

Fragmentology

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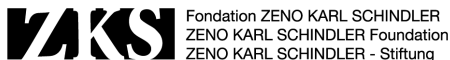
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Binding Waste as Evidence for the Reconstruction of a Lost Aristotelian Manuscript

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Abstract: This note discusses the hypothetically reconstructed content of a fourteenth-century Latin manuscript of Aristotle's *Parva naturalia*, from which two bifolia survive as flyleaves in an incunable binding. The note argues that the lost manuscript contained a collection of Aristotelian treatises in combination with short texts by Avicenna and Thomas Aquinas, which had a limited circulation in German-speaking regions.

Keywords: Aristoteles Latinus, *Parva naturalia*, Avicenna, Thomas Aquinas

In the late medieval period, Aristotelian works undeniably were among the most widely disseminated Latin texts in manuscript form, especially since they were used in the educational system. Yet fragments from discarded Aristotelian manuscripts that are recycled in bindings of other books do not appear nearly as often as those of liturgical books, Bibles, and (canon) law. Therefore, the instances where Aristotelian waste is encountered deserve special attention. Mostly, the texts that were preserved on these fragments are well attested, although occasionally the discovery of a new witness for a rare text necessitates the revision of commonly accepted theories.¹

Two bifolia preserved in the binding of a folio-size incunable from the Universitäts- und Landesbibliothek in Darmstadt (shelfmark: INC IV 452) provide a unique witness to a collection of Aristotelian texts. The host volume was printed in 1483 by Ulrich Zell in Cologne and contains Nicolaus de Ausmo's *Supplementum*

¹ P. Beullens, "Robert Grosseteste's Translation of Simplicius's Commentary on Aristotle's *De caelo*: Tracking down a Second Manuscript and the Greek Model", *Mediterranea. International Journal on the Transfer of Knowledge* 8 (2023), 565–594.

summae Pisanellae and the *Canones poenitentiales* by Astesanus de Ast ([GW M26221](#); [ISTC in00065000](#)). The incunable's provenance can be traced back to the Benedictine abbey of Saint-Vitus in Gladbach, as the ex libris in an early-modern hand on the blank recto of the first leaf of the incunable proves: "Liber monasterij D. Viti martyris in Gladbach" (the last two words are crudely struck out but they can be easily deduced from the strokes of letters that remain visible above and below the ink blotch). The incunable was among the books that were confiscated in the early days of 1795 when the abbey was visited by a commission of French revolutionaries. The books that they seized were duly listed in an inventory and subsequently transferred to Paris or to a local storage, whence some arrived along murky paths into the hands of a few collectors.²

According to the catalogue of the incunables with a Gladbach provenance published in 1998, the interiors of the covers were lined with fragments of manuscripts ("Innendeckel mit Handschriftenfragmenten beklebt").³ To judge from the images available on the website of the Universitäts- und Landesbibliothek in Darmstadt, the leaves originally were pastedowns that have been detached from the boards, since the discoloured sections at the edges clearly reveal that they were glued under the folds of the leather board covers for a considerable period of time.⁴ On the recto of the front flyleaf, a modern hand in pencil wrote down references for the edition to five incunable catalogues.⁵

2 H. Knaus, "Sieben Gladbacher Handschriften in Darmstadt", in *Studien zur Handschriftenkunde. Ausgewählte Aufsätze*, ed. G. Achten, T. Knaus, and K.H. Staub, Munich 1992, 73–83. The incunable is item 11 in the list reproduced on pages 82–83.

