm that the ordination was planned to take place in Verdun, and it was finally postponed to December 985, see Gerbert. Ep. Trans. *Lattin*, 94, n. 1. Further uncertainty is added by the fact that, according to the comments on Gerbert, Ep. 43, in Ed. *Weigle*, 71, it was the ordination that was meant to take place on 28th of December 894.

²⁹ Cf. McCormick, *Origins of the European economy* (2001). 474–481; Childs, *Moving around* (2006), 260–261.

³⁰ See *de Rachewiltz/Riedmann* (Eds.), *Kommunikation und Mobilität* (1995), 73.

³¹ See Gerbert. Ep. Trans. *Lattin*, 130, suggesting that these travels took place until 29th October.

³² *Riché/Callu*, *Introduction* (1993), xxiii and xxvii.

radic information related to this particular group. The second category is attested with significantly more detail and thus is much less anonymous. It encompasses any journey alluded to or hinted at within the letters, involving not just the primary correspondents but also their associates, servants, or family members. To ensure accuracy, I compared assessments from different editions, including Lattin's translation and, in cases of discrepancies, either selected the most plausible option or, when multiple interpretations were equally viable, included more than one for comprehensive coverage. The Excel database includes information pertaining to both of the categories mentioned – including explicitly named individuals with a considerable number of anonymous travellers and implicit information, such as those referring to messengers and inbound journeys. This data was subsequently analysed in conjunction with the pivot function provided by Excel, which allows for the generation of tailored statistics and construction of graphs. The database covers information on the senders, recipients, presumed departure and arrival points, documented journeys, individuals involved, items transported, and the stated objectives as referenced within these epistolary exchanges. For accessibility and transparency, the database is openly accessible on my Academia.edu page.³³ The map was redrawn from models created using Google My Maps, meaning that the study is widely based on easily accessible or free to use software. Thus, the procedure used here may be easily adopted in the framework of other projects with analogous requirements.

The database, along with any analysis emerging from it, is susceptible to a range of errors stemming from the uncertainties discussed above. These errors include the omission of vital information concerning the time of dispatch, the location of the sender and recipient, ambiguity as to whether future journeys alluded to in letters actually took place, and, perhaps most notably, the absence of numerous letters that were dispatched but never integrated into Gerbert's collection. Despite this array of inaccuracies, it was deemed impractical within the context of quantitative analysis to exclude any travels due to such ambiguities. Doing so would diminish the number of journeys analysed considerably, thus further distancing us from developing a comprehensive understanding of mobility in the vicinity of figures like Gerbert of Reims. Whether planned or implied, every journey mentioned in these letters would have been considered likely to take place by the authors: their inclusion in the study thus tentatively helps to restore some of the lost data. The same level of certainty is less apparent when dealing with journeys necessitating conjecture about time and place. Even when the recipient of a letter is known, such as Egbert of Trier, who is the most frequent addressee of these letters (see Figure 7.4), there is often no assurance as to whether that person was actually situated at their usual residence during the time being referenced. Therefore, whenever the available editions and translations pro-

³³ See the document "Mobility in the letters of Gerbert of Reims data" filed under "Other" on the page uni-freiburg.academia.edu/LaurySarti. Please note that this document contains mistakes, like misspellings or different references for a same element, which were amended manually before having the graphs drawn.

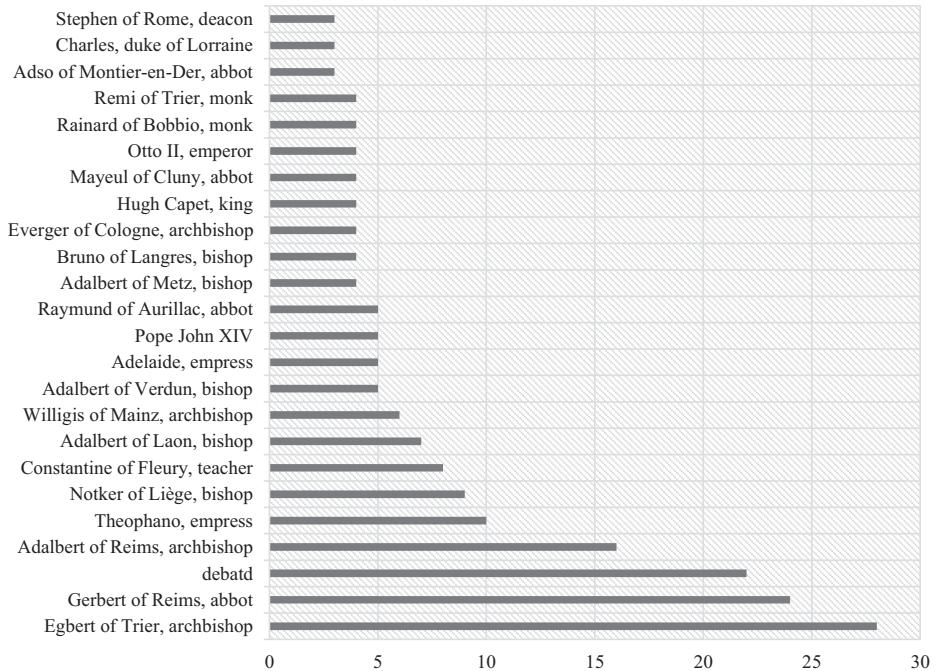


Figure 7.4: Recipients of at least 3 epistles in Gerbert's letters (976–991).

