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Published online: 19 Feb 2026.

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# Mapping Luther's Opponents. Benefits and Limitations of Social Network Analysis in Reformation History

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**ABSTRACT**

Social network analysis has been established as a method of historical research for a considerable number of years. The combination of quantitative and qualitative methods enables social structures to be visualised and the activities of individual actors to be better understood. This study explores the extent to which social network analysis can be applied to a specific field of Reformation history, namely the opponents of Martin Luther and the Reformation. Examining the case of Johannes Cochlaeus, it is demonstrated that the availability of sources has a pivotal role in determining the informative value of network analyses. Furthermore, it is revealed that actors who have seldom been given due consideration find their place within the social network of Luther's opponents.

What would William Tyndale have said about modern concepts of network research and its visualisations? Though this might sound like a somewhat whimsical question, it has a serious backdrop: after all, the term 'network' first appears in Tyndale's 1530 translation of the Book of Jeremiah and the Pentateuch, where the word refers to a more flexible 'web or network' or 'describes a flat object, a gridiron (gredyren), constructed of parallel bars, crossed, or interlaced in a squared pattern like a mesh, an openwork fabric'.[1] In the twentieth century, Tyndale's network became a metaphor for describing complex electronic systems or social relationships, and eventually its use exploded in the historical disciplines, prompting German historian Wolfgang Reinhard to state 'that this word has degenerated into the second most common empty formula in historical scholarship alongside the even more popular *discourse*'.[2]

It would be unwise to allow such criticism to deter one from conducting network research. However, it is important to exercise caution with regard to the methods as well as the terminology used. Social Network Analysis combines quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a sophisticated and detailed form of network research. Based on a comprehensive data set consisting of actors (nodes) and the connections between them

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[1] Keast and Meek, "What Are Networks," 16.
[2] Reinhard, "Kommentar," 135.

(edges), it can be used to calculate various parameters of the network, such as actors' degrees, centrality measures and network density. The more accurately the data set captures the social reality under investigation, the more reliable these calculations will be. Conversely, a lack of data inevitably leads to distortions in the metrics. Obviously, the data and calculations do not speak for themselves, but we must interpret them using appropriate hermeneutics, so that we supplement the quantitative method with qualitative evaluation.[3]

The following remarks aim firstly to present the networks of Martin Luther's opponents in Albertine Saxony under Duke George the Bearded (1517–1539). Based on this example, secondly, we will discuss if Social Network Analysis provides an appropriate methodological apparatus for network research in the Reformation and what the benefits and limitations of a network approach to Reformation history might be.

## Initial issues and research questions

Like any other theology, the work of Luther's opponents did not unfold without preconditions,[4] but was determined by predispositions of various kinds. Despite this rather obvious point, previous research on the Catholic opponents of Luther has thus far placed little emphasis on their social context and embeddedness, while research on the Reformation side has recently demonstrated ways in which networks can be fruitfully explored.[5] Despite the identification of the study of anti-Reformation networks as a research desideratum, it has not yet been seriously addressed or thoroughly analysed. Markus Wriedt's outline points out the significant circumstance that humanist and theological networks overlapped in two respects:[6] firstly, the participants in the networks cannot always be clearly assigned to the 'humanists' or 'Luther's opponents' since humanist and anti-Reformation networks often overlapped; secondly, given the impossibility to distinguish these networks neatly, the networks of Luther's opponents presumably functioned at least in part according to the rules of humanist networks.[7] Concurrently, the overlapping of humanist and anti-Reformation networks has resulted in a greater corpus of available material consisting of letters published by humanists themselves or modern editions.

The research presented here is therefore likely to represent only initial exploratory steps.[8] It relates to Albertine Saxony, a territory that has been relatively well researched in terms of opposition to Luther and the Reformation, and is guided by very fundamental concerns: firstly, the objective was to identify as many individuals as possible who were engaged in anti-Reformation theology or in dialogue with anti-Reformation theologians; secondly, the central figures involved in this process were to be identified. The data collected should therefore assist in determining the extent to which a network of Catholic controversial theology can be established.[9] In addition, the prevailing view that Luther's opponents were largely uncoordinated and acted with little strategy was to be subjected to empirical scrutiny.

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[3] See Ahnert and Ahnert, *The Network Turn*, 73–88.
[4] Cf. e.g. Bagchi, *Luther's Earliest Opponents*; Smolinsky, *Alveldt und Emser*.
[5] See Dornbusch, "Concerning the Defamation"; Gehrt, "16.000 Briefe"; Deicke, "Networks of Conflict."
[6] Wriedt, "Gelehrtennetzwerke."
[7] See Papy, "Letters"; Landtsheer, "Letters"; Mauelshagen, "Netzwerke."
[8] A more in-depth study by the author on the various contexts of anti-Reformation theology in Albertine Saxony will be published in 2026.
[9] I assume that a network is always a construct of the analysing historian and does not exist a priori. See Ahnert et al., *The Network Turn*, 13–24.

The only feasible main source genre for such research is the letter. However, for pragmatic reasons, almost exclusively printed material was used. In exceptional cases, it was complemented by letters whose existence, rough dating and sometimes even content can be verified from other letters as well as oral relationships whenever their existence was beyond doubt.

The fundamental criteria for the inclusion of actors ('nodes') and communication between them ('edges') in the network were derived from the main research issue of the study:

(1) The network includes letters from the years 1517 to 1539, spanning from Luther's indulgence theses to the death of Duke George; these limits were exceeded only in exceptional cases in order to visualise particularly significant social relationships.
(2) It was required that the sender or recipient had their centre of life in Albertine Saxony at the time the letter was written. Including communication between actors outside the territory would have resulted in an overly complex and less informative network.
(3) In the broadest sense, the communication in question should address the Reformation as its primary topic. This prompted the exclusion of letters with an exclusively humanistic focus or those of a predominantly political nature. Admittedly, this criterion was applied generously: where it was a matter of initiating correspondence in the humanist manner, for example, which would later have anti-Reformation publishing as its main topic, or, where this publishing was part of the political correspondence, the relevant letters were automatically taken into account.

The result is not a complete and comprehensive network but a multitude of star-shaped networks overlapping and, at best, being connected with each other.[10] In examining the texts of the letters, the (not infrequently indistinct) demarcation between 'private' and 'public' writing was deliberately eschewed, as the central objective of the research was to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the extent of communication between actors.[11] Letters of dedication were considered only selectively, where this served to enhance the visibility of certain relationships.[12]

In order to elucidate the social embedding of the authors and the role of anti-Reformation publishing, a deliberate decision was made to focus on social or communicative networks in this study. The examination of additional networks, including those of authors, printers, and booksellers, or a 'citation network', is a topic for future investigation. Such an inquiry is likely to yield significant insights.[13] Additionally, further prosopographical studies of lesser-known actors would be beneficial, as the necessitated human and temporal resources were unavailable for this study.[14] Hence, the work presented here ought to be complemented by further research.

