**Order of reading and Authenticity in two medieval manuscripts of Aristotle’s *Organon***

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**Abstract: Smith Fragment 27, currently housed at Columbia University’s Rare Book and Manuscript library, has never been studied in any depth prior to this present study. After identifying the text of the fragment, this paper first situates the fragment in relation to its former codex; second, it situates that codex to the course of studies of which it would have formed a part; third, we shall move to consider a codex completed about 25-60 years later, MS X88.Ar512 and, in parallel fashion, determine the curriculum that this second codex suggests; fourth, we will determine what the relation between these two manuscripts in terms of 1) their respective curricula, and 2) their quality, suggests about shifts in a global perspective on education in the meantime.**

**What we currently know about Smith 27**

Smith Fragment 27, currently housed at Columbia University’s Rare Book and Manuscript library, has never been studied in any depth prior to this present study. So I intend to begin this paperwith some statistics on the manuscript.

Smith 27 is a parchment bifolium, each folium of which is approximately 19 X 14.5cm. The text for each page is written in exactly 24 lines in one column, centered so that the outer and lower margins are noticeably larger than the top and inner margins of the page. The text itself is a small, rapid, heavily abbreviated, northern Gothic *textualis* script, likely written between 1255 and 1275 in Northern France. The area of the text block is approximately 10 X 6.5cm, which means that only about 25% of the parchment is devoted to the main text of the document itself.

There are only three marginal glosses in the text: the first is a symbol in the upper left-hand corner of the verso of folium 1; the second, a note written in a bold font on the recto of folium 2 in the upper left-hand margin; the third, on the verso of folium 2 in the bottom margin, is presumably a division of the text. In addition to these, the text contains a scant few interlinear glosses, which are not always easily distinguishable from superscript letters of the main text.

On the second folium, there are a number of C-shaped marks that are presumably an aid for dividing and organizing the text. On the recto, they are all in black; whereas on the verso, they begin in red, then alternate to black, and then back to red.

In terms of decoration, the recto of the first folium contains two initials, while the verso of the same contains one: on the recto, there is a red initial **P** taking up three lines of text, followed by a blue **Q**, with red geometrical decoration both inside and surrounding it; on the verso, there is a red **U** majuscule at the bottom of the page.

As far as the identity of the texts goes, Smith 27 actually contains two separate texts. The recto and verso of folium 1 contain a passage from the *liber sex principiorum*, a pseudo-Aristotelian work written in the 12th century; the recto and verso of folium 2 contain a passage from Aristotle's *de interpretatione* in the translation of Boethius. More specifically, folium 1 begins at chapter II, verse 27, of the *liber* and ends at chapter V, verse 48 according to the numbering of the modern critical edition.[[1]](#endnote-1) Folium 2 begins at chapter VIII, verse 61, of the *de interpretatione* and runs to the end of chapter IX.[[2]](#endnote-2) The *liber sex principiorum* survives in whole or in part in about 231 manuscripts,[[3]](#endnote-3) about 104 of which are of comparable or greater antiquity than Smith 27 itself.[[4]](#endnote-4) The Boethian translation of the *de interpretatione* survives in 297 manuscripts stretching from the 9th c. to the end of the middle ages.[[5]](#endnote-5)

In the form in which it has been handed down to us, the *liber sex principiorum* is a supplement to Aristotle's *categories*. At the beginning of his work, Aristotle enumerates 10 categories of being and states his intention to treat of all of them. But in fact, the *categories* expressly treats the first four in detail—substance, quantity, quality, and relation—and only provides a cursory summary of the remaining six in chapter nine of the work. The main body of the *Liber sex principiorum*, then, supplements Aristotle's categories by providing in-depth discussions of the six categories that Aristotle himself said little about—action, passion, time, place, position, and habit.Smith 27 folium 1 contains the end of the treatise on action, the treatments of passion and time in full, and the beginning of the treatise on place.

The *de interpretatione* is usually listed as the second work in Aristotle's organon (after the categories). Chapter 8 further clarifies the distinction between simple and complex propositions in relation to contradictories, while ch. 9 provides what is probably the work's most famous section: a discussion of the truth value of propositions about contingent future states of affairs.

**Situating Smith 27 in its codex and curriculum**

Now let us presume the following: 1) that the gap between chapter 5 of the *Liber Sex Principiorum* at the end of folium 1 and the 8th chapter of the *De interpretatione* on folium 2 is filled by missing pages; 2) that there are no additional works in the codex adjoined between the *Liber Sex Principiorum* and the *de interpretatione*; and 3) that the amount of main text on each page is relatively uniform for each page.