posed a location with reasonable plausibility, it was incorporated into the database. The most challenging scenarios involve recipients associated with itinerant courts, which lack a fixed home base and, consequently, defy a precise location without knowing the exact date of a dispatch. While the itineraries of these courts are typically documented, not least in the ongoing work on the *regesta imperii*,³⁴ the scarcity of specific dates for Gerbert's letters – as well as the journeys to which they refer – often makes it a difficult even to determine whether a recipient was situated north or south of the Alps. One such example is contained in a letter composed in the name of Adalbert around March 984, in which Gerbert mentions that the French kings had recently decided to support the Ottonians. However, in the absence of additional details regarding dates, it remains difficult to discern whether this exchange occurred via written correspondence or in person – i. e. whether only a messenger embarked on this journey – and where they might have encountered the King Lothar and Louis.³⁵ Other instances include Ep. 28, directed to the universal Church in Jerusalem, where both the timing and destination remain subjects of debate, or Ep. 61, where Gerbert,

³⁴ See, e.g., *Oppl*, Das Itinerar Kaiser Friedrich Barbarossas (1978), and regesta-imperii.de/startseite.html (accessed: 18.10.2023).

³⁵ Gerbert, Ep. 27. Ed. *Riché/Callu*, 54.

on behalf of Adalbert, alluded to a meeting with the addressee, but without specifying whether the recipient was Duchess Beatrice or confirming that the meeting took place in Lorraine.³⁶ A planned encounter between Adalbert of Reims and Notger of Liège, as referenced in Ep. 65, remains elusive in terms of both time and location.

In cases of such uncertainties, I have used any information that could be ascertained without resorting to excessive speculation. For instance, I made it a practice to specify a location or region where there was a reasonable basis for conjecture, and conversely, I labelled it as “unknown” where there was no such basis. This “unknown” designation applied in 39 instances concerning the precise destination location and in 28 cases in relation to the destination’s broader region. Consequently, it is worth noting that, although a significant number of the travels documented in the database may not have occurred exactly as described, the cumulative data should provide a plausible reconstruction of the mobility patterns in Gerbert’s vicinity. Still, given the unquantifiable volume of missing data resulting from the loss of a fraction of those once dispatched and received, it is highly likely that the total number of historical mobilities far exceeded what is presently captured in the collection – even after taking into account travels associated with uncertain data.³⁷

7.5 The travellers

The dataset comprises references to a total of 387 mobilities. Notably, a significant portion of these, precisely 262 or 68%, were carried out by messengers (*legati*).³⁸ While it can be assumed that each letter was entrusted to a messenger, Gerbert hardly makes any explicit mention of them, as we shall see. This category encompasses messengers implied explicitly or implicitly, either in the content of a relevant letter or by its dispatch. For instance, in a letter addressed to Abbot Gerald of Aurillac, he was urged to visit Reims, but also instructed to dispatch a messenger to notify his hosts in Reims about his upcoming visit.³⁹ A messenger with a similar task is mentioned in a missive to Archbishop Willigis of Metz, where Gerbert announced an envoy of Adalbert.⁴⁰ The group of messengers also includes escorts intended to accompany a guest, such as when Notger of Liège was invited to partake in the ordination of Adalbert of

³⁶ See Gerbert, Ep. Ed. *Riché/Callu*, 55, n. 1.

³⁷ See in this context my recent study *Sarti*, Die Mobilität der englischen Gentry (2023), showing the extremely high number of mobilities around the Paston Family of the fifteenth century, raising the question whether a similar amount may be presumed for the earlier periods even though they are lacking in our records.

³⁸ E.g., Gerbert, Ep. 42. Ed. *Riché/Callu*.

³⁹ Gerbert, Ep. 17. Ed. *Riché/Callu*, 36: *Si limina beatorum Remigii vel Dionisii datur vobis copia vobendi, nuntio praemisso vestris alloquiis poterimus condelectari.*

⁴⁰ Gerbert, Ep. 34. Ed. *Riché/Callu*.

Verdun by the Archbishop of Trier. On this occasion, Gerbert – acting on behalf of Count Godfroy of Verdun – dispatched a guide (*dux*) to accompany Notger on his journey.⁴¹ Unfortunately, the details of these journeys remain largely obscure.

At times, multiple letters were entrusted to the same messenger, as exemplified by Ep. 45, directed to the monk Raymond in early 985, and Ep. 46, addressed to Abbot Gerald, both situated in Aurillac. Additionally, a set of three letters directed to the monks of Bobbio and various individuals in Italy were likely conveyed by a single messenger.⁴² Ep. 48 seems to have been appended to Ep. 47 as a post-scriptum. These circumstances demonstrate that not every letter necessarily implies an additional messenger journey, a fact taken into account in the current analysis. Excluding travels executed by these messengers, we are left with 125 mobilities, constituting 32% of the documented travels (see Figure 7.5.a). Of the total 387 mobilities in the dataset, 81 were either requested or planned. This leaves us with 306 mobilities that had already taken place at the time of writing or were due to take place shortly after a letter was sent.

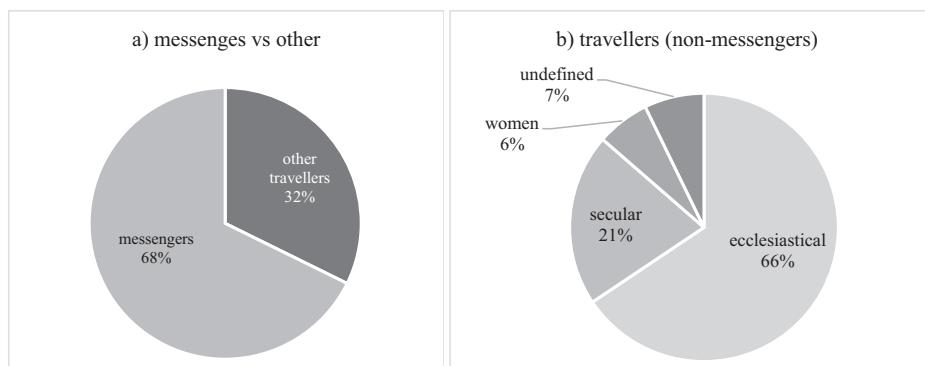


Figure 7.5: Mobilities attested in Gerbert's letters (976–991).