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[10] See Hitzbleck, "Verflochten," 29–30.
[11] See Rice Henderson, "Humanist Letter Writing."
[12] See Verbeke and Landtsheer, "Letters of Dedication."
[13] See Jansen, *Einführung*, 59.
[14] The admirably detailed work carried out by Tewes, "Luthergegner," demonstrates the high value of such studies for network research; however, since the networks analysed in the following contain hardly any actors who are completely unknown to research (let alone in leading roles), such elaborate work steps were dispensed with.

## Modelling the data: a network in two phases

Network reconstructions and particularly their visualisations frequently suggest a somewhat static system, which can mislead us into ignoring factors of change.[15] Given the considerable length of the studied period (1517–1539) and the importance of paying attention to an appropriate balance between research effort and expected yield, the network of controversial theology in Albertine Saxony was modelled in two phases.

The 'terms of office' of Duke George's two court theologians, Hieronymus Emser and Johannes Cochlaeus, provide a criterion for dividing these phases. As Emser died in autumn 1527 and Cochlaeus succeeded him at the beginning of 1528,[16] the period from 1517 to 1527 could be regarded as the first phase and the period from 1528 to the summer of 1539 as the second one. A more fragmented approach appeared to make less sense, as it promised hardly any significant gain in knowledge relative to the additional effort required and the susceptibility to errors when creating the database. Temporal developments are therefore integrated, as far as relevant, when the network is described and interpreted.

The networks were modelled with the aid of Gephi, a software that has been demonstrated to be effective in processing network data.[17] Gephi calculates the structural parameters of a network based on the data entered and allows networks to be visualised. For this purpose, different algorithms are available in order to support the description and the analysis of the network adequately. However, it should be noted that metrics may be distorted by various factors; this can be attributed to a range of causes:

(1) Sources for a particular actor are missing completely or for the majority of his (possible or probable) connections, a fact that is particularly important with regard to the first phase. For example, the correspondence of Hieronymus Emser is only available in small parts; moreover, the 'smaller' controversialists such as Paul Bachmann, Simon Blick or Wolfram Wulffer could not be adequately analysed in terms of networks due to the lack of sources.[18]

(2) Insofar as letters were printed in the sixteenth century, they represent exclusively the incoming or outgoing correspondence of the editor. Since the existence and basic content of letters in the opposite direction can for the most part only be inferred, they are available for quantitative analysis to a limited extent at best, but not at all for qualitative analysis. A 'two-sided' transmission, however, would further strengthen the existing connections and nodes in quantitative terms, but new findings could not be expected in either quantitative or qualitative terms.[19]

(3) The fact that individual letters that are alluded to in subsequent correspondence have not survived is not fundamentally surprising given the general state of preservation. Sometimes this phenomenon points to the inadequacies and risks associated with the transport of letters. Messengers could be unreliable or be ambushed, and letters from certain

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[15] See Lemercier, "Taking Time Seriously."

[16] Cochlaeus arrived in Dresden on 10 January 1528 and was officially inaugurated on 22 January, cf. Becker, "Herzog Georg," 191; Bäumer, *Cochlaeus*, 32.

[17] Gephi is a freely accessible open-source software, the work was mainly carried out with version 0.10.1 (https://gephi. org; viewed on 22/04/2024).

[18] For this problem, see Lemercier, "Formale Methoden," 24–5.

[19] Cf. Gehrt, "16.000 Briefe," 55–6, regarding Luther and Melanchthon.

senders or recipients could be intercepted by the other religious party.[20] In some cases, it also seemed advisable to contemporaries to destroy letters upon receipt so that they could not fall into the wrong hands.[21] Since at least the existence, and sometimes the content, of lost letters can be inferred, such letters have also been taken into account.

(4) The reconstruction of the network is thus largely based on written sources. Nevertheless, the communication between the actors is of course not limited to writing; especially for the members of Duke George's Dresden court, we must assume an everyday orality, which certainly applies to Hieronymus Emser and Simon Pistoris, and at least temporarily for Johannes Cochlaeus, who did not stay at court all the time. In terms of Social Network Analysis, the challenge, therefore, lies in determining the quantitative value ('weight') of such oral communication. For while every letter (including those inferred from others) was recorded as simple communication with an edge weight of 1, oral communication cannot be weighted equally unambiguously.[22] In the present study, an edge weight of 2 was assigned to each oral relation, thus acknowledging the observation that in oral communication the roles of sender and receiver are typically assumed by both participants, thereby implying an exchange (or at least the possibility of such an exchange) with a weight exceeding that of a single letter from A to B. Weighing the edges uniformly means that no distinction can be made between single and regular oral communication. Given the absence of data to quantify frequent and everyday oral communication, any weighting beyond 2 is not supported by evidence and would therefore be arbitrary. Nevertheless, the distortion must be taken into account when analysing the data.[23]

(5) Although this does not directly lead to a bias, it should be noted that only communication that satisfies the three criteria mentioned above has been included. Presenting a complete network would go beyond the scope of this study and would also affect its validity with regard to the actors in Albertine Saxony.[24]

It follows from the above that the structural measures and visualisations mentioned in the following sections must be read with caution. The reason they are not completely dispensed with is that, despite the risk of distortion, visualisations and structural measures can make social structures visible and clarify communication channels. But since the aforementioned reasons are particularly significant for the network covering the years 1517–1527, only the most basic structural measures were taken into account here. For the years 1528–1539, it was possible to include centrality measures in the analysis as well, due to the larger amount of available documents.

