

Fragmentology

A Journal for the Study of Medieval Manuscript Fragments

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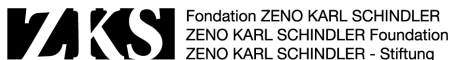
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A Fragmentary Witness of William of Ockham's *Brevis Summa Libri Physicorum*

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Abstract: The binding of an incunable edition printed in Leuven and formerly owned by the Franciscan convent in Cologne preserves one bifolium and the offset of another from a copy of William of Ockham's *Brevis summa libri Physicorum*. This note describes the physical remains, and attempts to reconstruct the parent manuscript's appearance and the place of its text in the textual tradition of the commentary.

Keywords: William of Ockham, Aristotle, commentary

William of Ockham wrote several commentaries on the Aristotelian *Physics*. One of those treatises, known under the title of *Brevis summa libri Physicorum*, had a rather limited transmission. The critical edition from 1984 by Stephen Brown was based on the three then-identified manuscripts.¹ In 2018, Brent Purkable and Steven J. Livesey published the description of a fourth witness.² My recent discovery of a bifolium of the same text preserved as a pastedown in an incunable from the collection of the University and City Library in Köln (Cologne) brings the current total up to five manuscripts.

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1 S. Brown, *Venerabilis Inceptoris Guillelmi de Ockham Brevis summa libri Physicorum, Summula philosophiae naturalis, et Quaestiones in libros Physicorum Aristotelis* (Guillelmi de Ockham Opera Philosophica VI), St. Bonaventure, NY, 1984, 7*–9*.

2 B. Purkable and S. J. Livesey, "A New Manuscript of Ockham's *Brevis summa libri Physicorum* : Saint-Omer, Bibliothèque d'Agglomération, BA 317", *Scriptorium* 72 (2018), 276–292. Digital images of the manuscript: <https://arca.irht.cnrs.fr/ark:/63955/md29b5645q96> (accessed 16 July 2024). For a full transcription of the text in the manuscript by the authors of the article, see <http://doi.org/10.15763/11244/299775>.

The three codices used by Brown are Uppsala, Universitetsbibliotek, [C 665](#) (A), München, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, [Clm 4379](#) (B), and Göttingen, Niedersächsische Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek, 4 Cod. Ms. theol. 124 (C). The relevant quires in MS A were written in a fourteenth-century cursive hand. The provenance of the manuscript can be traced back to the capitular library of Frauenburg (currently Frombork in Poland).³ MS B was written at Konstanz in 1347–1348 (*pace* Brown, who broadly situates it as “saec. XIV/XV”). It later belonged to the collection of the Benedictine convent of Saint Ulrich in Augsburg.⁴ MS C from the fourteenth century is labelled on fol. 1r as “Liber fratrum minorum Gottingen”.⁵

The manuscript that Purkaple and Livesey discovered in Saint-Omer (Bibliothèque de l’Agglomération de Saint-Omer, [317](#)) was designated by them as MS D. Although it entered the library after the French Revolution, and, more precisely, after the confiscation of the local Benedictine abbey of Saint Bertin, it belonged to the collection of the Dominicans of Saint-Omer in the sixteenth century. The quires containing the *Brevis summa* have watermarks corresponding to a paper mill in Central Germany or Austria in the second half of the fourteenth century.⁶

It could be anticipated that any hypothetical further witness of the text would be found in a similar geographical and cultural context. To the four previously identified witnesses I can now add the remains of a fifth copy, equally with a German background, two bifolia used as pastedowns on the boards of the incunable Köln, Universitäts- und Stadtbibliothek, GB IV 7361 [[F-amgv](#)].⁷ The book itself is a folio copy of the *Sermones quinquaginta super orationem dominicam* ascribed to Hermannus de Petra and printed by John of

3 M. Andersson-Schmitt, H. Hallberg, M. Hedlund, *Mittelalterliche Handschriften der Universitätsbibliothek Uppsala. Katalog über die C-Sammlung*. Band 6. Handschriften C 551–935, Stockholm, 1993, 244–249.

4 E. M. Buytaert, “The Elementarium Logicae of Ockham”, *Franciscan Studies* 25 (1965), 151–276, in particular 166 and 152. Digital images of the manuscript: <https://mdz-nbn-resolving.de/details:bsb001278o8>.

5 Brown, *Brevis summa*, 9*.

6 Purkaple and Livesey, “A New Manuscript”, 277–278.

7 <http://services.ub.uni-koeln.de/cdm/ref/collection/inkunabeln/id/73815>.

Westphalia (Johannes de Westfalia) in Leuven in 1484 (GW 12293; ISTC [ih00073000](#)). It has wooden boards covered with brown leather stamped with rulings and figures except for the back, and it displays the remains of two brass clasps.

