

Fragmentology

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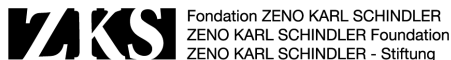
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Aristotelian Philosophy in Fragments

A New Witness of the Communia Ascribed to Robert Grosseteste

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Abstract: This article presents the preliminary study of ten fragmentary strips of parchment recovered from Karlsruhe, Badische Landesbibliothek, Cod. Aug. pap. 119. The strips were cut from a bifolium that contained passages from a summary of and commentary on Aristotle's *De anima* and *Ethica* in their oldest Latin versions. An analysis of the content and the paleographical details clarifies the original state of the didactic text, which was previously known from a single manuscript.

Keywords: Aristotelianism, Latin Aristotle, Robert Grosseteste, university

Not everyone is convinced that the study of fragments of lost manuscripts recovered from bindings of other books can advance our knowledge of medieval philosophy and its history. Admittedly, their contributions to the improvement of the transmitted texts are mostly proportionate to their limited size. More importantly, fragment finds are always relevant as witnesses of the reception of the texts they contain and of the lack of interest that marked their later fortune. In that capacity, they sometimes necessitate significant adjustments to our views on the transmission of certain texts. The importance increases if those texts are thought to have circulated in very few copies, or even in one unique manuscript, as in the case with the fragments presented here.

A new fragment of the *Communia* attributed to Robert Grosseteste

The fourteenth-century MS Salamanca, Biblioteca universitaria, 1986, fol. 83–115 (henceforth: S) preserves a collection of texts known by the title of *Communia*.¹ It contains summaries of and question commentaries on Aristotle's new (1) and old logic (2), his so-called *Ethica nova* (3) and *vetus* (4), the first books of the *De anima* (5) and of the *Meteorologica* (6), completed by a section of grammar based on Priscian (7). The compendium was probably intended as a primer for the students of the Arts faculty at the University of Paris. The manuscript ascribes the collection to Robert, bishop of Lincoln, but that attribution must very likely be rejected, as will become clear. In recent years, Claude Lafleur (Université de Laval, Québec) and his team have studied and edited several texts from the collection.²

For the sections on the old logic (2) and grammar (7), S is not the only witness: the same parts are preserved in MS Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, lat. 16617, ff. 171–205 (henceforth: P), which additionally contains a short section on Donatus's *Ars*. As for the passages on ethics and natural philosophy, S was considered the only access. Recently, however, I found remains of a second copy recovered from the binding of MS Karlsruhe, Badische Landesbibliothek, Cod. Aug. pap. 119 (henceforth: K), a manuscript on paper from Reichenau abbey. The manuscript itself dates from the first

1 Description and earlier bibliography in [O. Lilao Franca, C. Castrillo González], *Catálogo de manuscritos de la Biblioteca Universitaria de Salamanca. II. Manuscritos 1680–2777*, Salamanca 2002, 310–313.

2 C. Lafleur (ed.), *Les philosophies morale et naturelle du pseudo-Robert Grosseteste. Étude, édition critique et traduction des Communia de Salamanque* (Ms. Salamanca, BU 1986, fol. 99ra–102vb), Paris/Québec 2018; C. Lafleur, J. Carrier (eds.), *La 'Vieille logique' des Communia version parisienne du pseudo-Robert Grosseteste (= Pierre de Limoges, Pierre d'Auvergne?). Présentation, édition critique et traduction des Communia logice, ms. Paris, BnF, lat. 16617, fol. 171ra–183rb (et ms. Salamanca, BU 1986, fol. 91rb–99ra)*, Paris/Québec 2019; R. Létourneau, C. Lafleur, J. Carrier (eds.), *La grammaire philosophique du Pseudo-Robert Grosseteste (Pierre de Limoges, Pierre d'Auvergne ?). Présentation, édition critique et traduction des Communia grammatice parisiens et salmantins (mss. Paris, BnF, lat. 16617, fol. 183rb–205vb et Salamanca, BU 1986, fol. 102vb–115rb)*, Paris/Québec 2021.