While messengers constituted the largest group of travellers attested, the letters they delivered often lack additional information. Of the 262 messengers, 250 remain shrouded in anonymity. As for the remaining 12 messengers, 3 were clergymen or monks. In 2 instances, it appears that Gerbert not only authored the letters but also took on the role of the courier himself.⁴³ If this holds true, Gerbert features among the 6 named individuals responsible for 9 documented missions, as evidenced by his correspondence. Two additional dispatches were conveyed by Count Guy of Soissons and another 2 by someone named Gobther, while individual letters were carried by

⁴¹ Gerbert, Ep. 43. Ed. *Riché/Callu*. Similar procedures in Gerbert, Ep. 129 and 146, and 147.

⁴² Gerbert, Ep. 82 to 84. Ed. *Riché/Callu*.

⁴³ Gerbert, Ep. 43. Ed. *Riché/Callu*, see *Trans. Lattin*, 89, n. 1. See also *ibid.* 156, n. 2.

men identified as Roderick and Richard, and the mentioned Abbot Ayrard also handled another delivery (see Figure 7.6). These named carriers account for a mere 3% of the group of messengers.

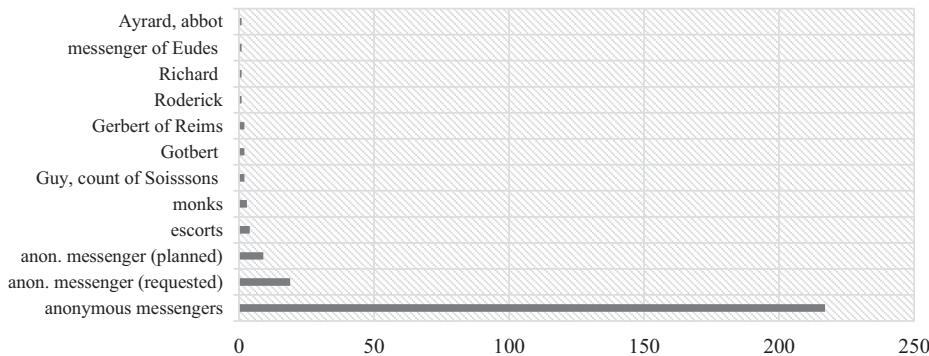


Figure 7.6: Messengers attested in Gerbert's letters (976–991).

As already mentioned, a total of 125 journeys have been documented for individuals unrelated to the role of the messenger. These travellers encompass a diverse array of individuals from various social backgrounds. When categorising these 125 journeys based on social groups, it becomes apparent that almost 66% of them were attributed to the clergy, while 27% belonged to secular groups – primarily the elite – including 6% women. Only 7% of those travellers unrelated to the group of messengers are unclassified (see Figure 7.5.b, with further details in Figure 7.7). In contrast, the social affiliation of 97% of the messengers remains undisclosed, 1% being classified as secular and 2% as ecclesiastical. One can speculate that the majority of them served as retainers or belonged to the household of the respective dispatchers, likely occupying a lower rank within the same social group. An intriguing glimpse of the mobility of more common people is offered in Ep. 61, which mentions the disappearance of the monk Meingus, ostensibly due to his fleeing. He was actively sought out by his abbot, Reingaud of Corbie, and eventually located in Rouen.⁴⁴

Among those travellers unrelated to the group of messengers, Gerbert unsurprisingly stands out, with a total of 24 documented journeys. The number of travels known for the remaining individuals is notably lower, with 9 recorded for Adalbert of Reims and 4 for Notker of Trier, all others falling below these numbers (see Figure 7.8). The letters only sporadically provide details about the circumstances surrounding these journeys. An interesting exception is found in Ep. 109, which sheds light on the

⁴⁴ Gerbert, Ep. 61. Ed. *Riché/Callu*. In Ep. 64, Ed. *Riché/Callu*, 162, Gerbert suggested that Meingus was tired of his life in the monastery: *Taedio monastrii eum nolle redire dixistis*. Ep. 67 suggests that Meingus was in England.

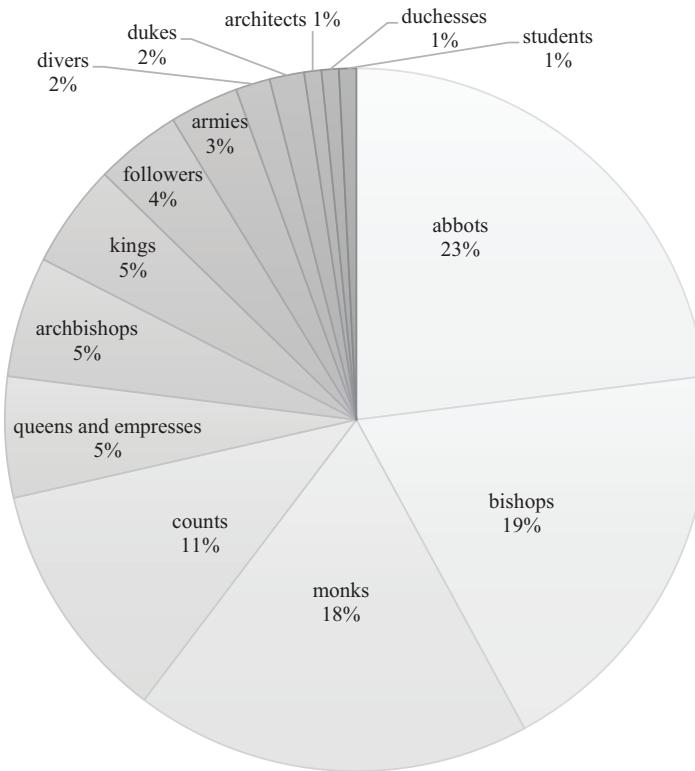


Figure 7.7: Non-messenger travellers attested in Gerbert's letters (976–991).