3 B. Veit, B. Schürmann, E. Haas, and E. M. Wermter, *Die Drucke von St. Vitus*, Cologne 1998, 160, no. 383.

4 Reproduction available at: <https://tudigit.ulb.tu-darmstadt.de/show/inc-iv-452>.

5 The references are: Cop. 11.785 = W. A. Copinger, *Supplement to Hain's Repertorium Bibliographicum*, Part 11, Volume 1, London 1898, 88, no. 785; Pell. 1637 = M. Pellechet, *Catalogue général des incunables des bibliothèques publiques de France*, v. 1, Paris 1897, 382, no. 1637; Pr. 904 = Robert Proctor, *An Index to the Early Printed Books in the British Museum: From the Invention of Printing to the Year MD. With Notes of Those in the Bodleian Library*, Part 1, Volume 1, London 1898, 78, no. 904; BiblC. 1,197 = *Catalogue of Books Printed in the*

The flyleaves are bifolia taken from an early-fourteenth-century manuscript in a smallish Gothic hand tending towards the cursive. The ink ruling of the pages is careful and clearly visible. The text is written in single columns with lines varying between 25 and 27 per page. It cannot be excluded that the variation was caused by the irregular trimming of the bifolia to conform to the size of the boards, although the text blocks look overall completely preserved. Several spaces for three-line-high initials were left open but have not been filled in. Various nearly contemporary hands made annotations in the margins and between the lines of the text.

For reasons that will become apparent further below, I assume that the bifolium that currently forms the incunable's rear flyleaf (henceforth: DAII) was taken from a different quire in the original manuscript than the quire from which the front flyleaf (DAI) originates, probably from the preceding one. The two bifolia are so positioned that the hair side faces the cover boards and the flesh side faces the first and last paper leaves of the incunable.

The hair side formed the outside of bifolium DAII, which contains Aristotle's *De longitudine et breuitate vitae* in the *translatio nova* from Greek by William of Moerbeke (end of chapter 3 to the beginning of chapter 6, 465b29–467a7) on its first half, while the other half preserves the final sections from Costa ben Luca's *De differentia spiritus et animae* translated from Arabic by John of Seville (137.10 to 139.16, ed. Barach).⁶ The end of the latter treatise is not indicated with a concluding formula or colophon. It is followed by 32 verses presented in two columns and written by a different contemporary scribe. The manuscript's ruling was adjusted to facilitate the layout of the verses, which were probably intended to fill out the unused writing surface. The verses can be identified as a selection from the *Carmen de pulsum* by Giles of Corbeil (selected in particular from the passage on pages 33–35, ed. Choulant).⁷

xvth Century Now in the British Museum. Part 1, London 1908, 197; VK. 223 = E. Voulliéme, *Der Buchdruck Kölns bis zum Ende des fünfzehnten Jahrhunderts. Ein Beitrag zur Inkunabelbibliographie*, Bonn 1903, 96–97, no. 223.

6 C.S. Barach, ed., *Excerpta e libro Alfredi Anglici De motu cordis, item Costaben-Lucae De differentia animae et spiritus liber translatus a Johanne Hispanensi*, Innsbruck 1878.

7 J.L. Choulant, *Aegidii Corboliensis Carmina Medica*, Leipzig 1826.

If only the single bifolium DAII had been preserved, it would have been likely identified as coming from a standard *corpus recentius* of Aristotelian works, the form in which the two treatises were most commonly transmitted.⁸ The content of the bifolium that currently serves as the front flyleaf to the incunable (DAI), however, requires a reassessment of the initial impression gained on the basis of its rear counterpart.

Bifolium DAI originally had its flesh side facing outwards. Its first leaf is covered with the opening section of Thomas Aquinas's *De mixtione elementorum*.⁹ On the inside recto, we find the end of Avicenna's *De diluviis*, which is the concluding chapter of his *Meteorology* that circulated separately in a Latin translation (307,11–308,18, ed. Alonso).¹⁰ Finally, the verso of the last leaf is completely filled by a short question with the incipit "Forma multiplex habet", which is known under the title *De distinctione formarum* and is sometimes attributed to Thomas Aquinas.

Although it is not totally unexpected to find these texts in an Aristotelian context, the probability of discovering them in binding waste is significantly lower. According to the critical edition of *De mixtione elementorum*, more than one hundred manuscripts that contain this short treatise are extant,¹¹ but the two other texts are significantly less widely attested. Only twelve manuscripts of the Latin

8 P. Beullens and P. De Leemans, "Aristote à Paris: le système de la *pecia* et les traductions de Guillaume de Moerbeke", *Recherches de théologie et philosophie médiévales* 75 (2008), 87–135.