## An overview of the two phases

A first look at the visualisation of the two phases clearly shows the source problem mentioned above in the first phase. (Figure 1) The modelling is therefore subject to a certain

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[20] Johannes Cochlaeus and Erasmus expressed this fear frequently.
[21] Cf. Tewes, "Luthergegner," 328.
[22] I would like to take this opportunity to thank Jakub Basista (Centre for European Studies, Uniwersytet Jagiellónski w Krakowie) and Abby Gibbons (University of Arizona), with whom I was able to discuss the problem at the Society for Reformation Studies conference in Cambridge (UK) in April 2024.
[23] Cf. Hitzbleck, "Verflochten," 31, on short- and long-distance relationships.
[24] Furthermore, the marking of 'positive' and 'negative' edges representing consensus or dissent was avoided, as this would have contributed little to the research question; cf. Hitzbleck, "Verflochten," 21.
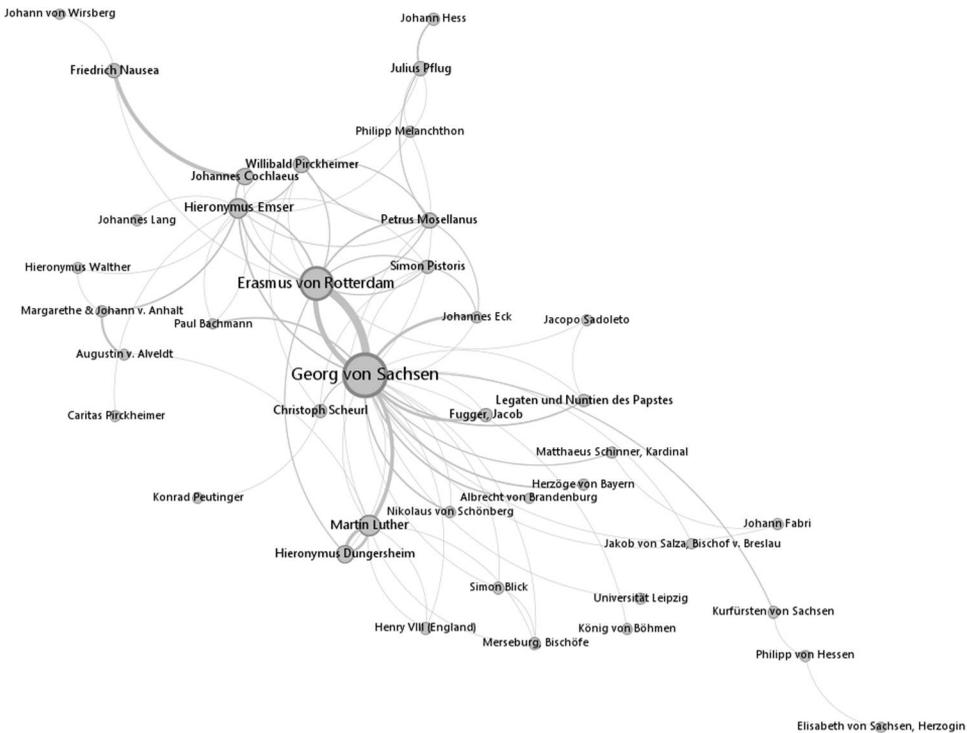
**Figure 1.** The network of Luther's opponents in Albertine Saxony, 1517–1527.

reservation. At its core, it represents a radial network of Duke George, complemented by other radial networks (above all that of Erasmus of Rotterdam). The combination also resulted in a small radial ego-network of Hieronymus Emser, of whom no collection of his own letters has survived.

The network density is relatively low at 0.206. In the visualisation, this can be surmised from the relatively high number of nodes that are integrated into the overall network with only one or at most two edges. Duke George and Hieronymus Emser, flanked by Simon Pistoris, appear as central actors inside Albertine Saxony; outside the territory, Erasmus of Rotterdam and Willibald Pirckheimer hold central positions, as do Albrecht of Brandenburg and Christoph Scheurl to a lesser extent (in regard to the focus on anti-Reformation theology and publishing).

The importance of certain edges, which appear strong in a quantitative view and in the visualisation, must not be overestimated with regard to their qualities. These include, for example, the correspondence between Hieronymus Dungersheim and Martin Luther, but also the correspondence between Duke George, Johannes Eck and Martin Luther in the run-up to the Leipzig Disputation. For others, the future significance for the network was already foreshadowed in the 1520s without yet clearly manifesting itself. This applies to the Leipzig merchant Hieronymus Walther as well as to Johannes Cochlaeus.

The lack of sources relates in particular to Hieronymus Emser's correspondence, which would be desirable not only for a quantitative completion of the database, but also in order to be able to make more valid qualitative statements about the network

of the Catholic theologians. Admittedly, the reverse is also true: precisely because not many letters have survived and because conclusions can be drawn about contacts at the same time, it is possible to identify the gaps more precisely. On the one hand, these gaps concern Emser's other contacts in the scholarly world, among humanists and theologians. No further correspondence seems to have developed with Johannes Eck, for example – despite the common line of argument after the Leipzig Disputation. On the other hand, the relevant contacts of the bishops of Meissen, Merseburg and Naumburg would also be worth looking into; from the fifteenth century onwards, all three episcopal churches provided canonries for professors from the University of Leipzig, whose theological faculty undoubtedly had some problems in the years of Duke George. But correspondence from other authors has also been missing hitherto, so the contacts of Hieronymus Dungersheim, Paul Bachmann, Simon Blick and Wolfgang Wulffer can at best be reconstructed as far as the political sphere is concerned.

In any case, it is noteworthy and significant that the network modelled so far is heavily influenced by the humanist networks, to which Dungersheim or Bachmann apparently had no access: By remaining silent in response to Dungersheim's letter, Erasmus of Rotterdam even refused to admit the Leipzig professor to the circle of humanist scholars. The humanist character of the network is not only attributable to the available sources, but also to the convictions of important players at the Dresden court:[25] Duke George, Hieronymus Emser and Simon Pistoris by no means corresponded with Erasmus merely as a compulsory exercise, and it is quite justified to ask what influence Erasmus had on anti-Reformation publishing in Saxony. Without going into further detail at this point, it can be suggested that Erasmus' nobly-restrained line also affected the work of Emser and others to a certain extent: if one wanted to conform to the group ethos of the humanists, one could neither write as bluntly erudite as Dungersheim nor as 'populist' as Luther.[26] One undoubtedly missed opportunities, but – as far as possible – preserved the humanist *decorum*.

