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Politics depends on personal contacts. This is true in today's world, and it was certainly true in early medieval states. Even in the Carolingian empire, the largest Western polity of the period, power depended on relations built on personal contacts. In an effort to nurture such necessary relationships, the sovereign moved with his court, within a network of important political "communication centres" ; in the ninth century, the foremost among these were his palaces, along with certain cities and religious sanctuaries. And thus, in contemporaneous sources, the Latin term *palatium* often designates not merely a royal residence but the king's entourage, through a metonymic displacement that shows the importance of palatial grounds in defining meeting spaces that were both physical and relational : coming to the palace, one could hope to see and hear the sovereign. This is why research on the movements of kings (*Itinerarforschung*) has been vital to recent historiography. It also justifies the considerable efforts invested in the study of palatial sites (*Pfalzforschung*), notably through archaeology. And it coheres with the central role of the concept of 'proximity to the king' (*Königsnähe*) in Carolingian political historiography.

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