9 *Sancti Thomae de Aquino Opera omnia iussu Leonis XIII P.M. edita*, tomus XLIII: *De principiis naturae*, *De aeternitate mundi*, *De motu cordis*, *De mixtione elementorum*, *De operationibus occultis naturae*, *De iudiciis astrorum*, *De sortibus*, *De unitate intellectus*, *De ente et essentia*, *De fallaciis*, *De propositionibus modalibus*, cura et studio Fratrum Praedicatorum, Rome 1976, 133–157.

10 M. Alonso Alonso, "Homenaje a Avicenna en su milenario. Las traducciones de Juan González de Burgos y Salomon", *Al-Andalus* 14 (1949), 291–319. After the completion of this note, a new edition of the translation was published: D.N. Hasse, "Avicenna's *On Floods* (*De diluviis*) in Latin Translation: Critical Edition with an English Translation of the Arabic", in *Mastering Nature in the Medieval Arabic and Latin Worlds. Studies in Heritage and Transfer of Arabic Science in Honour of Charles Burnett*, ed. A. Giletti, and D.N. Hasse, Turnhout 2023.

11 *Sancti Thomae de Aquino Opera*, tomus XLIII, 137–143.

version of Avicenna's *De diluviis* are documented.¹² The question *De distinctione formarum* is known to be preserved in no more than four manuscripts, although more copies of the text may have been overlooked by cataloguers due to its shortness:

- Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, latin 6569, f. 125r¹³
- Praha, Knihovna Metropolitní kapituly, B. LXXI (381), f. 60v¹⁴
- Erfurt, Bibliotheca Amploniana, 4^o 15, f. 48v¹⁵
- Chicago, Newberry Library, Case MS 23, f. 81r¹⁶

Of these four manuscripts, the last two contain the same three texts that are found on bifolium DA1. The three witnesses share some important characteristics: they all date from the first half of the fourteenth century and come from a German-Austrian environment, since the last manuscript of the list was known before its purchase by the Newberry Library in 1938 as MS Melk, Benediktinerstift, 389.

In particular, the similarity between the Darmstadt flyleaves and the Newberry manuscript is helpful to understand what the original manuscript to which DA1-II belonged might have looked like. Just like the content of DA1, the last three items 25–27 in the Newberry manuscript are *De mixtione elementorum*, *De distinctione*

- 12 S. Di Donato, “Les trois traductions latines de la *Météorologie* d’Avicenne: notes pour l’histoire du texte”, *Documenti e studi sulla tradizione filosofica medievale* 28 (2017), 331–348, list of manuscripts 335, n.11. To the eleven manuscripts of that list has to be added MS Innsbruck, Universitäts- und Landesbibliothek Tirol, 302, see W. Neuhauser and L. Subarič, *Katalog der Handschriften der Universitätsbibliothek Innsbruck*, v. 4, Wien 2005, 34–35. The text is also cited among the (dubious) works of Giles of Rome, see J.R. Eastman, “Die Werke des Aegidius Romanus”, *Augustiniana* 44 (1994), 209–231, title on 226, no. 85.
- 13 O. Weijers, “Les gloses sur le *Liber de causis* dans les manuscrits parisiens”, in *Reading Proclus and the Book of Causes*, Volume 1: *Western Scholarly Networks and Debates*, ed. D. Calma, Leiden 2019, 152–179, description of the manuscript 172. The question was added by a later hand in an open space.
- 14 M. Grabmann, *Die Werke des Hl. Thomas von Aquin. Eine literarhistorische Untersuchung und Einführung*, 3rd ed., Münster 1949, 208.
- 15 W. Schum, *Beschreibendes Verzeichnis der Amplonianischen Handschriften-Sammlung zu Erfurt*, Berlin 1887, 296.
- 16 P. Saenger, *A Catalogue of the Pre-1500 Western Manuscript Books at the Newberry Library*, Chicago 1989, 39–42.

formarum, and *De diluviis*. Although the order in DA_I is slightly different, since the Avicenna text precedes the question on forms, it is quite conceivable that *De distinctione formarum* was the final text in the original manuscript. The observation that the last line of the posterior verso of DA_I is left blank and that there is no reference whatsoever to a following text may support that hypothesis. However, as Bill Duba kindly pointed out to me, the missing sections at the end of *De mixtione elementorum* and the beginning of *De diluviis* count about 500 words, while one leaf of DA_I contains more than 800 words. If we accept that flyleaf DA_I was produced from the outer bifolium of the lost manuscript's last quire, that quire must have held another text that filled at least three pages if the last quire was a binio, and possibly more leaves if it was larger.