half of the fifteenth century and contains *Sermones de tempore (Pars aestivalis)*.³ The parchment fragments were probably retrieved when the original binding was restored, as is documented in a pencil note on the modern rear pastedown: “restauriert Juli 1975, Kr. Fragmente liegen bei”. The entire manuscript and the fragments are digitized and freely accessible on the internet.⁴

The ten strips of parchment that have come to light after the restoration were initially cut from a single bifolium. They were trimmed for their purpose in the binding, which resulted in some loss of text, mainly close to the margins and at the bottom of the pages. Each strip is approximately 20 × 305 mm, with considerable variation between strips. The exterior margins are missing, but since the inner margin is about 35 mm wide, the original width of the bifolium was probably close to 340 mm. Assuming that the missing margins at the top and the bottom had analogous measurements, the size of the two original folios can be estimated at 240 × 170 mm.

When the strips are arranged in the right order (Figures 1-4, at the end of this article [F-laoo]), two columns of around sixty lines per page written by a single scribe in a very neat and fluent handwriting, a tiny *littera semitextualis libraria* that verges on the cursive, can be read almost completely. Occasional mistakes are crudely struck out, after which the scribe continues with the correct text. Characteristics of the hand are the letter *a* with a single compartment and the lack of descenders to the *f* and the high *s*. There are no loops to the ascenders, but often the *l* has an emphatic serif to the left of its top. The Tironian note for *et* with a crossbar, the variation between high and low *S* at the word endings, and the general appearance of the script make a date to the middle of the thirteenth century, and even slightly earlier, very likely.

The content of the preserved bifolium can be identified as paragraphs 14–85 of the ethical question commentary *Communia De virtute* and paragraphs 1–121 of the *Communia De anima* of

3 A. Holder, *Die Handschriften der Badischen Landesbibliothek in Karlsruhe. VI.2. Die Reichenauer Handschriften: Die Papierhandschriften, Fragmente, Nachträge*, Wiesbaden 1971; reprint of the edition Leipzig 1914, 269–270.

4 [urn:nbn:de:bsz:31-90895/fragment/page=4320715](https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:bsz:31-90895/fragment/page=4320715).

Pseudo-Grosseteste.⁵ The section on *De anima* opens with the rubric *Communia super librum De anima* without further attribution to an author. In that section (at least where the margins are not trimmed away), the start of each new question is consistently indicated by a Roman numeral and a superscript *a*, followed by the abbreviation for *questio*. The descender of the *q* is executed with an expansive loop, which closes and extends under the o to make it resemble a baroque cursive *g*.

K	S	P
	Logica nova (1)	
	Logica vetus (2)	Logica vetus
	Philosophia moralis (3): <i>De felicitate</i>	
Philosophia moralis: <i>De virtute</i> (§14–85)	Philosophia moralis (4): <i>De virtute</i> (§1–85)	
Philosophia naturalis: <i>De anima</i> (§1–121)	Philosophia naturalis (5): <i>De anima</i> (§1–142)	
	Philosophia naturalis (6): <i>De generatione galaxie (= Meteorologica I)</i>	
	Grammatica: Priscian (7)	Grammatica: Priscian
		Grammatica: Donatus

Table 1: The relationship between the three manuscripts containing the *Communia*

The four pages of contiguous text in K must have formed the inner bifolium of a quire. The bifolium misses the beginning of the treatise on virtues (13 paragraphs) and the end of the other on the soul (21 paragraphs). It is therefore highly likely that the quire contained other texts before and after them. Just like in S, the remains of the *Communia De virtute* and *Communia De anima* in K were probably once part of a larger complex of didactic texts on philosophy and grammar. On the basis of the surviving bifolium, however, it

⁵ Edition in Lafleur, *Les philosophies morale et naturelle*, 125–140 and 195–225.

is impossible to decide whether the original collection was identical to the one preserved in S.

Consequences for the establishment of the text of the *Communia*

The importance of K for the history of the *Communia* is considerable. The manuscript from which it originates was certainly produced about a century earlier than S, at the latest not long after the middle of the thirteenth century. Its early date makes it likely that it preserves a more faithful version of the original text. In the following part of this note, I will focus on the text of K and its characteristics.