The two networks of the first and second phases – 'with Emser' and 'with Cochlaeus', so to speak – were modelled in Gephi using the same algorithm to ensure comparability (Figure 2). In slightly simplified terms, this 'Force Atlas' offers a 'spatialisation' of the network to make social structures more visible.[27] The nodes are thought of as repelling one another, while the edges pull them towards each other; at the end of the computational process, there is a state of equilibrium between repelling and attracting forces. The basic data of the two networks can be listed as follows:

|  | Number of nodes | Number of edges | Density |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Phase 1: 1517–1527 | 40 | 161 | 0.206 |
| Phase 2: 1528–1539 | 68 | 458 | 0.201 |

First of all, it is noteworthy that the number of nodes increased by 70% and the number of edges almost tripled (increase of 184.5%.). A lower network density was therefore to be expected, since the larger the network, the less likely it is that a large number of nodes are

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[25] Cf. Wartenberg, "Erasmianismus"; Volkmar, *Catholic Reform*, 360–1.
[26] Cf. Ryrie, "Martin Luther."
[27] Cf. Jacomy et al., "Force Atlas 2."
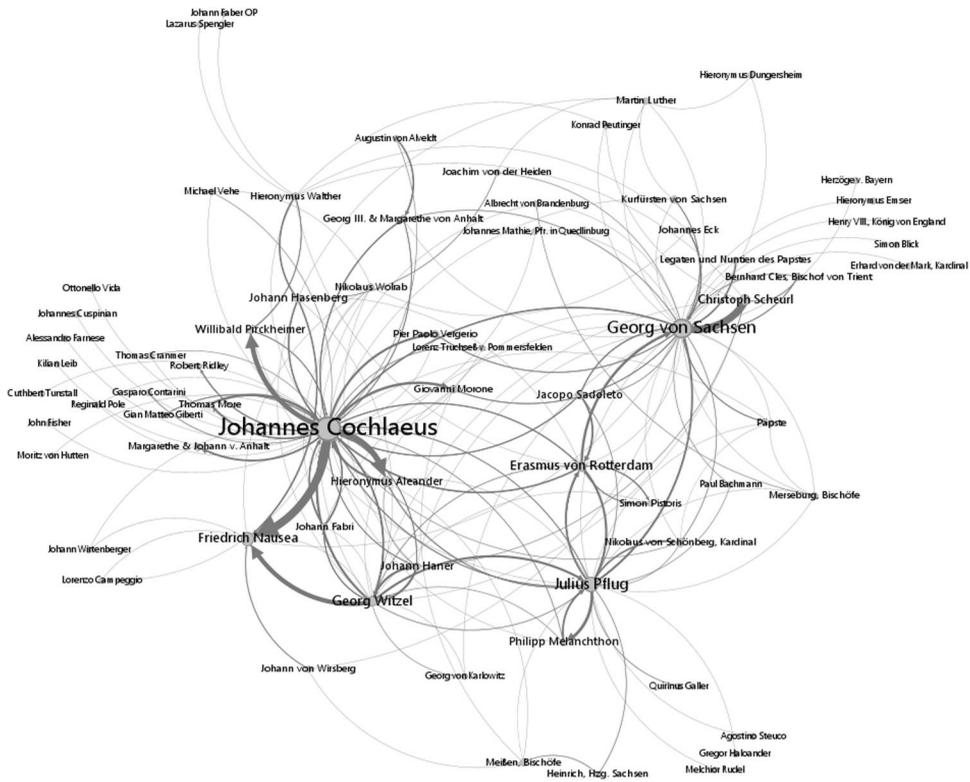
**Figure 2.** The network of Luther's opponents in Albertine Saxony, 1528–1539.

connected to each other[28]However, the difference of only 0.005 indicates that more communication between the actors can be detected at the same time. This is due to an increased quantity of sources being available on the one hand and on the other hand to the fact that a larger number of highly communicative actors could now be taken into account for the network.

It also strikes the eye that in the second phase Duke George no longer forms the only centre around which the other actors group themselves. Instead, Johannes Cochlaeus emerges as a second strong centre of communication, whose radial network partially overlaps with Duke George's. In addition, Julius Pflug also became an important 'networker' during the 1530s, while the importance of Erasmus of Rotterdam declined both quantitatively and qualitatively.

## A closer look: Johannes Cochlaeus in Saxony (1528–1539)

In the period from 1528 onwards, Johannes Cochlaeus was the central communicator in Albertine Saxony, ranking ahead of Duke George in all relevant indicators – although his correspondence has not been systematically recorded and unknown Cochlaeus letters can still be found in archives.[29]

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[28] This applies in particular to work-related networks, to which the network modelled here also belongs, in contrast to kinship or friendship networks, see Jansen, *Einführung*, 95.
[29] I would like to thank Sam Kennerley for the information on his own findings in France.

| | Degree[30] | Closeness centrality[31] | Betweenness centrality[32] |
|---|---|---|---|
| Duke George | 98 | 0.644 | 816.123 |
| Johannes Cochlaeus | 196 | 0.720 | 1290.376 |

From the perspective of network research, Cochlaeus's appointment to the Dresden court as Emser's successor was a brilliant move. After all, Emser was appreciated for his works in the world of scholars and humanists and must have been well connected to a certain extent; his writings were read and could even provoke reactions from the Lutheran party. Cochlaeus, however, can probably be considered the more assiduous networker, as he cultivated wide-ranging contacts and undertook several journeys, both of which lifted him out of the provincialism in which most of Luther's opponents found themselves.

Virtually nothing can be said about Cochlaeus's relationship with Duke George (or vice versa) from their letters; it must be assumed that they met personally rather than write letters. In 1535, Cochlaeus accepted a canonry at Meissen Cathedral and appears to have lived in Meissen thereafter. This cannot only be interpreted as an honour and further financial security, but also raises the suspicion that Cochlaeus was to be 'praised away' from the court.[33] After all, he himself hints at certain tensions with the party around Simon Pistoris and George of Karlowitz, who set the tone at court during these years.[34] Nevertheless, he was at least occasionally approached as the head of the anti-Reformation theologians in Saxony, as letters from the Quedlinburg pastor Johannes Mathie demonstrate who hoped for efficient backing from Dresden when the Reformation arrived in Quedlinburg.[35]

Cochlaeus initially also took on the role of Hieronymus Emser in relation to the princes of Anhalt. Princess Margarethe had asked him to continue to provide her with news, so Cochlaeus sent her a Cologne edition of Emser's New Testament,[36] later endeavouring to send her his own works.[37] The princess in turn thanked him with a monetary gift, as she had already done with Emser.[38]

After the death of the princess in 1530, Cochlaeus maintained contact with her sons, Princes John IV and George III. He was thus involved in the princes' struggle to decide between the Lutheran and Catholic parties, which was also a decision between political

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[30] The degree represents the total number of incoming and outgoing connections (edges) of an actor (node).

[31] Closeness Centrality comprises an actor's direct and indirect relationships established via third parties. The focus here is on the possibility of making indirect contact with as many other actors as possible, not on actual communication. Closeness Centrality is calculated from the sum of the path distances of an actor to all other actors apart from itself. The reciprocal of this sum is then used to obtain a closeness measure so that the result is between 0 and 1.