Is it possible to hypothesize on the position of the bifolium that is now DA_{II} in relation to the last quire? For this purpose, the comparison with the Newberry manuscript might turn out to be equally useful. The 24th item of that codex is the Latin translation of *De differentia spiritus et animae*, the same text that is preserved on DA_{II}. The other partially preserved text on the bifolium, the *translatio nova* of Aristotle's *De longitudine et brevitae vitae*, is also present in the Newberry manuscript, but its position there as item 14 is at a considerable distance towards the front of the volume.

That arrangement of the Newberry codex leaves room for some reasoning by analogy to reconstruct plausibly the composition of the original quire to which DA_{II} belonged. The open space on DA_{IV}, which was later filled with the medical verses from the work of Giles of Corbeil, likely was the last page of a quire. For that reason, the scribe decided to leave some writing surface unused and start the copying of the following treatise at the top of the next page — all the more so because an open space for a rubricated initial was foreseen, which eventually was not executed. In that scenario, there is no objection to accept that the three treatises on the final bifolium of the original manuscript were, just like in the Newberry manuscript, immediately preceded by *De differentia spiritus et animae*.

Can we draw the analogy further and conjecture that, just like in the Newberry manuscript, eleven treatises in all were contained between *De longitudine et brevitae vitae* and *De differentia spiritus*

et animae in the quire of which DAII was the outer bifolium? A quire with that content must have had a size that made it technically unmanageable. However, it is well known that the *Parva naturalia*, among which both *De differentia spiritus et animae* and *De longitudine et brevitae vitae* were transmitted, were connected in a very loose and unspecified order.¹⁷ As a result, this quire as well as the preceding one(s) may have contained any number of treatises from the *Parva naturalia*, in a formation more or less comparable to the composition of the Newberry manuscript. Incidentally, although the manuscript from the Amploniana is less markedly similar in its content to DAi-II, it also contains a considerable number of Aristotelian *Parva naturalia*.

From the analysis of the Darmstadt fragments and the comparison with extant codices that have a comparable content, we may arrive at the following tentative conclusions. In the first half of the fourteenth century, a limited branch of the tradition combined three short Latin texts, Aquinas's *De mixtione elementorum*, Avicenna's *De diluviis*, and the question *De distinctione formarum*, and transmitted them in connection with a selection of Aristotelian *Parva naturalia*. The manuscripts circulated in German-speaking regions, although the collection in that form possibly originated elsewhere. Evidence for the confirmation or refutation of the hypothesis may lie in the textual variants or in the annotations of the Darmstadt fragments, which I did not examine for this note.¹⁸

¹⁷ P. Beullens and P. De Leemans, "Aristote à Paris", 125–128.

¹⁸ The research for this article was carried out as part of my postdoctoral fellowship project Mind Your Words! The Role of Medieval Translations in the History of Concepts, funded by the Research Foundation – Flanders (12W5722N).