Before establishing the connection between the texts of S and K, it is instructive to examine the sections where S can be compared with P, mainly in the chapters on logic. We must also take into account that the progress of Lafleur's edition project has resulted in an evolution of insight on the relationship between those two extant manuscripts. Initially, Lafleur claimed that the two manuscripts were independent witnesses of the same compilation, though in different edited versions. He cited three conspicuous discrepancies between the manuscripts as evidence for his hypothesis, namely the almost consistent use of *quare*, *ideo*, and *queritur* in S, while in the same passages P writes *propter quid*, *propter hoc*, and *querebatur*.⁶ In an appendix of his edition of the sections on grammar, Létourneau elaborated on these observations to form a "typologie provisoire". He describes the tendencies observed in S as the results of "miniaturisation ou abréviation" and of "réécriture" in comparison with the text of P. On the one hand, S shortens the text in various material ways, which can be illustrated by the use of *quare* and *ideo* instead of the longer *propter quid* and *propter hoc* in P. Létourneau thinks that financial motives may have played a role in this initial attempt to physically condense the text. In other instances, S tends to make the text more correct or understandable and therefore longer, e.g. by introducing alternatives and synonyms.⁷ Whichever the reasons

6 Lafleur, *La 'Vieille logique'*, 46–57.

7 Létourneau, *La grammaire philosophique*, 613–632 (Appendice 1).

behind the processes may have been, it is definitely clear that scribes attributed less authority to these newly produced didactic texts than to those of Aristotle himself, and that scribes and scholars therefore felt entitled to revise the phrasing according to their personal standards or preferences.

The comparison of the preserved text in K with S yields a similar outcome and makes the list of analogous examples longer. It confirms the manifest preference in S for *quare* over *propter quid* in K (e.g. *De virtute*, § 50) and for *ideo* over *propter hoc* (e.g. *De anima*, § 12 and 40). Other substitutions in S might also be considered shortenings with respect to the text of K, like *quia* for *quoniam* (e.g. *De virtute*, § 32 and *De anima*, § 43) and *sicut* for *quemadmodum* (*De virtute*, § 37), although the abbreviated forms used in the manuscripts almost completely annihilate the potential to economize on writing surface. The explanation of saving space does not hold at all for the choice of verbs, since S sometimes substitutes a longer word for what is found in K: *queritur* S for *dubitatur* K (*De virtute*, § 27); *contrariatur* S for *opponitur* K (*De virtute*, § 54); *determinatur* S for *agitur* (*De virtute*, § 74); *videtur* S for *ostenditur* K (*De anima*, § 35). The last opposition is also frequent in the grammatical sections, where P often prefers *ostenditur* over *videtur* in S.⁸ Some lexical oppositions between the two manuscripts might have been ultimately inspired by variants that the commentator found in his copy of the Aristotelian translations. The doublets *speculatio/speculor* and *consideratio/considero* (e.g. *De virtute*, § 19 and *De anima*, § 40) are frequently found as alternative equivalents for θεωρία/θεωρέω.⁹ The same explanation may be valid for the variance between *actionis* in S and *operationis* in K (e.g. *De anima*, § 45 and 50).¹⁰ The presence of

8 Létourneau, *La grammaire philosophique*, 367, n. 59; 369, n. 105; 420, n. 797; 427, n. 894; 429, n. 904; 430, n. 918; 438, n. 1027; 463, n. 1411; and many more.

9 E.g. double readings of *consideratio* and *speculatio* in the manuscripts of James of Venice's translation of the *Physica*, 200b24, 203a1, 203b3, and similarly of *considero* and *speculor* in the same text, 189b32 and 193b33, see F. Bossier and J. Brams, *Physica. Translatio vetus. Aristoteles Latinus VII 1.2* (Leiden/New York, 1990), app. ad loc.

10 F. Bossier, "L'élaboration du vocabulaire philosophique chez Burgundio de Pise" in *Aux origines du lexique philosophique européen. L'influence de la Latinitas*, ed. J. Hamesse, Louvain-la-Neuve 1997, 81–116, in particular 102–109.

alternatives is confirmed by the use of *sive* in *De virtute*, § 61 where S reads *et avaritia*, while K preserves the original pairing *illiberalitas sive* <*avaritia*> (the last word is trimmed off but can be logically supplemented).