impact of weather. Adalbert's pilgrimage to St. Gall (Ep. 106) took an unexpected turn due to adverse weather conditions. The letter vividly describes incessant torrents affecting the mountains and villages, emphasising that the inhabitants were submerged, and their flocks were carried away by the floods. In another letter, addressed to the Bishop Notger of Mainz in May 984, there is a rare mention of a foot injury that prevented Count Godefroi of Verdun from travelling to visit his king.⁴⁵

While it is evident that early medieval letters were occasionally dispatched to individuals of lower social standing, and often pertained to the mobility of this part of society,⁴⁶ most known letter recipients were members of the elite. Consequently, names and other personal information about individuals of lower birth are infrequently provided, underscoring a notable limitation of early medieval collections of letters, a tendency also shared by other historical records like chronicles. Nonetheless,

⁴⁵ Gerbert, Ep. 30. Ed. *Riché/Callu*, 64.

⁴⁶ See, e.g., Einhard, Ep. Ed. *Hampe*, which comprise a large number of administrative epistles. See also related discussions in Einhard, Ep., Ed. *Grabowsky* et al.

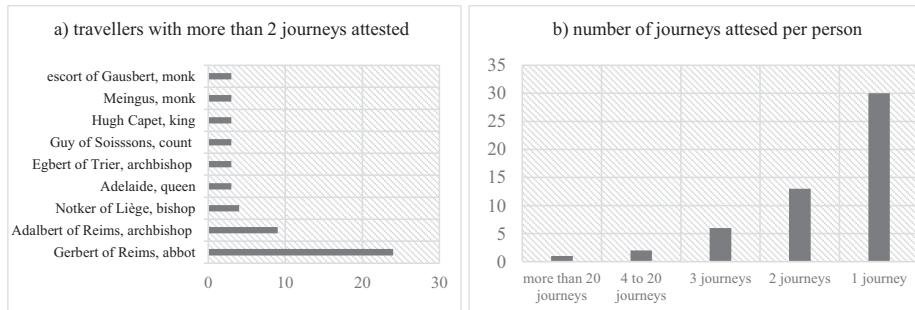


Figure 7.8: Journeys of non-messenger travellers attested in Gerbert's letters (976–991).

it is crucial to recognise that the elite never travelled in isolation. This implies that for every bishop, king, or count, we must assume a corresponding entourage, which could span from an entire royal court – as in the case of kings and other high-ranking authorities like dukes – to just one or two servants, as was probably the case for a common monk or scholar. Regrettably, these companions remain conspicuously absent from Gerbert's correspondence. In a letter addressed to his friend, Gerald of Aurillac, Gerbert alluded to the presence of *milites* under his command, prepared for armed service. However, he did not clarify their exact relationship to him or whether they regularly accompanied him during his journeys.⁴⁷ In Ep. 101, Gerbert's use of the plural form to refer to him meeting the western authorities confirms that he did not travel alone.⁴⁸ In a letter attributed to the former Queen Emma, Gerbert mentioned her scheduled encounter with Empress Adelaide in Remiremont on 11th May 986, along with her son.⁴⁹ However, these examples already represent the majority of information related to possible travel companions contained in Gerbert's letters. Nevertheless, even though we cannot quantify these companions, any reference to travellers from the upper social strata implies the existence of further journeys undertaken by unnamed, largely unmentioned individuals. This means that these letters merely scratch the surface, revealing only the tip of the iceberg – any additional detail is thus highly significant in estimating what lies beneath the surface.

⁴⁷ Gerbert, Ep. 16. Ed. Riché/Callu, 32: *Milites mei quidem arma sumere, castra munire parati.*

⁴⁸ Gerbert, Ep. 101. Ed. Riché/Callu, 246: *XV kl. jun. Francorum colloquio nobis occurrendum.*

⁴⁹ Gerbert, Ep. 74. Ed. Riché/Callu, 180: *Nostro quidem vestrae praesentiae ac regis Conradi, in vicinia Romarici Montis, ubi confinium regnorum est, XV kl. jun. me ac filium meum occurrere volunt.* Similar Gerbert, Ep. 29. Ed. Riché/Callu, 62.

7.6 Travel places

Gerbert's letters exhibit a noticeable variability in their mention of the origins and destinations of letters and travellers, as evident from the preceding discussion. Among the starting locations, Gerbert's hometown of Reims predominates with a substantial 189 mentions, followed by comparatively fewer references to Bobbio (22), Laon (14), Trier (12), and Senlis (9). Turning to the destinations, we encounter a more diverse landscape. Nevertheless, certain places enjoy a higher frequency of mention, such as Reims (78), Trier (34), Bobbio (20), and Rome (15). Just like the travellers, the majority of destinations are mentioned only once or twice. This enhanced variety of destinations becomes more apparent when we examine the frequency of locations from distinct regions. In terms of regions of origin, France (296) takes the lead, with Italy (43) and the Ottonian east (26) following closely behind. In contrast, when it comes to destinations, France (213) is closely followed by the Ottonian Empire (74) and Italy (55). These destination choices attest to Gerbert's strong Ottonian patronage, even though he resided in western Reims, where he later also established ties with King Hugh Capet. It is noteworthy that Reims served as a pivotal point for both outgoing and incoming journeys, despite the fact that the total count of starting locations is significantly lower than the number of known travel destinations (see Figure 7.9).