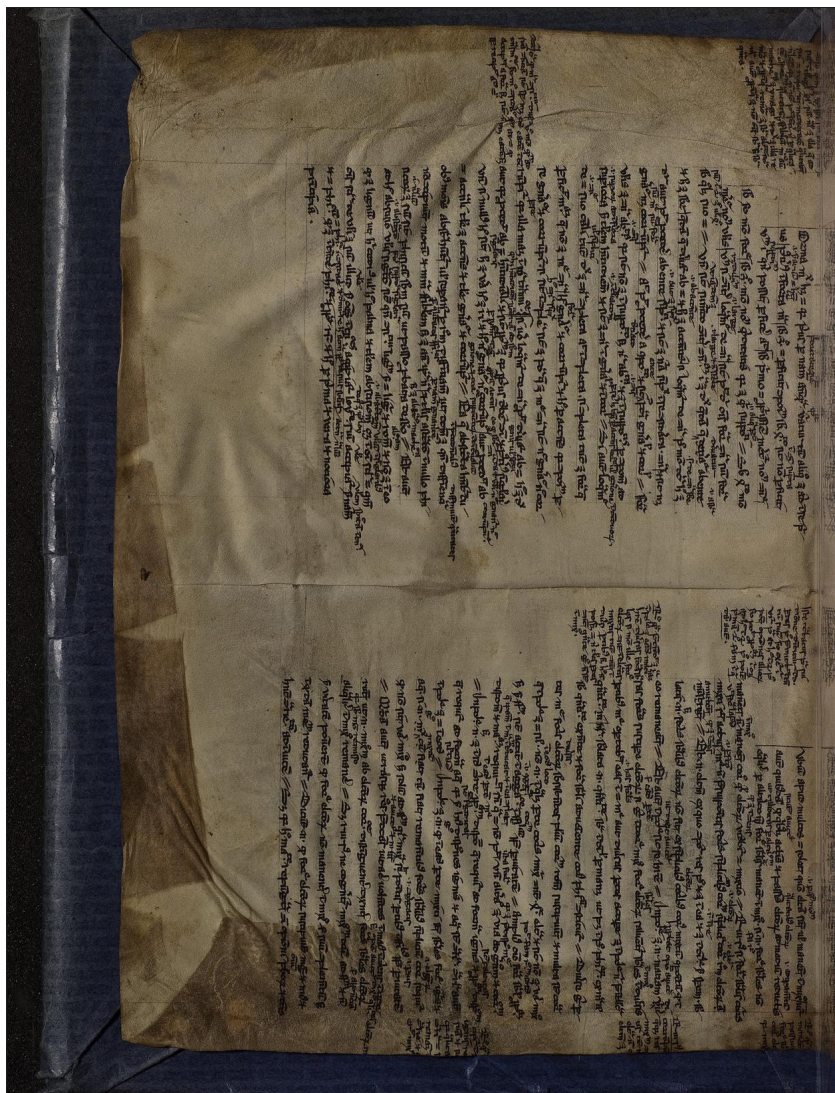


Figure 1: Darmstadt, Universitäts- und Landesbibliothek, INC IV 452, front flyleaf: DA1, outwards-facing side (e0004)