If this is the case, then we can surmise the following: three missing bifolia must be laid on top of our fragment in order to supply the missing text. The next innermost fragment after our own would contain *Liber Sex Principiorum* V. 49-VII. 70 on its left and *De Interpretatione* VI.39-VIII.60 on its right panel. The third bifolium would contain *Liber* VII. 71-VIII.92 on its left and *De Interpretatione* III.17-VI.38 on its right, and the innermost fourth bifolium would contain *Liber* VIII. 93 and its explicit, while the right side would contain the incipit for the *de interpretatione* and the text up to II. 16. This is represented in the following chart.

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| Smith 27 folium i: Contains *Liber Sex Principiorum* II.27-5.48 | Smith 27 Folium ii: contains *De Interpretatione* VIII.61-IX |
| Missing folium i: Contains *Liber Sex Principiorum* V. 49-VII. 70 | missing folium vi: contains *De Interpretatione* VI.39-VIII.60 |
| Missing folium ii: contains *Liber Sex Principiorum* VII. 71-VIII.92 | Missing folium v: contains *De Interpretatione* III.17-VI.38 |
| Missing folium iii: contains *Liber Sex Principiorum* VIII. 93 & explicit | Missing folium iv: *De Interpretatione* incipit*,* I.1-II.16 |

Something like this setup is also suggested by the gloss in the upper left margin of the folium 2 recto. The gloss in part reads, ““semper hanc quidem veram, illam vero falsam.” This is a variant reading of a passage from *De interpretatione* VIII. 52. Thus, the passage may be a catchword referring to a passage that would have been right around the top of the verso of the folium immediately preceding it in quire.

Since the standard Medieval Latin *divisio* of the *de interpretatione* divided the text into two books (as opposed to the Greek text, which counts the whole work as one book), and since the end of chapter nine—i.e. where Smith fragment 27 ends—marks the end of book 1 of the work, it seems likely that our bifolium was the outermost bifolium of a quire of four bifolia.

Next, we can situate our fragment within a standard medieval curriculum. Both the *Liber* and the *de interpretatione* are works of logic. They would likely have been studied along with other works of Aristotle's *organon*, such as the *categories* and perhaps Porphyry's *Isagoge.* Since the order in which the texts of our fragment is given was likely also the order in which they were read, we can suggest the following: in the course of studies for which the codex from which our manuscript came was originally designed, the *Liber Sex Principiorum* was studied immediately before the *de interpretatione*. And since the *Liber* is, by its very intention, a supplement to Aristotle's *categories*, it seems likely that the study of the *Liber* would have been preceded by the study of the *categories* itself, which itself implies that the *categories* would have immediately preceded the *liber* in the codex of which our fragment originally formed a part.

So in sum, our fragment came from a codex that probably contained at least Aristotle's *categories*, and may have additionally contained other logical works in Aristotle's *organon*, or works that normally accompany parts of it, such as Porphyry's *Isagoge* or Boethius' *de divisione.*

1. **Introduction to Columbia's Ms X88.Ar512**

The only other manuscript in the US to contain both of these works is Ms X88.Ar512, also from Columbia's rare book and manuscript library. The manuscript contains the following works in the order listed: Porphyry's *Isagoge*; Aristotle's *Categories*; The *de interpretatione,* here listed under its Greek title, *Perihermeneias;* The *Liber Sex Principiorum*; Boethius' *De divisione*; Boethius' *de differentiis topicis*; Aristotle's *Prior analytics;* Aristotle's *topics*; Aristotle's *On Sophistical Refutations*; and lastly, Aristotle's *Posterior analytics*.

This manuscript, which is much more complete and intact than Smith 27, is in a French gothic script written between 1300 and 1315. The page is larger (32 x 22 cm) and taller. The script is of a higher quality and contains fewer abbreviations. The number of lines per page has increased to 28 compared to Smith's 24. Where Smith only included some minor decoration in its initials, Ms X88.Ar512 has historiated initials with vines, animals and human figures.

**A change in the curriculum, and what it tells us about shifts in medieval educated life**

Now let us draw attention to a factual difference between the manuscripts: the order of the *Liber* and the *De interpretatione* has been switched from the earlier manuscript to the later one. In Smith 27, the *Liber* comes first, while in X88.Ar512, the *De interpretatione* comes first. Furthermore, the *De interpretatione* is listed immediately after the *categories*, so that the *de interpretatione* comesbetween the *categories* and its supplement. What does this mean?