There are numerous other variations between the versions of the manuscripts S and K that clearly rely on intentional changes at some stage of their transmission, although it is not obvious to discern the strategies that led to these interventions – at least if a structured plan governed the process at all. Létourneau considers them forms of ‘réécriture sans finalité’ in P.¹¹ Some variants have a connection with the citation of an authority, but there are no signs that they result from a systematic revision, e.g. *auctor* S : *Aristoteles* K (*De virtute*, § 61); but *Aristoteles* S : *auctor* K (*De virtute*, § 64); *ostendit auctor* S : *dicit Aristoteles* K (*De virtute*, § 72); *Plato* S : *opinio Platonis* K (*De anima*, § 12). In other cases, a synonym seems to have taken the place of the original wording and it is impossible to decide in which direction the change was made, e.g. *sumpta* S : *accepta* K (*De anima*, § 41); *olfactus* S : *odoratus* K (*De anima*, § 111); *extrinsecum* S : *extraneum* K (*De anima*, § 111).

While the discovery of K confirms, but also partly nuances the analysis of the process that led to the formation of the revised text version preserved in S, K in several passages contains a reading that is more correct or more complete than the one preserved in S. It confirms some minor corrections made by the editors, e.g. *etiam* ed. K : *solum* S (*De virtute*, § 23); *opponitur* ed. K : *opponuntur* S (*De virtute*, § 51); *civilis* ed. K : *finalis* S (*De virtute*, § 67); *consiliata* ed. K : *considerata* S (*De virtute*, § 84); *virtus* ed. K : *sic* S (*De anima*, § 1); *sufficienter* ed. K : *insufficienter* S (*De anima*, § 6); *perfectam* ed. K : *imperfectam* S (*De anima*, § 12); *recipit* ed. K : *respicit* S (*De anima*, § 54). In a few other cases, the reading of K is not identical to the emendation made by the editors, but it confirms that the editors were right to intervene, e.g. *generantur* ed. : *generatur* S : *conficiuntur* K (*De virtute*, § 51); *sicut* ed. : *et* S : *ut* K (*De anima*, § 31); *quod* ed. : *communiter* S : *quia* K (*De anima*, § 32); *quedam* ed. : *iterum* S : *iterum quedam* K (*De anima*, § 61). In some instances, the

11 Létourneau, *La grammaire philosophique*, 626.

editors may have been too eager to emend, e.g. *differentiarum vel malitiarum* ed. : *malitiarum* K : om. S (*De virtute*, § 45); *virtus itaque et* ed. : *virtus itaque ex* S : *virtus itaque* K (*De virtute*, § 73).

If the previous listings have created the impression that the contribution from K for the establishment of the text remains minor, the following instances show that its readings can significantly alter and improve the text as transmitted in S. That is definitely the case when K preserves phrases that are missing in S. In the latter manuscript, the scribe repeatedly skipped a line due to a homoeoteleuton, e.g. *cognoscendo enim* S : *in cognoscendo enim et diligendo* K (*De virtute*, § 21); *operando* SK + *grammatic(am...) simus gramatici, non tamen operando* K (*De virtute*, § 41); *scientia* SK + *aut si subicitur, non est scientia de anima* K (*De anima*, § 37); *substantiam ut* SK + *sed dicte differentie anima in diversis diffe<...> ut* K (*De anima*, § 94); *color* SK + *et auditus cuius obiectum est sonus et olfactus cuius obiectum est odor* K (*De anima*, § 111). In the following passages, K transmits complete sections or paragraphs that are lacking in S: *in tertio de eligentia existente autem eligibili* K : om. S (*De virtute*, § 82); *Ad aliud dicendum est quod, licet anima non abstrahatur nec cognoscatur per abstractionem sicut res habentes speciem in materia, cognoscitur tamen per suas operationes, que non possunt complete cognosci sine hac scientia* K : om. S (*De anima*, between § 11 and § 12); *Ad quod dicendum quod sensitivam fetus precedit <...> am matris, tamen vegetativa propria fetus non precedit propriam sensitiv(am)* K : om. S (*De anima*, § 92); *Alii dicunt quod sensitiva et intellectiva sunt differentia anime cogitative et apprehensive. Vegetativa enim non est cogitativa et propter hoc sensitive et intellective sunt idem in substantia in homine, vegetativa vero differt* K : om. S (*De anima*, between § 102 and § 103).

