

CHRISTOPHE ERISMANN

“To be circumscribed belongs to the essence of man”¹

Theodore of Stoudios on Individuality, Circumscription and Corporeality

Abstract: The concept of “circumscription” (περιγραφή) plays a crucial role in the argument in favour of images developed by Theodore the Stoudite in his *Antirrhethici*. Being circumscribed is the condition of the possibility of depiction, and more generally a characteristic of any being in the sensible world. This concept is traditional, but Theodore redefines anew its meaning thanks to several unprecedented statements about the kind of entities involved in the process of circumscription. For him, it is neither essences nor bodies which are circumscribed but hypostases. Theodore reaches this conclusion by drawing on Aristotelian logic. The resulting understanding of circumscription contributes to ensuring the coherence of his theory of icons.

“Circumscription” (περιγραφή) is the key concept of Theodore the Stoudite’s well-argued defence of images. His views on the topic are set out above all in his *Antirrhethici adversus iconomachos*, three treatises written during the first years of the second period of iconoclasm, probably not very long after the council of 815². The range of the term’s application—mainly the question of Christ’s circumscribability—is the central conceptual battleground with the iconoclasts’ arguments, ultimately inspired by Constantine V’s *Peuseis*, which deny that Christ could be circumscribed³. Perhaps more surprisingly, “circumscription” is also a central notion for Theodore’s ontology of the sensible world, i.e. for his explanation of the constitution and mode of being of things. Being circumscribed is for Theodore a fundamental feature of all created entities, from angels to animals. What is created is by definition circumscribed. God is not circumscribed, all the rest of the world is. The point at which he disagrees with iconoclasts is the following: for Theodore, if Christ did really become incarnate, i.e. did really become a man, then he has to be circumscribed, like every other human being. It is due to his circumscription that Christ is depictable in icons. The three concepts—incarnation, circumscription, depictability—are, for the abbot of the Stoudios monastery, indissolubly linked. The main argument of Theodore, often formulated in his *Antirrhethici*, may be reconstructed as follows:

¹ Theodore of Stoudios, *Antirrhethici*, III.a.3. The complete sentence reads as follows: Εἰ τὸ ἀπερίγραπτον οὐσίας ἐστὶ Θεοῦ, τὸ δὲ περιγραπτὸν οὐσίας ἀνθρώπου, ἐξ ἀφοῦν δὲ ὁ Χριστός (italics mine). Theodore’s Greek text is quoted after PG 99. Translations are originally from C. ROTH. Crestwood NY 2001, or T. CATTOI. New York – Mahwah NJ 2014), but have often been modified.

² On Theodore’s life (759–†826), see PMBZ #7574/corr.; the introduction (“Theodoros Studites’ Leben und Werk”) to the edition of the Letters, in G. FATOUROS (ed.), *Theodori Studitae Epistulae*. Berlin 1992, I 3*–38*; and T. PRATSCH, *Theodoros Studites (759–826). Zwischen Dogma und Pragma*. Frankfurt 1998. On Theodore’s contribution to icon-theology, see among others: V. GRUMEL, L’iconologie de Saint Théodore Studite. *EO* 20 (1921) 257–68; T. SIDERIS, The Theological Position of the Iconophiles during the Iconoclastic Controversy. *St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 17.3 (1973) 210–26; K. PARRY, *Depicting the Word. Byzantine Iconophile Thought of the Eighth and ninth Centuries*. Leiden – New York – Köln, 1996; M. BRATU, Quelques aspects de la théorie de l’icône de S. Théodore Stoudite. *Revue des Sciences Religieuses* 77.3 (2003) 323–49; T. TOLLEFSEN, St Theodore the Studite’s Defence of the Icons. *Theology and Philosophy in Ninth-Century Byzantium*. Oxford 2018.

³ The *Peuseis* of Constantine V are partly quoted by Nicephorus in order to refute them. They have been collected and edited in H. HENNEPHOF, *Textus Byzantinos ad Iconomachiam Pertinentes in Usus Academicum*. Leiden 1969, 52–7. A previous edition was included in G. OSTROGORSKY, *Studien zur Geschichte des byzantinischen Bilderstreites*. Breslau 1929, 8–11. Constantine V’s main argument goes along the lines: to circumscribe Christ and to characterise his person leads one to consider him only as a creature (κτίσμα) and to omit his divine nature.