Excel's pivot function allows us to zoom in on data by filtering and arranging it, drawing connections between these various aspects. For instance, it allows us to link the initial points of travel to the destinations, the travellers, their objectives or the goods they transported. This method facilitates the examination of the relationship between specific groups of travellers and their respective destinations or intentions. Referring to the travels undertaken by Gerbert himself, for example, 59% of the destinations were situated within the western Frankish territories, while 25% of his destinations were in Italy, with only 8% being located in the eastern realms, and another 8% of the locations remaining unclear (Figure 7.10).

Pivot also allows for analysis of the interplay between other starting locations and destinations, as demonstrated in Figure 7.11.a–b for Trier and Bobbio. The data from Reims (Figure 7.11.c) shows that, unsurprisingly, this city served as the predominant point of departure for the majority of the destinations documented, whereas dispatches from Bobbio primarily headed towards destinations within the peninsula, alongside a few Ottonian centres and Reims itself. It is also intriguing to examine the 150 messengers dispatched from Reims. As illustrated in Figure 7.11.c, the bulk of these messengers were directed towards the archbishops of Trier (25) and Liège (9), the Ottonian courts, as well as Bobbio, Gerbert's friend Constantine in Fleury,⁵⁰ and Aurillac, which was Gerbert's hometown. These destinations thus mirror the diverse networks in which Gerbert was embedded. If we map out the origins and endpoints of the journeys

⁵⁰ On Gerbert's amical friendships and related notions, see *DeMayo*, Ciceronian amicitia (2007).

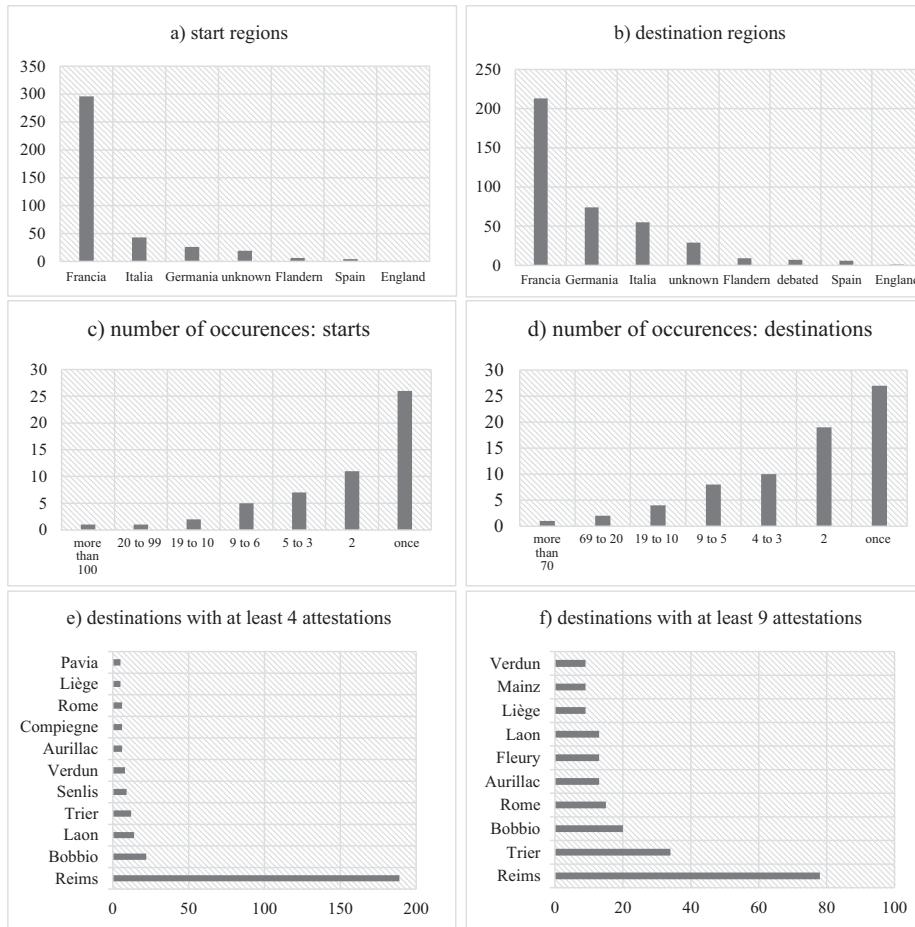


Figure 7.9: Start locations and destinations attested in Gerbert's letters (976–991).

recorded in Gerbert's letters, we can discern that a significant proportion of these travels occurred within a radius of roughly 200 kilometres around Reims, while Bobbio had a considerably smaller travel perimeter, as depicted in Figure 7.12.

7.7 Travel aims

The letters seldom provide explicit explanations for the underlying reasons behind a journey. When we consider both the stated objectives and the implicit inferences drawn from the available evidence, the predominant aims appear to revolve around the execution of tasks that connect the sender with the intended recipient of a letter.



Figure 7.10: Travel destinations attested for Gerbert of Reims (976–991).

