

## What do the Church Fathers, Scientific Fathers, and Military Fathers have in common?

Richard Matthew Pollard (UQAM)

This paper will show how techniques and perspectives borrowed from other disciplines of history can answer some fundamental unanswered questions about the early Middle Ages. One such question seems simple enough, though its implications are profound: who were the Church Fathers for those living in the early Middle Ages? No one has hitherto answered this question, and indeed, it has almost never been posed. These ‘Fathers’ were invoked again and again in theological works, in Church councils, in letters, in canon law, but their identity was only ever fleetingly addressed. Knowing who these figures were (and who they were not, and how and when this changed) obviously would tell us a great deal about early medieval intellectual culture, its preferences, its idea of authority, its changeability.

To delve into this problem, techniques first applied in the history of science offer an exciting new perspective and some interesting results. Creating network graphs of co-citations between scientists, for example, can reveal the structure of a particular field and its leading authorities in a given era, and accurately predict subsequent Nobel prizewinners. The same techniques can be adapted to map how Augustine, Jerome, Gregory the Great, and others (even Flavius Josephus!) stood relative to one another in the minds of early medieval scholars, and who was admitted to the inner circle of ‘Church Fathers’. Similar techniques can be applied to the circulation of texts in manuscript codices to yield equally interesting results. Detailed quantitative analysis of which authors circulated with which others can add to the ‘networks’ generated by other techniques. Since *volatilia ad sibi similia conveniunt* (Eccl. 27.9: ‘birds of a feather flock together’), this too helps us to answer the question of who the Church Fathers were, besides much else.

Since the work presented in this paper was the result of frequent collaboration with historians in other disciplines, and gave rise to a large collaborative CFI-funded project (*Sapientia*, 2020–2023, UQAM), I will conclude by reflecting on the benefits of collaboration with non-medievalists in this realm. Our project aims to develop cross-disciplinary techniques for tracing manuscripts and early editions, as well as the reception of texts, networks of authorities, and so forth. By pooling resources, we can arrive more easily – and more convincingly – at a determination of not only who the Church Fathers were, but who were the greatest scientific figures of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, or the most important military thinkers of the 16<sup>th</sup>. Networking today better reveals the networks of yesterday.