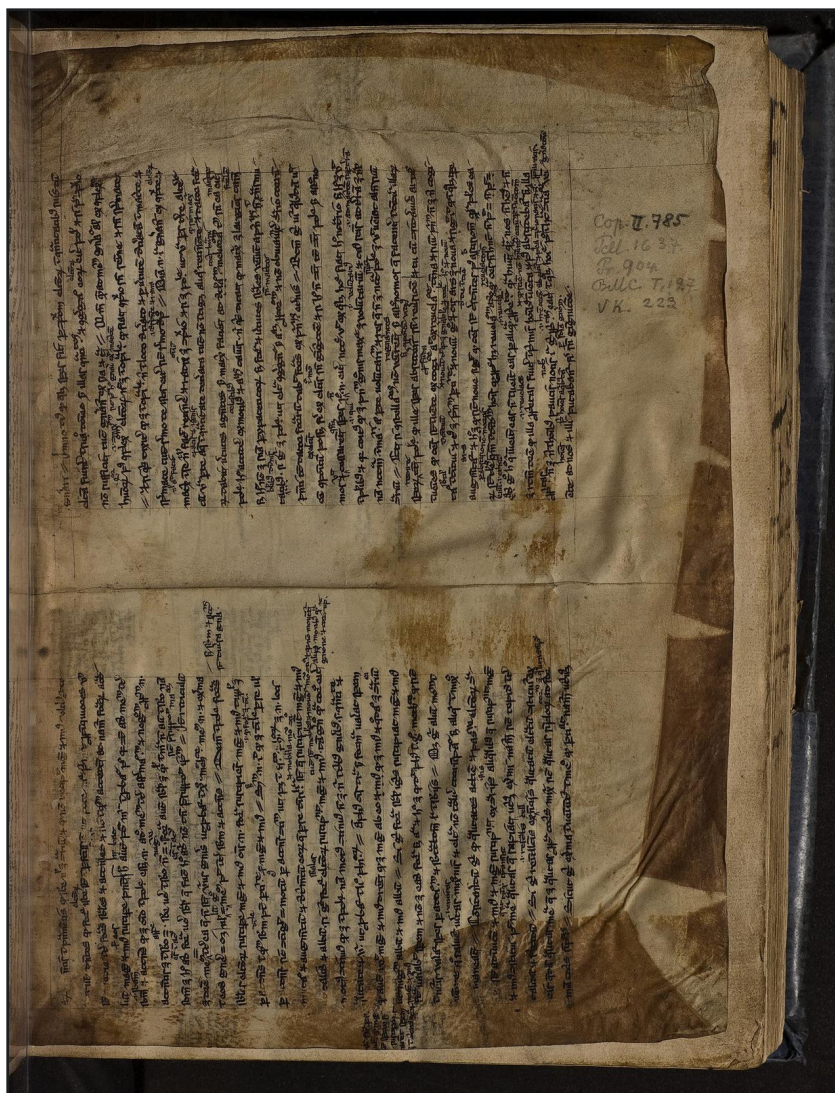


Figure 2: Darmstadt, Universitäts- und Landesbibliothek, INC iv 452, front flyleaf: DA1, inwards-facing side (e0003)