Let us turn back to our “Smith 27 codex” to analyze its content a bit further. Restricting our speculation only to what is most likely, our codex contained the following texts in the following order: the *categories*, the *Liber sex Principiorum*, and the *de interpretatione.* The principle behind this ordering is rational. The *categories* is the first work in Aristotle's organon, because it treats of the most basic element of logical thinking: apprehension of simple concepts, categorized according to their most general genera.[[6]](#endnote-6) The *Liber sex principiorum* treats of this exact same topic, and therefore comes next in the codex. From here, the study moves to the composition and division of concepts, or *judgment,* which is expressed in the proposition. This is studied in the *de interpretatione*, which comes next. In short, *the organization of the curriculum suggested by Smith 27 is essentially determined by the logical relationship of the subject matter of the different treatises to each other.*

The organization of X88.Ar512, by contrast, while it retains the principle of organization of Smith 27, is complicated by two other factors, which are only noticeable in the light of each other: 1) the distinction between *logica vetus* and *logica nova*; and 2) the issue of the authenticity of the work.

The works of the *logica vetus* are those works of or related to Aristotle's *Organon* that never ceased to exist in some fashion or another in medieval Latin education. These works were: the *Isagoge*, the *categories*, and the *de interpretatione*, all known through the translations of Boethius. The *logica nova,* on the other hand, are those works of Aristotle's Organon that only came to be known with the new wave of translations of scientific treatises from Greek and Arabic in the course of the 12th century. The works of the *Logica Nova* are, in the order found in Ms X88.Ar512: the *Prior Analytics*, *Topics*, *On Sophistical Refutations*, and the *Posterior Analytics*.

We can recognize that this distinction is at work in the organization of Ms X88.Ar512 because the Aristotelian works of the *Logica Vetus* are separated from the *Aristotelian* works of the *logica nova* by the addition of the *non-Aristotelian* works that were usually studied with the *logica vetus*: The *Liber Sex Principiorum,* Boethius' *De divisione,* and Boethius' *de differentiis topicis.* So the thematic organization of Ms X88.Ar512's *organon* can be charted as follows:

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| Porphyry's *Isagoge* | Authentic Aristotelian works of the *logica vetus* | Non- or Pseudo-Aristotelian works of the *logica vetus* | Authentic Aristotelian works of the *logica nova* |

In short, it seems that the non-Aristotelian works of the *logica vetus* have been relegated to an appendix. What does this suggest about the role that the notion of the “authenticity of the work” plays in medieval education in logic?

One answer is as follows. The inversion of the order of the *liber sex principiorum* and the *de interpretatione* from Smith Frag. 27 to Ms X88.Ar512 suggests nothing at all about the importance of authenticity. The issue of authenticity was always a factor in the organization of medieval curricula. Instead, what explains the difference between Smith Frag. 27 and Ms X88.Ar512 is that by the time that Ms X88.Ar512 was written, the *liber* was known to be spurious, whereas in the mid 13th century it was not. In short, our earlier scribe simply took the *liber* to be authentic on faith, while our later scribe, coming out of a more critical age, was furnished with the knowledge that the *liber* was a spurious work. So the shift in the place of the *liber* in our two manuscripts is explicable in light of the move from dogmatic to critical thinking that marks not only the shift from the 13th to the 14th century, but also the move from the Middle Ages to modernity in general.

I will reply to the above in two parts: first, by showing that this narrative does not explain the shift in the ordering of the texts of the two manuscripts; second, by showing that the ordering of the texts of these two manuscripts actually calls into question the general veracity of the above narrative.

The above narrative does not explain the ordering of Smith 27 for a rather simple reason: the *Liber Sex Principiorum* was widely known not to have been written by Aristotle, even in the 13th century. Hence, Dodd writes that the *liber* “became a regular part of the logical corpus, and it was often commented on and accepted as containing genuine Aristotelian doctrine, although most medieval authors recognized that it was not by Aristotle;”[[7]](#endnote-7) and, as Minio-Paluello tells us[[8]](#endnote-8), Iohannes Blundus, Nicolas of Paris, Roland of Cremona, Albertus Magnus, Roger Bacon, Bonaventure, Alexander of Hales, Thomas Aquinas, Lambertus Autissodoriensis, Aegidius of Lessines, and Siger of Brabant all either explicitly or implicitly[[9]](#endnote-9) acknowledge that the work was not written by Aristotle. The idea of an awakening of critical consciousness simply does not apply to this case, since the pseudonymous character of the *liber* was widely known from early on.