The initial exploration of the manuscript remains was done on the basis of the images available online. They show various indications of the book's provenance. Printed labels with the ex libris of the Library of the Franciscan convent in Cologne ("Ad Biblioth. FF. Min. Conv. Coloniae") and the former shelfmark "O L.V. n.7." were pasted onto the manuscript leaf on the front board [Figure 1]. The shelfmark "J.S. L.z. N.4." is handwritten in ink on the recto of the first flyleaf, accompanied by modern catalogue references in pencil. The first unnumbered printed leaf has a nineteenth-century stamp of the "Gymnasial-Bibliothek zu Koeln" in its lower margin.

The images document a bifolium pasted onto the front board, which displays discoloration at the sides where a leather cover was previously folded over it. Its current dimensions are approximately 285 × 180 mm. The text is written in a late fourteenth-century German semi-cursive hand on long lines, originally more than 48 per page, since the bottom of the bifolium was trimmed off with the loss of about seven lines per page. Marginal annotations indicate the logical articulations of the commentary's content as "p^o", "2^o", and "3^o".

The preserved text on the left section coincides with p. 11, l. 22 (*quando arguitur quod est factum* – p. 14, l. 115 (*sed esse veras substantias*), the right side contains p. 52, l. 91 (*quod causa divisionis est materia*) – p. 57, l. 40 (*notandum hic primo quod*) ed. Brown. The latter passage interestingly includes the beginning of the treatment of book IV of Aristotle's *Physica*, where the opening words of the Aristotelian text are quoted in larger and slightly less cursive characters (*[S]imiliter autem* – the initial is missing). The lemma of the Aristotelian text opening the last chapter of book III (p. 53, l. 3 ed. Brown) is similarly executed in larger characters, preceded by a paragraph sign, and underlined. As for the end of book III, that is indicated with the formula *explicit sententia 3ⁱ libi phi(sicorum)*, thus clearly going against the convention to designate the work as



Figure 1: [F-amgv] Universitäts- und Stadtbibliothek Köln, GB IV 7361.
Front Pastedown

summa in the colophons of A and B, and siding with the *sententie octavi libri phisicorum* at the end of D. Obviously, this one preserved intermediary concluding formula brings no decisive evidence for the phrasing of the lost explicit of the entire work at the end of book VIII.

In the preface of his edition, Brown determined that the three manuscripts known to him are independent from each other. In his opinion, A preserves the best version of the text, while B and C go back to a shared lost intermediary copy.⁸ Purkaple and Livesey established the similarity between B and D in their textual variants, suggesting that they relied on another shared ancestor.⁹ As for the Cologne fragment (K), a considerable number of textual variants connect it with the readings of MS C:

- 11,22: quod est factum + habet principium CK
- 11,33: ad] per CK
- 11,36: neganda est] negari debet C : debet negari K
- 11,44: primo sic] prima ratio est ista : prima ratio talis K
- 12,47: vult + dicere CK
- 12,51: aliqua univocatio (CK)] alia univocatio A : aliquod univocum BD
- 12,54: essent] erunt BD : sunt res C : esse videtur res K
- 12,55: stricte] large CK
- 12,64: quia tunc] tunc enim CK
- 12,67: qualitas est *om.* CK
- 13,87: substantia habet quantitatem quantitas est] substantia esse quantitatem et qualitatem esse C : substantiam habere quantitatem quantitatem esse K
- 13,90: mentem] intentionem CK
- 14,96: accidens distinctum: aliqua res distincta CK
- 14,98: aliquid + plus CK
- 14,115: verae substantiae] esse veras substantias CK
- 52,91: dicendum] distinguendum est CK : + de materia C
- 53,98: similiter] sic C : sic etiam K
- 53,101: amphiboliae] aequivocationis CK
- 53,13: posset esse] esset CK
- 54,41: in magnitudine procederet] in magnitudinis procedat CK

8 Brown, *Brevis summa*, 15*.

9 Purkaple and Livesey, "A New Manuscript", 280–282.

55,51: secundo] illo CK
 55,58: a rebus numeratis] praeter rebus numeratas CK
 55,59: magnitudinem + esse CK
 56,5: primo sic (Brown)] sic ABD : primo sic quia C : sic primo
 quia K
 56,5: corpora + naturalia CK
 56,6: naturalia] naturaliter CK
 56,10: locus est] locum esse CK
 56,12: patet] probatur CK
 56,15: distinguuntur] differunt CK
 56,18: hoc quod] quia CK
 56,20: tantum] tamen B : solum CK
 56,21: quando scilicet illud] quia illud scilicet D : quia illud CK
 57,24: sint aliae res] esse aliqua CK
 57,31: probat] arguit DCK
 57,33: si igitur locus sit] sed locus si sit aliquid est simul CK
 57,35: recipiat] retinet CK