[32] Betweenness centrality asks about the probability that an actor can become an intermediary between others and thus control communication. This probability is listed for each pair of actors; it corresponds to the ratio of the number of edges between any two nodes that run through a specific third node to the number of shortest connections between these two actors. The respective calculated probabilities are totalled, resulting in a value between 0 (for actors without any centrality) and infinity.

[33] Cf. Bäumer, *Cochlaeus*, 44. See also Cochlaeus to Aleandro, 6 May 1534 (Friedensburg, "Beiträge," no. 35), where Cochlaeus indicates that he urgently needed the income.

[34] Cf. Cochlaeus to Erasmus, 13 March 1529 (Allen, *Opus epistolarum*, vol. 8, no. 2120, 84, on Pistoris): "Et in summa videtur multis Lutheranis dogmatibus propensior quam velit clerus. Haec secreto." Cf. also Cochlaeus to Pirckheimer, 15 March 1529 (*Pirckheimers Briefwechsel*, vol. 7, no. 1214), where the grumbling of the "Lutherans" at the Dresden court about Cochlaeus's *Septiceps Lutherus* is mentioned.

[35] Johannes Mathie to George of Breitenbach, 29 September 1534, and to Cochlaeus, 19 April 1535 (*Akten und Briefe*, vol. 3, no. 2563; vol. 4, no. 2774).

[36] It was probably one of the editions printed by Peter Quentel in 1528 or 1529 (VD16 B 4382, B 4383, ZV 1845 or B 4391).

[37] Cf. Cochlaeus to Princess Margarethe, 28 October und 26 December 1529 (Clemen, *Briefe*, no. 14; 17).

[38] Cf. Cochlaeus to Princess Margarethe, 28 November 1529 (Clemen, *Briefe*, no. 15).

proximity to the Electorate of Saxony on the one hand or Brandenburg and the Duchy of Saxony on the other.[39] Cochlaeus was acutely aware of how intensely the Wittenberg party was striving to win over the Anhalt princes and consequently issued a warning againstthe 'luterey'.[40] Eventually, Prince George reaffirmed his loyalty to the Catholic Church; but he received Holy Communion under both from 1533 onward.[41] At the same time, contact between Cochlaeus and the Anhalt princes ceased until 1538, when briefly exchanged views on the differences over the lay chalice and priestly marriage.[42] Both topics were discussed intensively at the Dresden court between 1537 and 1539 and were to remain an issue even after Duke George's demise.

Cochlaeus' correspondence with Erasmus of Rotterdam and Willibald Pirckheimer evidences his being recognised and well-connected in the world of humanist scholars. He maintained contact with his former employer and mentor Pirckheimer – the period of tension during which Pirckheimer had 'unfriended' him in 1523[43] was over when he took up his post in Dresden. Their correspondence focussed on two main areas, the first of which was an exchange on publication projects: They read each other's manuscripts adding remarks and queries. Furthermore, Cochlaeus kept Pirckheimer informed about current political developments, particularly the Diet of Augsburg of 1530.[44] In a legal case, Cochlaeus made his network available to Pirckheimer bringing the Saxon jurist Simon Pistoris and the Eichstätt churchmen Johann of Wirsberg and Kilian Leib to his attention.[45] The correspondence reveals the long friendship between Cochlaeus and his long-time patron Pirckheimer, who had integrated the younger friend into the humanist community – the correspondence therefore also conveys a certain social status.

This also applies to the correspondence that Cochlaeus maintained with Erasmus of Rotterdam. Both men repeatedly reaffirmed their friendship and exchanged personal information, but they also warned each other about the uncertainties of transporting letters.[46] It is possible that Cochlaeus's contact with Thomas More was established through Erasmus; in any case, Erasmus received from Cochlaeus the manuscript of a work dedicated to More.[47] However, it is also clear that the specific opposition to the Reformation is no more a topic in this humanist correspondence than it is in the correspondence with Pirckheimer.

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[39] Cf. introduction in Georg III. von Anhalt, *Abendmahlsschriften*, 13–7.

[40] Cochlaeus to Prince Johann, 27 December 1532 (Clemen, *Briefe*, no. 33). Similarly in the letter to Prince George of the same date (no. 34).

[41] Cf. Georg III., *Abendmahlsschriften*, 15.

[42] Cochlaeus to Prince George, 26 April 1538; Prince George to Cochlaeus, 8 May 1538; Cochlaeus to Prince Johann, 25 July 1538 (Clemen, *Briefe*, no. 42–44). Despite all the differences that had become obvious and which most probably prevented any further exchange, Cochlaeus expressly thanked Prince Johann in 1545 for the support of his relatives from the Wolrab family: Cochlaeus to Prince Johann, 16. Oktober 1545 (Clemen, *Briefe*, no. 45).

[43] See Pirckheimer to Emser, 10 August 1523 (*Pirckheimers Briefwechsel*, vol. 5, no. 791).

[44] Particularly remarkable is the fact that Cochlaeus also conveyed information to Pirckheimer on the state of politics in England, see Cochlaeus to Pirckheimer, 30 November 1529 and 27 March 1530 (*Pirckheimers Briefwechsel*, vol. 7, no. 1258; 1285). On several occasions between May and October 1530 Cochlaeus sent his reports from the Diet in Augsburg (ibid., no. 1293–1295, 1311, 1317, 1318, 1326).

[45] See *Pirckheimers Briefwechsel*, vol. 7, no. 1293-1295, 1298, 1300, 1326.

[46] See Cochlaeus to Erasmus, 8 January 1528 and 13 March 1529; Erasmus to Cochlaeus, 19 March 1528, 1 April 1529, 24 November 1534 and March 1535 (Allen, *Opus epistolarum*, vol. 7, no. 1928, 1974; vol. 8, no. 2120, 2143; vol. 11, no. 2979, 3001).

[47] Erasmus to Cochlaeus, 25 August 1527 (Allen, *Opus epistolarum*, vol. 7, no. 1863): Erasmus expresses his delight that Cochlaeus has been able to win the friendship of Thomas More. Cochlaeus thanks Erasmus for correcting the manuscript on 13 March 1529 (Allen, *Opus epistolarum*, vol. 8, Nr. 2120).