And nevertheless, this does not prevent the above-mentioned authors from citing the *Liber* approvingly. So then, it seems to me that between the time of the ordering of the Smith fragment's curriculum and the writing of the more recent manuscript, authenticity, conceived of as the trustworthiness of an author, has indeed become an issue. And if the inauthenticity of the *liber* is more widely known at the start of the 14th c. than in the middle of the 13th, this itself may also be because authenticity has begun to be regarded as more important in the meantime.

More broadly, the fact thatauthenticity has become a factor in the ordering of the later manuscript actually suggests just the opposite of the standard narrative that I have summarized above. The orientation towards experienceis made to uneasily coexist with an orientation towards the expert.[[10]](#endnote-10) That the shift in the order of the texts signifies an increased importance accorded to the idea of authority is also supported by the gloss of MS X88.Ar512. The gloss on the *de interpretatione* in the latter manuscript is fairly heavy at places, and seems to be in at least two different hands; while the gloss on the *liber sex principiorum* is scant. In short, the authenticity of the one work and the inauthenticity of the other entailed that one was read regularly, while the other was not.

Here, we will bring forth a second objection: the claim that authenticity of the works seems to be a more important factor for ordering the works of the later manuscript seems to be compromised by the presence of Porphyry *Isagoge* prior to the Aristotelian works of the *logica vetus*. If the genuine or spurious character of the works were that important for the organization of the codex, Porphyry's *Isagoge* would come after Aristotle's works along with the other non-Aristotelian works of the *logica vetus*.

This would be the case if the distinction between “authentic” and “inauthentic” which the manuscript points to were merely a distinction between Aristotle, on the one hand, and his commentators and expositors on the other. But our codex does not draw the boundary line “authentic/inauthentic” in exactly this way. Remember the whole issue of authority and authenticity, as it shows up in this manuscript, seems to be a matter of *trustworthiness*: certain authorities are put ahead of others—in this case, literally, by virtue of their organization in the codex. But if this is the case, then how can Porphyry's presence at the beginning of the codex be explained?

Answer: the borderline drawn by Ms X88.Ar512 between the authentic and inauthentic is a national border. The distinction between authentic and inauthentic works is, in this codex, a distinction between the Greeks and the Latins. So the organization of Ms X88.Ar512 can be simplified even further as follows:

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| Greek authors of the *logica vetus* | Latin appendix to the *logica vetus* | *Logica nova:* exclusively Aristotle's works. |

This schema should be familiar, since an exact parallel arrangement is at work in the organization of Scripture 300 years later in the King James bible, also along national lines: first, the authoritative, Hebrew works of the Old testament; next the non-authoritative Greek works of the old testament; third, the Greek new Testament. As the Latin texts are to Greek texts in the *logica vetus*, so are Greek texts to Hebrew texts in the canon of the Old Testament.

Given this parallel, we cannot take the shift in order, and the emphasis on authority that it signifies, as an anomaly: the shift in the order of reading from Smith 27 to Ms X88.Ar512 signifies not a decreasing, but an *increasing* reliance on the status of the *auctor* in Latin logical pedagogy*—*in other words, it signifies the exact opposite of what the standard narrative of the movement from the 13th to the 14th century, and more broadly, from the middle ages to modernity, suggests to us.

1. **On the quality of the manuscripts, and what they suggest about their social provenance.**

In this section, I would like to more closely consider the other major way in which the two manuscripts differ: their aesthetic quality. Smith 27 is sparsely decorated, while Ms X88.Ar512 is decorated with miniatures; Smith 27 is heavily abbreviated, while Ms X88.Ar512 would be readable by the average layperson who understood Latin. This suggests the following about the two manuscripts.

Smith 27 likely came out of a closed community of scholars. For such a group, the abbreviation of the text itself has the character of a specialized language—i.e. a linguistic practice into which one is initiated by virtue of belonging to a certain sub-group of a larger linguistic community. Furthermore, the smith 27 manuscript’s functional nature guarantees its low quality *because* it probably was expected to be replaced rather quickly—not because the parchment would have worn out, but because of advancements in the organization of the codex that could have been expected by the scribe of the manuscript himself, on account of the community in which he wrote. It would have been expected that, for instance, the specifics of the linguistic practice of abbreviations might change within a generation, and/or that the organization of the writing on the page itself would become more efficient in a writing culture oriented towards the efficient use—but also the constant updating—of the materials involved in the practice itself (both of these things actually happened in manuscripts during the time period to which Smith is assigned). As a result, many of Smith 27’s confreres would have likely been recycled as pastedowns, or perhaps recycled in some other way.