Some variants are only transmitted in K:

13,81: sequitur] sciendum K
 13,76–85: et qualitatem – Commentatoris *om.* K
 55,57: dicere + contra Platonem K
 55,65: veritas] necessitas K
 56,11: hic] sicut C : iste rationes K
 56,17: terram] aerem K
 57,31: aliam partem videlicet] aliam partem negativam B : ad
 partem C : ad partem negativam K : *om.* D

The limited data available for comparison make it clear that both C and K were copied from a lost intermediary stage of the transmission (γ), which would necessitate adding an extra bifurcation in the stemma given by Purkale and Livesey.¹⁰ The character of the distinctive readings cannot be considered mechanical scribal errors: they rather betray the editorial intervention of an anonymous scholar. In C, the editorial changes are so important that Brown confined three long additional passages typical for that manuscript to appendices at the end of his edition.¹¹ The online image allowed

¹⁰ Purkale and Livesey, “A New Manuscript”, 282.

¹¹ Brown, *Brevis summa*, 815–820.

me to confirm that the supplement in Brown's appendix C, which follows after *verificabile* (14,99) is absent from K.¹² Consequently, it seemed likely that the passage was introduced in a later phase of the transmission than in the common ancestor γ .

Yet the book was about to produce more surprises than could be anticipated from the online images. When I contacted Svenja Berkensträter about the fragment and she had the volume retrieved from the stacks at the Stadt- und Universitätsbibliothek Köln, she discovered that the book's physical appearance had undergone several changes since it had been digitized.¹³ The labels from the Franciscan convent's library had been removed and the pastedowns detached from the board. As a result, the text on the verso of the pastedown became visible, although the damage done by time and glue makes it difficult to read. The available evidence confirms that only a few lines were trimmed at the bottom of the bifolium since little text was lost in the transition between verso and recto. On the prior recto, the text starts p. 5, l. 22 (*realis et aliqua non...*), on the other it continues through p. 63, l. 180 (*...quia scilicet carent*). Most interestingly, the former passage also includes the *prologus tractatus*, yet not in the standard version (pp. 8–9 Brown), but in the variant preserved in C (Appendix B, pp. 818–819 Brown). That particularity once again confirms the similarity between C and K. At the same time, it inspires caution to accept unreservedly that all characteristic divergences in the text transmitted by C can necessarily and uniformly be attributed to one and the same editorial stage in the text's history.

Undoubtedly, the rear pastedown was removed at the same time as the front pastedown was detached. The online image shows that the paper leaf apparently came from an unidentified early-modern academic dissertation on logic [Figure 2]. The removal of the replacement pastedown has revealed the offset of an earlier pastedown. Although large sections of the text have become illegible,

¹² Brown, *Brevis summa*, 819–820.

¹³ Private email 23 July 2024. I am extremely grateful to Svenja Berkensträter for the prompt and enthusiastic reaction on my query. She also kindly provided me with images that document the current appearance of the manuscript waste and its traces in the volume.

especially at the bottom of the bifolium, it is clear that it was a bifolium from the same manuscript as the front pastedown. On the visible verso, text can be recognized from p. 47, l. 18 onward (*[sol] vit omnes istas...*), on the visible recto, text from p. 14, l. 122 (*accidentia...*). Consequently, the lost bifolium must have been adjacent to the one that is now the front pastedown further to the middle of the quire.

The availability of more remnants of pages revealed an interesting shift in the material presentation of the text. In the earlier parts of the work, the text was presented in a more spacious layout (around 48 lines per page visible), while the sections from further in the commentary are more crammed (around 54 lines). This might suggest that a change of scribe occurred between the two passages. However, I was unable to find any noticeable difference in hand. It seems probable that the same scribe decided to condense his writing during the copying process of the entire text. Incidentally, Ockham's commentary was probably not the only text in the volume, since a calculation on the basis of the remains indicates that the text must have started in the middle of the verso of the lost previous leaf.

The identification of the bifolium and the offset of another one from a lost manuscripts of William of Ockham's *Brevis summa libri Physicorum* does not significantly add to our knowledge of the transmitted text. Still its discovery is relevant for the reception history of the work since it confirms that the treatise initially had a less restricted dissemination than was previously accepted. However, the fact that the manuscript was discarded and recycled as binding waste as early as the late fifteenth century suggests that interest in its content had already faded by that time.