The list of additional passages of text preserved in K but absent from S leaves open the possibility that S was directly or indirectly copied from K. However, this cannot be the case since S contains a paragraph that is missing from K (*De virtute*, § 26). Both manuscripts are therefore independent witnesses of the same text, even if S or its ancestor underwent a thorough editorial intervention.

I list half a dozen passages where the text as transmitted in S can be improved with the readings preserved in K. For each instance, I add a short comment.

1. *tractatus* S : *executionem sive tractatum* K (*De virtute*, § 63): the preceding preposition *in* clearly necessitates the accusative, so unless *tractatus* is considered a plural, it is incorrect. Since the text says that the section is divided into two parts, and that the *prohemium* is the first, the accusative singular must be the correct reading.

2. *a corporali* S : *a corruptibili* K (*De anima*, § 88): intellective soul and body are differentiated, just like the eternal (*perpetuum*) differs from the bodily, which would be tautological with what precedes. The reading of K with the more logical opposition of eternal and corruptible is confirmed by the verb *corrumpuntur* in the following sentence.

3. *differentia* S : *substantia* K (*De anima*, § 89): as a proof that the three different aspects of the soul, namely the vegetative, sensitive, and intellective are one substance, the commentator argues that different forms can only become one substance if one is in act and the others in potency. The frequent use of *differentia* in the passage put the scribe of S or of its model on the wrong foot.

4. *embrio* ed. : *sor* S : *sortes* K (*De anima*, § 96): the editors emended *sor* to *embrio* in a passage which says that the fetus according to Aristotle first is an animal and therefore acquires the sensitive soul prior to the intellective. The reading of S could result from the misunderstanding of an abbreviation used in manuscripts of medical texts, but the variant in K does not lend support to the editorial emendation. I see no obvious solution for this *crux*, unless *fetus* must be used as in § 93.

5. *suprema* S : *sperma* K (*De anima*, § 109): it is clear that in this context of reproduction, there is no reason to talk of a “surabondance suprême”. The reading of K makes the text sound: the commentator here argues that seed is the excess of the ultimate digestion.

6. *parva* ed. : *parvia* SK : *pervia* Beullens (*De anima*, § 111): the passage deals with the mediation of the senses through air or water, which are taken up by the smell if the signs are *munda et rara et parva*. The editors translate with “raffinés, rares et délicats”. To reach

that meaning, they change the reading *parvia* of S (confirmed by K) to *parva*, but it seems impossible to understand that adjective as “delicate”. I suggest to emend *parvia* to *pervia*: the hypothetical misreading is easily explained on paleographical grounds and it can be fittingly translated as “penetrating”.

Consequences for date and author of the *Communia*

The analysis of the text in K and the comparison with S form a significant corrective to the hypotheses put forth by Lafleur and his team. They suggest that the collection preserved in S was not necessarily realized as a unified enterprise by a single author. In their opinion, it cannot be excluded that the sections on logic and grammar, which were also preserved in P, were compiled before or after those on the *Ethica* and on *De anima* by a different scholar.

For these last sections, Lafleur initially put the date of composition around 1252–1255, when the *De anima* was for the first time mentioned in the statutes of the University of Paris and prescribed as compulsory reading. Nevertheless, the *Communia* section on the *Ethica* clearly states that only books I–III were known under the names of *Ethica nova* and *Ethica vetus*, the parts of Burgundio of Pisa’s twelfth-century translation that remained accessible in the following century.¹² That situation probably changed after 1250 when Robert Grosseteste’s version of the ten books started to circulate in Paris, thus Lafleur’s initial dating might be a little late; on the other hand, Lafleur holds, on the basis of doctrinal positions defended in the *Communia*, that its original core was not composed prior to 1245.¹³ Therefore, the work was likely compiled between 1245 and 1255. Given the paleographical evidence that K was produced in the mid-thirteenth century, K was copied shortly after the actual compilation of the work that it contains.