The situation is different with Hieronymus Aleander, whom Cochlaeus probably got to know as a papal diplomat, but whom he also appreciated as a humanist. A comparatively large number of letters have survived from the time of the Diet of Worms in 1521,[48] and the two were in regular friendly contact in the 1530s. These letters generally revolve around certain focal points, which primarily include Cochlaeus's publication projects. Cochlaeus regularly reports on their progress, but also on the most serious problem, the lack of funding.[49] Aleander was probably able to help a little on this point, however, as he was apparently successful in raising funds from Bishop Gian Matteo Giberti of Verona,[50] with whom Cochlaeus subsequently also corresponded.[51] Efforts to obtain direct support for Cochlaeus's publishing activities from the Pope, by contrast, do not appear to have been rewarded by either Clement VII or Paul III. However, Cochlaeus did not only act as a petitioner on his own behalf, but also as an intermediary for others, when he supported Georg Witzel as well as Johann Haner in precarious situations.[52] Finally, Cochlaeus also petitioned for the Wolrab printing shop, in whose financial stability he had a twofold interest: firstly, he needed Wolrab as a 'house printer' (and maybe a successor to the 'Emserpresse'), and secondly, its owner Nikolaus Wolrab was married to one of his nieces.[53]

The third major topic was the political situation not only in Germany, but also in England and Scotland in particular, to which Cochlaeus devoted special attention in the mid-1530s. From the letters to Aleander and Pier Paolo Vergerio, we learn that Cochlaeus sent his own legation to England, which was unsuccessful, particularly because John Fisher and Thomas More had already been imprisoned.[54]

*Mutatis mutandis*, the observations made for Aleander can be repeated for Cochlaeus's other 'Roman' contacts. These include the nuncios Pier Paolo Vergerio and Giovanni Morone, Vergerio's auditor Ottonello Vida, the papal nephew Alessandro Farnese, and Cardinal Nikolaus von Schönberg.[55] Cochlaeus appears to have cultivated these contacts less systematically than the correspondence with Aleander, but they ultimately served to build up a network connected to the Roman Curia, which Cochlaeus himself must have understood in this way.[56] Therefore, the contact with the papal nuncios Vergerio and Morone can hardly come as a surprise, but might be more attributed to their function and Cochlaeus's interest in Roman contacts. This approach bore

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[48] See Friedensburg, "Beiträge," 106–31 ( = no. 16–21, 23–24).

[49] Cochlaeus to Aleander, 7 October 1532, 12 April 1534, 8 September 1534, 25 June 1535 (Friedensburg, "Beiträge," no. 27, 32, 38, 41).

[50] Aleander to Cochlaeus, 12 May 1535, 24 October 1536 (Friedensburg, "Beiträge," no. 40, 45); Cochlaeus to Aleander, 25 June 1535, 12 March 1537 (ibid, no. 46). In 1535 Giberti transferred 50 gold guilders (via the Welserbank), in 1536 it was 37 guilders (Giovanni Morone took over the transport across the Alps on the way to his nunciature). Aleander had already promised these endeavours in the summer of 1533: Aleander to Cochlaeus, 29 August 1533 (ibid., no. 29).

[51] There are references to this in various letters between Cochlaeus and Aleander, see Friedensburg, "Beiträge," no. 41, 53, 55. Cochlaeus Aleander also sends greetings to Giberti on various occasions (ibid., no. 27, 41, 56).

[52] Cochlaeus to Aleander, 7 October 1533, 12 April 1534, 6 May 1534 (Friedensburg, "Beiträge," no. 27, 32, 35). Aleander offered to take Witzel in and had asked a bishop for support for Haner, but this was not granted, citing the need to care for the poor: Aleander to Cochlaeus, 29 August 1533 (ibid., no. 29).

[53] Cochlaeus to Aleander, 7 October 1537 (Friedensburg, "Beiträge," no. 49), Cochlaeus to Ottonello Vida, 26. July 1536 (ibid., no. 44); see also Cochlaeus to Morone, 31 August 1537 (ibid., no. 48). On Wolrab, see Wenzel, "Nicolaus Wolrab".

[54] Cochlaeus to Aleander, 23 April 1534, 8 September 1534 (Friedensburg, "Beiträge," no. 33, 38); Cochlaeus to Vergerio, 27 Juli 1534 (ibid., no. 37). In greater detail Cochlaeus to Johann Fabri, 28 October 1534 (ibid., no. 39).

[55] Cf. Friedensburg, "Beiträge," no. 30, 31, 34, 36, 37, 42-44, 48, 50–57.

[56] See Cochlaeus to Alessandro Farnese, 7 October 1537 (Friedensburg, "Beiträge," no. 50). Lorenzo Campeggio is added here to those already mentioned; in addition, a letter to Gasparo Contarini has been edited, too (ibid., no. 57).

fruit insofar as Cochlaeus was also present as an absentee at the beginning of the Council of Trent through his letters; finally, at the beginning of the second session of the Council of Trent, Cochlaeus's works could also be used for the Council's work.[57]

Cochlaeus and Friedrich Nausea were even closer friends – not only in terms of shared humanistic and theological interests, but also on a very personal level.[58] Against this background, Cochlaeus's letters to Nausea have a different quality from those to Aleander or Pirckheimer: while these two were superior to Cochlaeus in ecclesiastical and social rank (and this was tacitly accepted by all involved), the contact with Nausea appears more informal and personal. Here Cochlaeus reports from his everyday surroundings and offers more direct judgements on people and developments than in other letters.[59]

Quite often, it is about the great esteem in which Cochlaeus held Nausea's works,[60] but also about the difficulties of publishing: printers of dubious loyalty[61] or lost and presumably intercepted letters.[62] The sympathy that Cochlaeus expresses with regard to the difficulties of providing Nausea with adequate financial resources, but also the fact that a nephew of Nausea's probably lived in Cochlaeus's household for a time, indicates the personal connection.[63] From April to August 1539, Cochlaeus also wrote very personally about his situation, the uncertainty and fears about the future after the death of Duke George.[64] The fact that he expressly did not ask Nausea for money when he was plagued by financial worries also contributes to the characterisation of this relationship: Nausea was presumably not to become a patron and thus not to be superior to Cochlaeus.[65]

Furthermore, from the perspective of network theory, a clique can be identified for the years 1536–1539 consisting of some of the aforementioned actors: Johannes Cochlaeus, Friedrich Nausea, Georg Witzel and Johann Hasenberg. These four were in direct contact with each other, could be reached by each other (in fact partly through the services of Hieronymus Walther), made comparatively frequent use of this opportunity and exhibited a higher density of relationships compared to their surroundings.[66] Admittedly, little more can be said about this clique than that its members communicated with each other on a friendly basis; by contrast, there is no evidence of concerted action in the sense of coordinated publishing or even a joint appearance as a group, and this apparently did not take place. The effectiveness of the connection between Cochlaeus, Nausea and Fabri can rather be observed by focussing on the theological prehistory of the Colloquies and the Council of Trent from 1540 onwards.[67]

At this point, it is important to mention the merchant Hieronymus Walther, who came from Nuremberg and was active in Leipzig as a factor of the Welser trading

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[57] The Auxiliary Bishop of Mainz, Sebastian von Heusenstamm, brought a series of anti-reformatory theological publications with him to Trent; cf. Jedin, *Geschichte des Konzils von Trient*, vol. 3, 264.