It is worth noting that while these travels may have served multiple purposes, these additional intentions remain obscure in cases where the letters offer no further clues. By excluding any references to messenger-related travel objectives or those of Gerbert himself, we are left with a total of 106 remaining references. The majority of these references are attributed to (arch)bishops (30) and monks (29), as shown in Figure 7.13. a. Among the most prominent objectives were meetings with secular (14) and ecclesiastical (12) authorities, followed by military movements (10), and further, more personal motivations, as depicted in Figure 7.13.c. When we focus on the travel purposes of the individual for whom we possess the most comprehensive information – namely, Gerbert himself – it becomes evident that meetings with secular authorities were by far the most frequent aim, with bishops only ranking fourth in terms of frequency, as indicated in Figure 7.13.b.

Establishing connections between these mobility objectives and distinct groups of travellers substantiates disparities between laypeople and clergy members, on the one hand, and between higher-ranking officials and individuals from lower socioeconomic strata, on the other. Notably, bishops primarily embarked on journeys to convene for religious ceremonies, whereas other clergy members typically undertook travels for the purpose of delivering letters and commuting between monasteries. Military groups predominantly comprised laypeople, while encounters with other notable figures predominantly encompassed high-ranking officials and noblewomen. Anonymous messengers were excluded from this analysis, mainly due to the men-

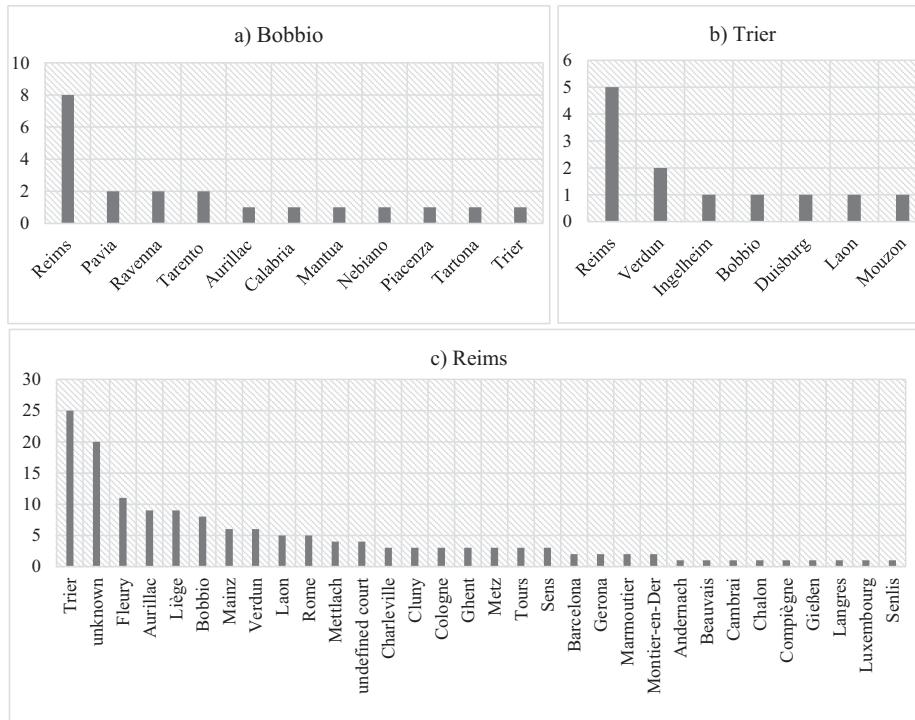


Figure 7.11: Destinations recorded for Bobbio, Trier and Reims in Gerbert's letters (976–991).

tioned unavailability of additional information necessary to determine their social status (Figure 7.14).

7.8 Objects transported

Within the corpus of letters, there are a total of 41 references to items carried by travellers that were not letters. Among these, manuscripts are the most prevalent category, accounting for 10% of relevant references, as depicted in Figure 7.15.a. They mirror Gerbert's efforts to acquire new literary works and offer manuscript copies from his own library in exchange, a trend also reflected in the varied recipients illustrated in Figure 7.15.c.⁵¹ In 24 instances, manuscripts were dispatched from France, predominantly originating in Reims, with a sporadic occurrence of three instances from Italy. The prevalence of French origin is similarly evident when examining the destinations, as the majority of relevant dispatches were directed to Gerbert. Other items, such as