As for the identity of the author or authors of the *Communia*, the unambiguous remark that the books of the *Ethica* that follow after the first three known from the *Ethica nova* and the *Ethica vetus*

¹² Lafleur, *Les philosophies morale et naturelle*, 21–23.

¹³ Lafleur, *Les philosophies morale et naturelle*, 34. A similar date is suggested for Robert Kilwardby’s commentary on the *Ethica*, see A. Celano, *Robert Kilwardby’s Commentary on the Ethics of Aristotle*, Leiden/Boston 2022, 89.

were not available to them makes it virtually impossible to accept the evidence from the title in S and to attribute the *Communia* to Robert Grosseteste. It would be very odd indeed if the bishop of Lincoln had complained that he did not have the books that are missing from the earliest Latin version of the *Ethica*, while he was at the same time working on a new and complete translation.¹⁴

On the basis of the frequent use of the name *Petrus* in grammatical examples of the collection, Lafleur and his team suggested that the author used his own name in those instances. The names of Peter of Auvergne, who became a master at the Paris university after 1270, and of Peter of Limoges, who studied there in the 1260's, come to mind. The latter bequeathed P to the library of the Sorbonne, which confirms his interest in the matter. From an intellectual and doctrinal point of view, their profiles could well match that of the compiler of the *Communia*.¹⁵ Yet the attribution of the ethical sections of the *Communia* to either Peter is hardly defensible on chronological grounds, given the author's lack of access to the complete translation of Aristotle's *Ethica*, which points to a date before 1250. To remedy this problem, Lafleur hypothesizes that the logical and grammatical sections of the *Communia* were compiled separately by Peter of Limoges (or by Peter of Auvergne on the basis of material prepared by the former) and eventually combined with the others. In order to unify the different sections, the compiler revised their style and content.¹⁶ In that hypothetical scenario, P represents the original form of the logical and grammatical parts of the *Communia*, while in S their revised phrasing results from the compiler's unifying efforts. Surprisingly, it would mean that the compiler complicated his task by inserting the older parts on Aristotelian philosophy in the middle of his own commentaries on logic and grammar (see table above).

In the light of the stylistic resemblances that have now been established between the logical and grammatical *Communia* in P and the sections on the *Ethica* and *De anima* in K, the hypothesis

14 For a detailed argumentation against the paternity of the bishop of Lincoln, see Létourneau, *La grammaire philosophique*, 36–38.

15 Lafleur, *Les philosophies morale et naturelle*, 35–40.

16 Lafleur, *La 'Vieille logique'*, 101–103.

of two different authors is no longer acceptable. The two witnesses represent a single stage of the (more or less) complete *Communia* different from the one represented by S. The editorial revision from which S results cannot be considered a stylistic unification attempt. As a result, it restricts any possible role in the revision process for Peter of Limoges (or Peter of Auvergne) to a mere stylistic facelift – which is a very unlikely supposition. From the evidence provided by the date of the script in K, it is extremely probable that P and K are partial representatives of one and the same extensive original form of the *Communia*. Whether all sections preserved in S were also present at that initial stage cannot be determined with complete certainty.

Conclusion

The discovery of fragments from the *Communia* ascribed to Robert Grosseteste proves that the didactic corpus based on Aristotle's *Ethica* and *De anima* was produced before the middle of the 13th century. Although it cannot be established beyond doubt, it seems highly likely that the bifolium reconstructed from the fragments belonged to a quire containing a broader selection of texts similar to the only extant and more complete manuscript from Salamanca. The analysis of the Karlsruhe fragment confirms the hypothesis that the Salamanca manuscript underwent an editorial revision, although the editors may overestimate the systematic approach behind the changes. I have shown from a few examples that a more detailed study of the Karlsruhe bifolium will improve the published text in numerous passages.



Figure 1: [F-laoo] Karlsruhe, Badische Landesbibliothek, Cod. Aug. pap. 119. Author's virtual reconstruction of f. 1r.