[58] Cf. Spahn, *Cochläus*, 115-116. Letters from Cochlaeus to Nausea can be found in Nausea's collection of letters from 1524 onwards.

[59] See *Epistolarum Miscellanearum ad Fridericum Nauseam Libri X,* 72–4.

[60] See Cochlaeus to Nausea, 27 August 1529, 28 September 1530, 1 July 1531 (*Epistolarum Miscellanearum,* 77, 91, 115).

[61] Concerning Melchior Lotter: Cochlaeus to Nausea, 27 August 1529 (*Epistolarum Miscellanearum,* 77).

[62] Cochlaeus to Nausea, 10 July 1529, 11 February 1533, 29 December 1536 (*Epistolarum Miscellanearum,* 72, 97, 184).

[63] Cochlaeus to Nausea, 21 May 1532 (*Epistolarum Miscellanearum,* 127).

[64] Cochlaeus to Nausea, 18 April, 1 / 10 / 24 June, 12 August 1539 (*Epistolarum Miscellanearum,* 243–5, 247–50, 254–5).

[65] Cochlaeus to Nausea, 10 June 1539 (*Epistolarum Miscellanearum,* 247–8).

[66] Due to the incompleteness of the sources, a strict definition of clique was deliberately applied. Cf. Jansen, *Einführung,* 194–5; Kappelhoff, "Cliquenanalyse," 45–7.

[67] Cf. Jedin, *Geschichte des Konzils von Trient*, vol. 1, 301–4.

company in Augsburg.[68] A staunch opponent of the Reformation who had a considerable and reliable logistics organisation at his disposal, Walther was indispensable for the transport of letters, book shipments and money.[69] The evidence for his activities is as scattered as it is numerous, and it is in the nature of his 'intermediary' activities that it can only be found sporadically; they include the transport of books and gifts as well as the transfer of money.[70] However, Walther also acted independently, organising the dispatch of 'remnants' of ducal publications, promoting the pamphlets of Johann Hasenberg and Joachim von der Heyden against Luther's marriage, and sending books to Willibald Pirckheimer.[71] Johannes Cochlaeus valued Walther above all for the reliable and discreet transport of letters that were not intercepted en route.[72] In addition, Walther's indispensability for the functioning of the anti-Lutheran network is shown from the fact that Cochlaeus dedicated his publication of John Fisher's prefaces to him.[73]

In Albertine Saxony, Cochlaeus was on good terms with Georg Witzel, who, as a married priest had returned to the Catholic Church and was caught between a rock and a hard place. Duke George offered him a temporary position at court, with the result that many of Witzel's publications in the 1530s appeared in Nikolaus Wolrab's publishing house. Yet, there was no need for further correspondence with another theological authority: Julius Pflug, like Cochlaeus, held a canonry at Meissen Cathedral and eventually became dean of the cathedral chapter, which meant that the two met more often in person. As far as can be gleaned from their letters, their relationship was respectful but not particularly close – their attitudes and emphases tended to be too different. However, they did act together after the death of Duke George, when they approached the papal nuncio Aleander to obtain the pope's indult for the lay chalice and dispensations for priests' marriages, albeit without success.[74] Pflug also informed Cochlaeus of his last days in Meißen and his departure; this letter may mark the definitive end of our period of investigation.[75]

Rather significant, and largely neglected in research hitherto, were Cochlaeus's contacts to England.[76] By 1527, he was engaged in correspondence with Thomas More, predominantly concerning the current state of religious politics in Europe.[77] An exchange of letters with the Bishop of Rochester, John Fisher, who was highly esteemed on the Continent, can only be inferred, as Fisher's documents were confiscated when he was arrested

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[68] Cf. Volkmar, "Luther am Boden."

[69] Cf. Tewes, *Bursen*, 779–80.

[70] Cf. Emser to Princess Margarethe, 25 December 1526 (Clemen, *Briefe*, no. 3); Cochlaeus to Aleander, 12 April 1534 (Friedensburg, "Beiträge," no. 32); Aleander to Cochlaeus, 12 May 1535, along with Cochlaeus's receipt, 25 June 1535 (ibid., no. 40, 41); Walther to Duke George, 13 November 1529 (*Akten und Briefe*, vol. 3, no. 1861); Erasmus to Duke George, 30 July 1526, 2 September 1526, 30 June 1530 (Allen, *Opus epistolarum*, vol. 6, no. 1728, 1743; vol. 8, no. 2338); Hasenberg to Erasmus, 6 January 1530 (Allen, *Opus epistolarum*, vol. 8, no. 2247).

[71] Walther to Duke George, 13 November 1529 (*Akten und Briefe*, vol. 3, no. 1861); Walther to Pirckheimer, 11 January, 26 February 1530 (*Pirckheimers Briefwechsel*, vol. 7, no. 1270, 1278).

[72] Cochlaeus to Aleander, 30 July 1532, 8 September 1534 (Friedensburg, "Beiträge," no. 26, 38); Cochlaeus to Pirckheimer, 30 June 1528 (*Pirckheimers Briefwechsel*, vol. 7, no. 1182).

[73] Fisher, *Funff vorreden*.

[74] Pflug and Cochlaeus to Aleander, 4 May 1539 (Pollet, Correspondance de Pflug, no. 135); Aleander to Bishop Johann VIII of Meißen, Pflug and Cochlaeus, 16 July 1539 (Pollet, Correspondance de Pflug, no. 138). Cf. Schmidt, Turca gaudet, secta ridet, 232-235.

[75] Pflug to Cochlaeus, 14 August 1539 (Pollet, Correspondance de Pflug, no. 140).

[76] Further research on the issue seems necessary, cf. Spahn, *Cochlaeus*, 186–7 and passim.