51 On Gerbert's work on ancient manuscripts, see *Passalacqua*, Gerberto di Aurillac (2003).

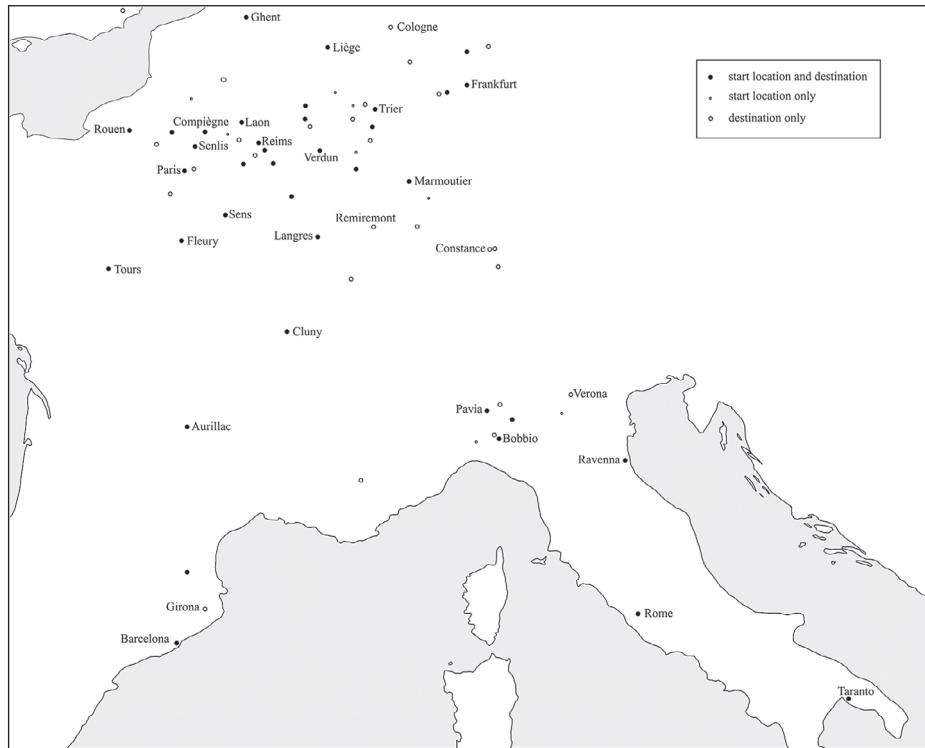


Figure 7.12: Start locations and destinations attested for the time between 976 and 991.

money, cloth, or singular elements like a sphere, are only mentioned once, as indicated in Figure 7.15.b.

7.9 Conclusion

To what extent may letter collections serve as a lens to study the complexity of early medieval mobility? And what are the potentials and limitations associated with the quantitative approach presented here? The fact that Gerbert's collection comprises only a selection of dispatched letters implies that it can provide merely a glimpse into the mobility of those who authored these letters. This selectivity primarily focuses on the elite, resulting in a lack of references to the movements of individuals of lower status, which would be essential for constructing a comprehensive overview of related mobility patterns. This limitation only becomes more surmountable with the emergence of private letters in the late Middle Ages. A notable challenge also arises from the paucity of (or incomplete references to) dates and locations, as well as a scarcity of information about the recipients due to the liberal use of abbreviations. These

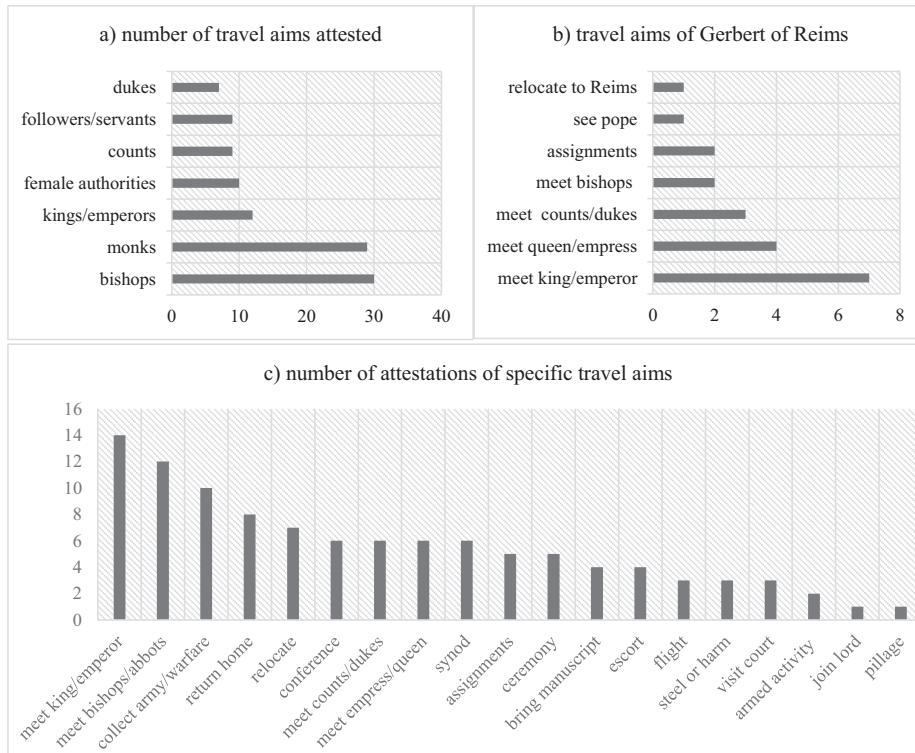


Figure 7.13: Travel aims in Gerbert's letters (976–991).

shortcomings, which affect the comprehensiveness and reliability of the source material, could not be adequately addressed within the confines of the database established for this study. Consequently, the latter includes conjectures and other information, such as planned journeys, even when the specific letter's parameters may be inaccurate or the journeys in question might have been cancelled. By not confining itself to travels for which the letters provide unequivocal information, this quantitative study succeeded in amassing additional data allowing to further complete a still fragmentary picture. This supplemental information contributes to a more holistic understanding of the potential mobilities connected to Gerbert and his archbishop, Adalbert. However, this approach bears the significant drawback that its results do not precisely mirror the historical travels that once took place.

This study demonstrates the potential of a quantitative approach, notwithstanding the initial reservations. Early medieval letter collections like Gerbert's epistles provide limited data owing mainly to constraints in both quantity and quality of information, further compounded by the fact that the relevant data pertains predominantly to the elite. However, a quantitative approach is able to reconstruct a multifaceted view of a substantial portion of high-born mobility within the network of