In short, Smith seems to have been written 1) for the utility of immediate study, 2) for a specialized group, 3) and was not written to be a durable manuscript. This hypothesis is also in accord with the lack of gloss on the manuscript, which likely lacks gloss simply because it fell out of use before it *could* be extensively glossed.

By contrast, the initials of MS X88.Ar512 suggest a less technical, more general provenance for that manuscript. The manuscript was likely made for a member of the educated, wealthy, lay public. The abbreviations, being few both in number and in kind, and being those which a generally educated Latin reader would be aware of, also suggest this. And the quality of the codex as a whole suggests that it was made for durability. The presence of at least two different gloss hands (one which loops its ascenders and uses a lighter ink, and one which does not, in a darker ink) suggests that this manuscript may have been actively studied for at least two generations in the family to which it belonged. In other words, this is no longer a merely functional manuscript within an educational setting: within the 25-60 year period between the transcription of Smith 27 and that of Ms X88.Ar512, Aristotle has moved out of the priory, the cathedral school, the University, and found his way back to the *agora*.

In short, the movement of Aristotle's organon from a specialized readership to a general readership—or more broadly, the extension of education to the broader public—is contemporaneous with an increase in the importance of authority for the organization of the texts of the manuscripts themselves.

**Conclusions**

Our manuscripts suggest that the introduction of the organon to a wider readership coincides with a shift in the importance of authority for the order in which the works would be read. The older manuscript, Smith Fragment 27, suggests a small community of scholars reading the different texts in an order determined by the order of the subject matter which those texts treat of; the newer manuscript, X88.Ar512, suggests a broader public reading the texts (or a non-reading of them) in an order determined 1) by the distinction between *logica vetus* and *logica nova;* and 2) within the *logica vetus* curriculum, by a distinction in the status of the *auctores* read, drawn along national/ethnic/linguistic lines. Broader questions about the relationship between authority and universality unfortunately cannot be broached here. But we can summarize the results of our study as follows.

First, the notion that the movement from the 13th to the 14th century is a move away from dogmatic thinking towards more critical thinking is unjustifiable. The question of the authority of an author, of the reliability of a text, becomes *more* important, not less, as we move from the 13th to the 14th century, and as we move from the middle ages to modernity more generally.

Second: for this reason, the characterization of the 13th century as a time of dogmatic thinking compared to the 14th century and modernity is not merely false—it is nonsensical. Dogmatic thinking can only come into existence *after* the question of truth begins to be asked as a question about who or what is reliable and trustworthy—i.e. as a question of authority. If this orientation towards the text was not apparent in the 13th century, neither could that orientation be “dogmatic.” *Dogmatism and Critical thinking are not opposites, but identical in their orientation towards the question of truth as a question of authority, and hence are contemporaneous in their genesis*.

Third, the coincidence of a wider readership with an increase in the importance of authority suggests the possibility of a rational connection between them. Though time constraints do not permit my doing so here, I hope that this paper can provide a directive for future research on this matter in considering the teaching of Aristotle’s *Organon* through the centuries.

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1. Aristoteles Latinus 1966, pp. 40-48 [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. The verse numbering is taken from Aquinas, 1955. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. cf. Dod 1982, p. 79 [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. cf. Aristoteles Latinus 1966, pp. LV-LVIII [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. cf. Dod 1982, p. 74; Aristoteles Latinus 1965, pp. XII-XXVIII [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. It seems unlikely to me that Aristotle actually intends the term “category” to be coextensive with either “highest genus” or “most basic concept.” But since he was read as doing so both in late antiquity and in the middle ages, Aristotle's actual intention is not directly relevant to the organization of the organon in medieval education. Furthermore, the “most basic genus” reading is already implicitly present in the title of the *liber* as the “book of the six *principles.*” [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Dodd 1982, p. 48 [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Aristoteles Latinus 1966, p. LXIV-XLVIII [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. i.e. by ascribing quotes from the *liber* either to the book simply (e.g. “*ut dicit Liber sex principiorum*”), or to the author of the *liber* (e.g. “*dicit auctor Sex Principiorum”*) but never to “Aristotle” or “the Philosopher.” cf. ibid. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. This orientation remains with us even today in such phenomena within the world of education as 1) specialization of research, and 2) the peculiar forms of communication associated with specialized research—the conference and the research journal—as places where different researchers can share their results with each other (i.e. mutually regard each other as authorities in regionally distinct intellectual spheres). [↑](#endnote-ref-10)