[77] See Erasmus to Cochlaeus, 25 August 1527 (Allen, vol. 7, no. 1863); Rogers, *Correspondence of Sir Thomas More*, nos. 162, 164–166, 184, 189.

and probably destroyed after his execution.[78] Anyway, Cochlaeus dedicated some of his works to Luther's opponents, and it is clear that Cochlaeus used this instrument strategically. In addition to Thomas More and John Fisher, Nicholas West and Robert Ridley were among the recipients of dedications. This circle also included Cuthbert Tunstall, a 'networker' of anti-Lutheran publishing in England, whose nephew and secretary was Robert Ridley. There is a possibility that Cochlaeus and Tunstall met in Worms in 1521, as both were present at the fringes of the Diet, and Tunstall reported back to England on Luther's theology and the reactions of the people.[79]

In 1534, when Cochlaeus dispatched his emissaries to England, they encountered Tunstall, who informed them that, despite his inclination to be favourable towards Cochlaeus, he was reluctant to accept correspondence from him, given the prevailing political climate. Tunstall's apprehension was likely exacerbated by the fact that John Fisher, Thomas More and Robert Ridley had already been incarcerated. Cochlaeus had also become acquainted with Thomas Cranmer, later to become Archbishop of Canterbury, at the Diet of Regensburg in 1532, where he was present as Duke George's representative.[80] A more systematic account of Cochlaeus's contacts with England and his views on the English situation remains to be written.

It should be noted, at least in passing, that there was not only theological bad blood between Cochlaeus and Philipp Melanchthon, but also respectful contacts. For instance, Cochlaeus and the Cologne humanist Arnold von Wesel requested a confidential meeting with Melanchthon at the Augsburg Diet, and in the same context Cochlaeus sent Melanchthon a copy of Pirckheimer's *Topographia Germaniae* on behalf of the latter.[81] A few years later, Cochlaeus sent Wittenberg a pamphlet containing theses on the 'spiritual priesthood', which was attributed to Melanchthon, but from which Melanchthon immediately distanced himself.[82] This collegial contact was, of course, only temporary.

## Benefits and limitations of network research

The network of Luther's Saxon opponents between 1528 and 1539 demonstrates the central position of Johannes Cochlaeus – not only due to the comparatively superior documentation, but also because of Cochlaeus's outstanding communicative abilities. Admittedly, there are limits to what we can do with him, and even more so with his correspondents, as the surviving records are incomplete to varying degrees. This inevitably leads to distortions when analysing the network with the mathematical apparatus of social network analysis, so the aforementioned metrics must be interpreted with reasonable caution. Against this background, it seems more appropriate to describe the study presented here as network research and to reserve the term network analysis 'for reasons of linguistic aesthetics as well as methodological delimitation for those studies that make better use of the corresponding formal conceptual apparatus and mathematical

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[78] See Cochlaeus to Pirckheimer, 15 September 1526, 27 March 1530 (Pirckheimers Briefwechsel, vol. 6, no. 1054; vol. 7, no. 1285). Cf. Rex, Polemical Theologian, 111–114; Rex, Theology, 82–85. I would like to thank Richard Rex (Cambridge) very much for an illuminating discussion on this topic.

[79] Cf. Rex, "English Campaign," 86.

[80] Fabri to Nausea, 13 June 1538 (*Epistolarum Miscellanearum*, 226); Cranmer to Henry VIII, 1533 or 1535 (Pocock, *Records of the Reformation*, vol. 2, 506-507); Cochlaeus, *Scopa*, G ii b.

[81] Cochlaeus to Melanchthon, 2 June and September 1530 (Melanchthon Briefwechsel, no. 918 and 1074a).

[82] Melanchthon to Cochlaeus, 24 April 1533 (Melanchthon Briefwechsel no. 1321).

methodology'.[83] Summarising the issues of the method in the example of Luther's opponents, three aspects can be identified:

(1) The problem of missing sources. Written or oral communication can only be partially inferred from other documents. As a consequence, the individual actors can only be compared with each other to a considerably limited extent.
(2) The danger of carelessness with the data. It is always necessary to check the validity of the metrics. After all, the calculations can complement, but not replace, a hermeneutic approach to the sources.
(3) The problem of missing dynamics. In particular, visualisation has a tendency to create the impression of a stable network. The chronological break is intended to mitigate this, but it remains a task for detailed analysis.

Given these issues, what value might be attributed to the methods of network research for a 'Catholic' history of the Reformation? In general, network research does not intend to pit mathematical methodology against 'classical' hermeneutics with a certain exclusivist self-image; rather, both approaches should complement each other.[84] The heuristic value of the method is therefore paramount, as the systematic examination of correspondence unveils numerous unexpected or overlooked connections. Consequently, the positions of notable individuals such as the printer Nikolaus Wolrab, the merchant Hieronymus Walther, and the ducal secretary Simon Pistoris can be determined with greater precision. Concurrently, the actors' social context becomes discernible, thereby furnishing the history of theology with a foundation for studying the preconditions of theological work and the ambit of theological ideas. A meticulous examination of the individual actors also facilitates an analysis of the efficiency of their activities. Moreover, the data obtained will enable the delineation of the lacunae attributable to a paucity of sources.[85]

Johannes Cochlaeus, for example, not only had an extensive humanist theological network at his disposal, but also cultivated it deliberately and in some cases used it strategically. It only appears to be inefficient if one takes as a yardstick a complete (almost annihilating) prevention of the Reformation and an equally complete enforcement of the papal church. However, if we look at the opportunities that the network provided for the dissemination of Cochlaeus's writings and for increasing his social capital, then the network can certainly be described as highly efficient. Its yield is particularly evident in Cochlaeus's biographical stages of rupture, when he was repeatedly able to convert acquired social capital into economic capital.

It is often criticised that network research – especially in a field such as this – does not produce any new findings, since essentially everything is already known. In the example presented here, this is true insofar as the correspondence used for this study is available in print and Cochlaeus's contacts are already mentioned in Martin Spahn's biography. However, such a view might overlook the fact that network research can certainly put traditional research opinions to the test – for example, the common view that the actions of Luther's opponents were generally ineffective or failed.

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[83] Gramsch-Stehfest, "Metapher," 5.
[84] Cf. Gramsch, "Metapher," 6.
[85] Cf. Nitschke and Rollinger, "Network Analysis," 250–2.

Furthermore, it would be too short-sighted to assume that this evaluation of research aims at an apology of Luther's opponents through a historical method. Rather, it is a decisive advantage of network research from the perspective of church history that it offers a somewhat 'non-ideological' analytical approach; its essential criterion not being a theological quality – however that may be defined – but the efficiency of the network or its usefulness in achieving certain goals. In this sense, the network research presented here is open to expansion and sees itself explicitly as a building block for an 'ecumenical' history of the Reformation that does not intend to be a (de)legitimising history of one confession.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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