Figure 3: [F-laoo] Karlsruhe, Badische Landesbibliothek, Cod. Aug. pap. 119. Author's virtual reconstruction of f. 2v.

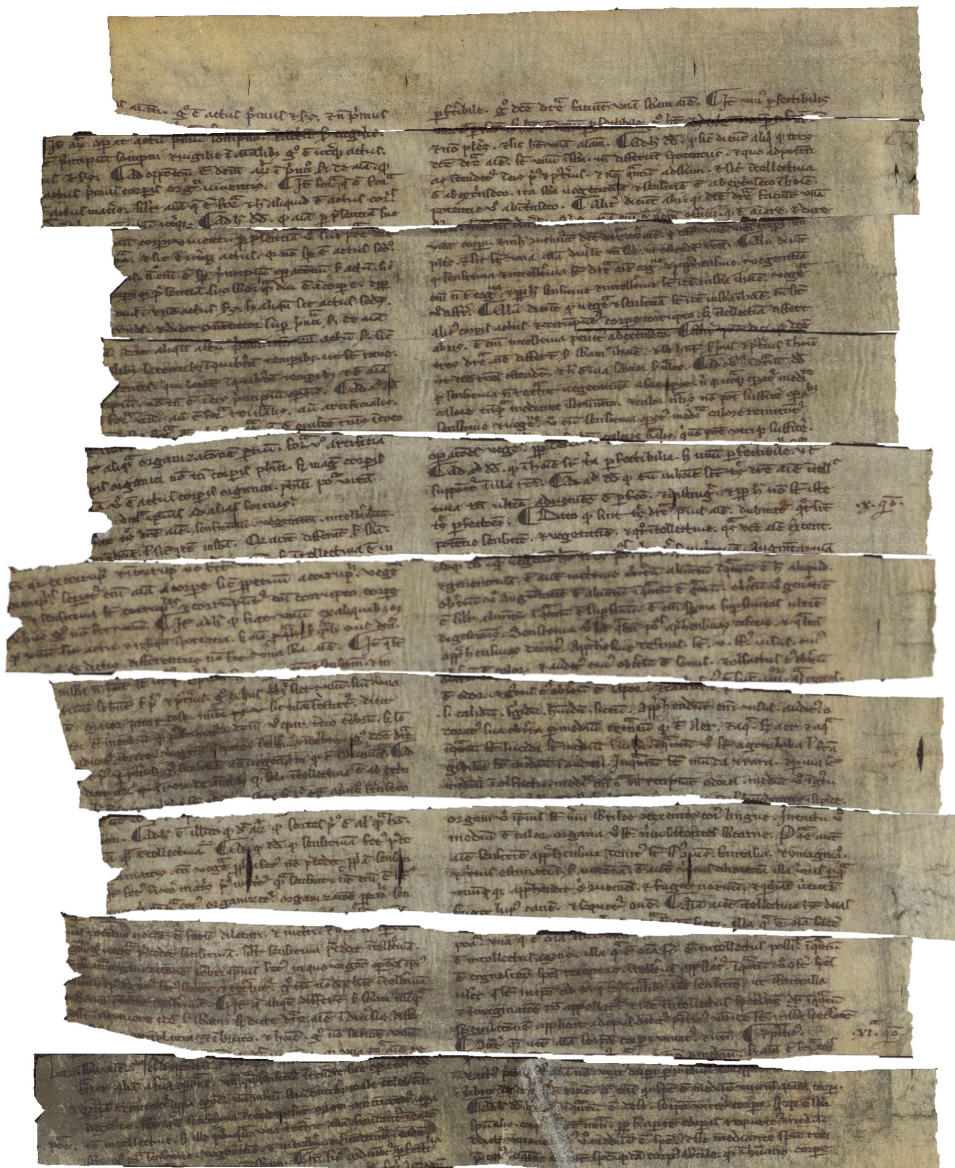


Figure 4: [F-laoo] Karlsruhe, Badische Landesbibliothek, Cod. Aug. pap. 119. Author's virtual reconstruction of f. 2v.