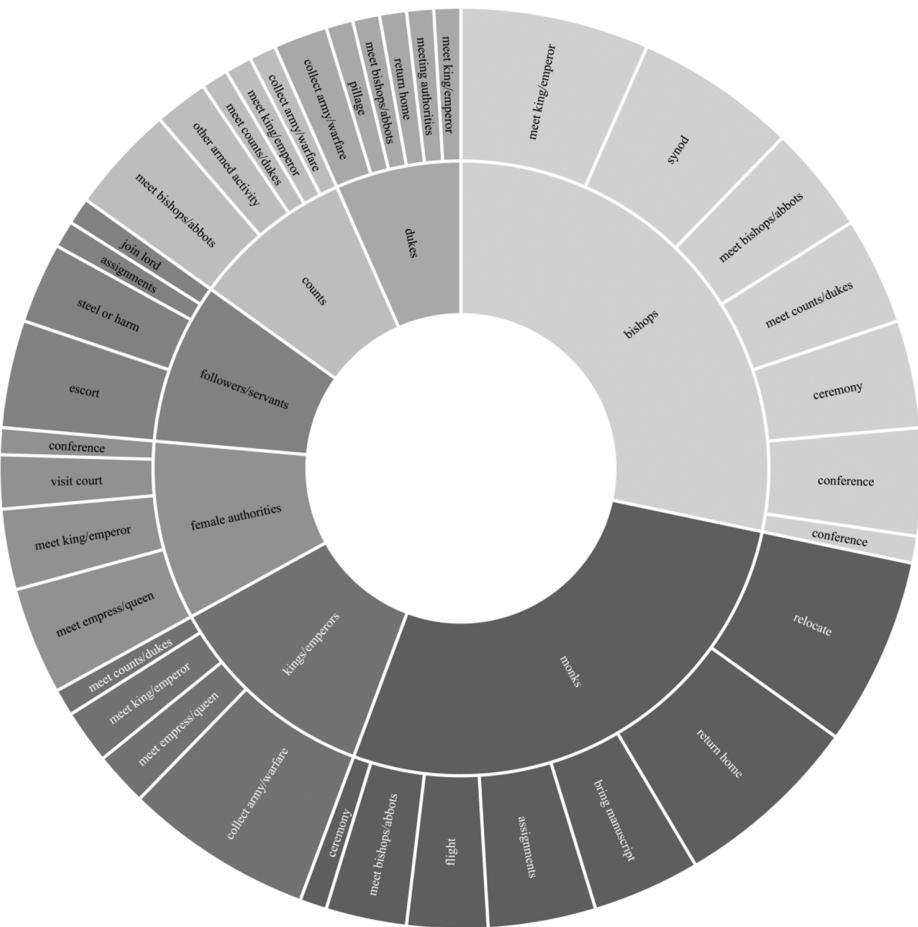


Figure 7.14: Traveller groups and their travel aims, excluding Gerbert of Reims and the anonymous messengers (976–991).

senders and recipients of these letters. Although the inclusion of equivocal information prevents a one-to-one reconstruction of historical mobilities, the incorporation of additional data enables the creation of a more comprehensive representation that may reflect past mobility patterns more accurately than a study confined to explicit evidence. It is important to note here that this approach may not be suitable for collections where unequivocal information is significantly more abundant, meaning that any research methodology should be adapted to address the challenges inherent in its respective source material. The present results illuminate the diverse networks Gerbert of Reims was connected to, encompassing political ties to the Ottonians and the

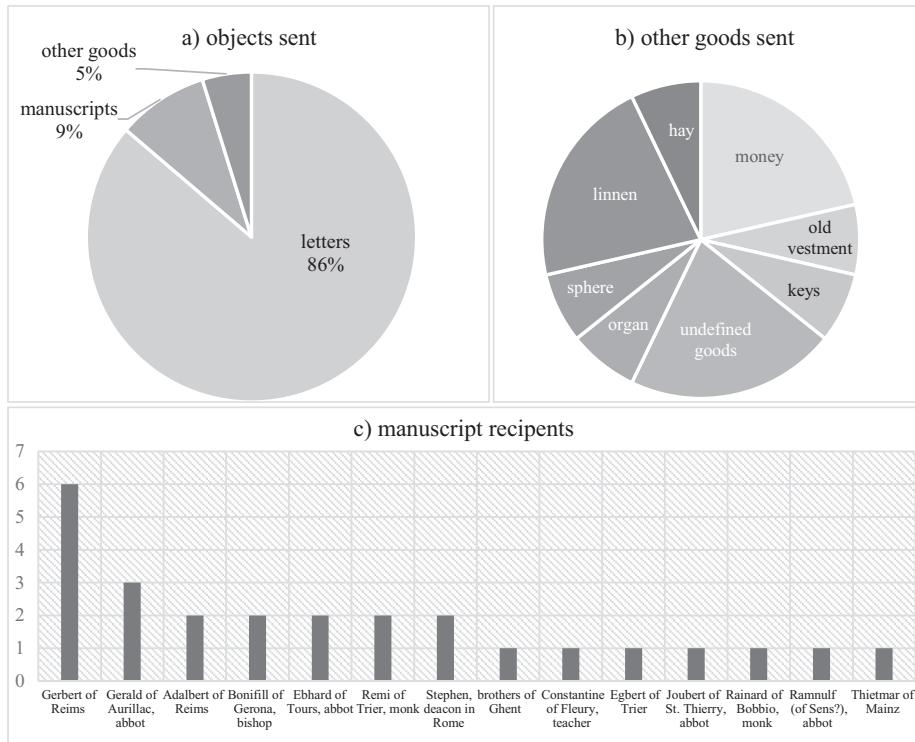


Figure 7.15: Objects carried by the travellers recorded.

Frankish kings as well as a broad network of ecclesiastical authorities,⁵² and personal relationships with specific scholars. This research intended to show how letter collections may serve as a unique window onto the use of letters as instruments of influence and relationship maintenance across different strata of society. Consequently, this approach contributes significantly to our understanding of early medieval mobility patterns, travel objectives, and the roles played by at least a selection of voyagers.

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⁵² Lake, Gerbert of Aurillac (2013), offers a meticulous analysis of these networks and how Gerbert used them.

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