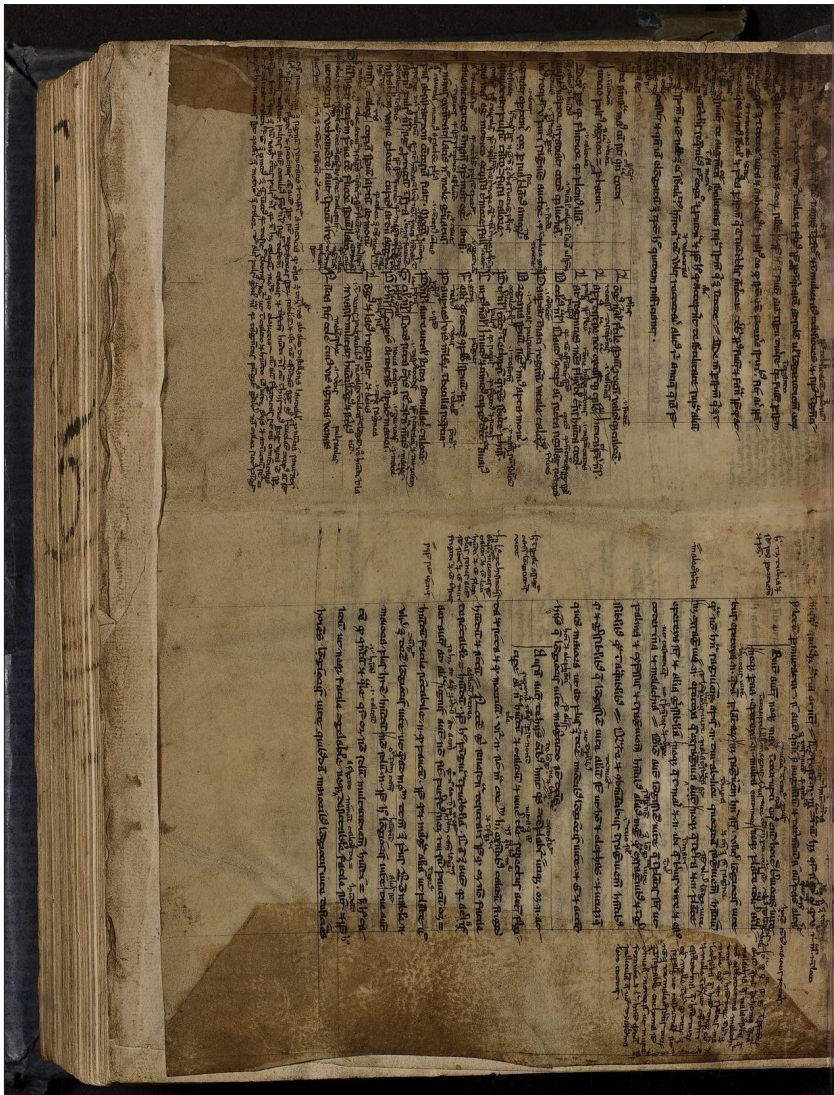


Figure 3: Darmstadt, Universitäts- und Landesbibliothek, INC IV 452, back flyleaf: DAII, outwards-facing side (e0006)



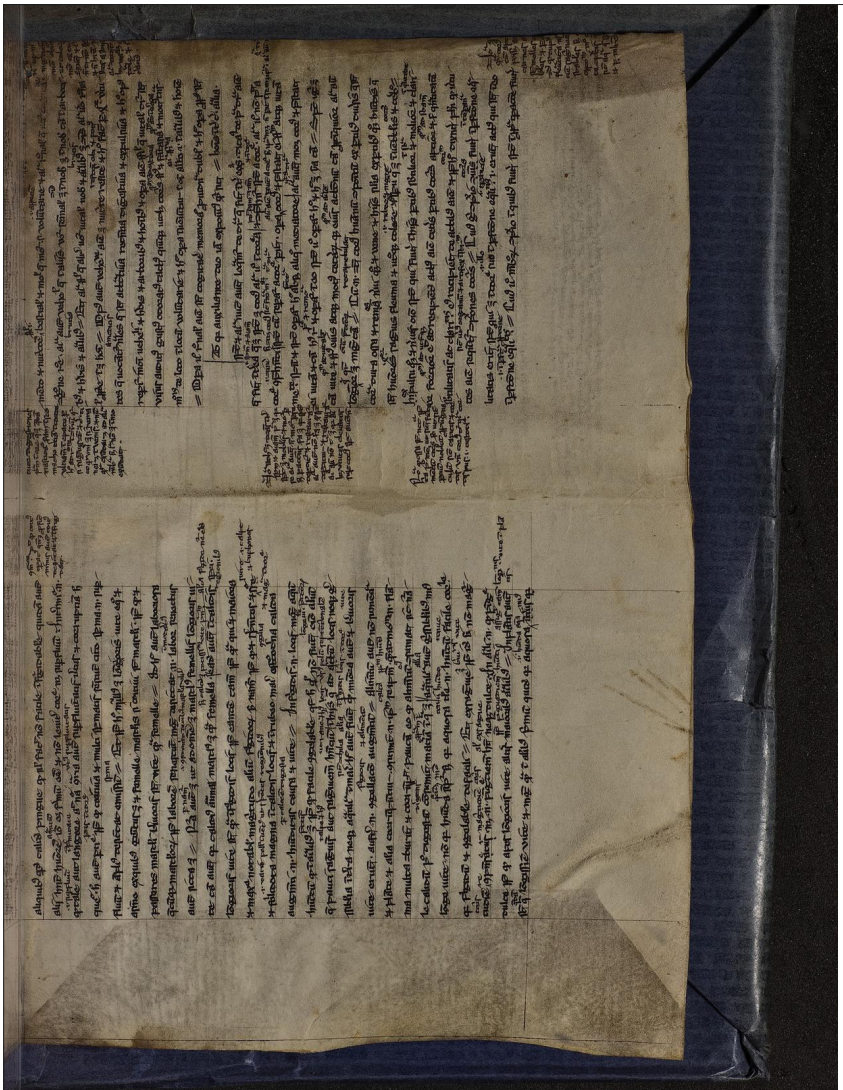


Figure 4: Darmstadt, Universitäts- und Landesbibliothek, INC iv 452, back flyleaf: DA11, inwards-facing side (e0005)