What is circumscribed, is depictable;
 all human beings are circumscribed;
 Christ is a real human being,
 therefore, he is circumscribed;
 therefore, he is depictable.

For Theodore, to negate the circumscription of Christ and his consequent depictability implies negation of the reality of the incarnation, as it amounts to a negation of the humanity of Christ⁴.

Surprisingly enough, given the abundant secondary scholarly literature on Theodore of Stoudios, several aspects of the concept of circumscription have not yet been properly analysed⁵. For example, the most basic issue regarding circumscription, namely what is circumscribed, has not been clarified, even if some hypotheses have been tacitly assumed. Basically, circumscription is an act of delimitation, of seclusion, of separation from something else. Further, it is clear by definition that, as an act, circumscription implies at least two elements, namely something which will be circumscribed and something that circumscribes it. Let us take as an example a field in the countryside. In order to have some circumscription, you need a field, which, after the act of circumscription, will be delimited and as such separated from the rest of the land and, secondly, a fence which limits it. In ontology, it works the same way: you need some entity which will be secluded by some other element. What circumscribes is explicitly listed by Theodore of Stoudios (III.a.13, 396A) in a key passage about the question; he says that circumscription is realised by “comprehension, quantity, quality, position, places, times, shapes, and bodies”; I will later come back to this passage, which is an interesting testimony to Theodore’s culture of Aristotelian logic. In secondary literature, several kinds of things have been claimed to be circumscribed according to Theodore: essences (like humanity), bodies, and accidents. On the basis of Theodore’s writings, it is possible to dismiss these claims, and to establish that he has a clear position on the question, one at odds with the traditional patristic understanding of the concept. I will argue that the entity which, according to Theodore, is circumscribed is the hypostasis. Thanks to this clarification of the components of the circumscription, it will be possible to reconstruct the very precise understanding of the concept that Theodore upholds. In what follows, I will proceed in several steps. I will first present the traditional meaning of the concept of circumscription, as it was used by the Cappadocian Fathers, who are, on this question as on so many others, the main sources not only for the late patristic tradition but also for the ninth century. I will then describe the basic components of Theodore’s ontology⁶—i.e. the kinds of entities he accepts in his explanation of the ontological structure of beings. I will further analyse the concept of circumscription according to Theodore’s perspective and propose a new reconstruction of his position, emphasizing his reliance on Aristotelian thought; I will proceed in two steps discussing successively two questions: first what circumscribes and then what is circumscribed. On this basis, I will suggest an interpretation of his motivation to depart from the traditional understanding of the concept; and finally, I will discuss one corollary of his position, namely the distinction between individuality and circumscription, and draw some conclusions about Theodore’s philosophical and logical culture.

⁴ Antirrhētici III.a.38: “but if He is not circumscribed, neither is he truly man as well as truly God. But he is truly man, and therefore truly circumscribed”.

⁵ On Theodore on circumscription, see M. BRATU, Les notions de circonscriptible et d’incirconscriptible chez Saint Nicéphore de Constantinople et Saint Théodore Stoudite. *Studia Historica et Theologica* (2003) 509–525; K. PARRY, Depicting 99–113; T. TOLLEFSEN, St Theodore 60–91; B. DALEY, God Visible. Patristic Christology Reconsidered. Oxford 2018, 255–260.

⁶ By ontology, I mean the philosophical study of what exists, the enquiry about kinds of beings.

THE TRADITIONAL UNDERSTANDING OF THE CONCEPT OF CIRCUMSCRIPTION

The concept of circumscription had already had a long history when Theodore tackled this issue. In theology, it was mainly used with a negative prefix to insist on the fact that the divine nature is not limited. For a more precise and technical meaning, related both to ontology and to the problem of individuality, and helpful to describe created entities, we have to go back to the Cappadocian Fathers. They are maybe not the only source for iconophile theologians on this question, but they are definitely a central one. The concept of circumscription is used in a famous text, a letter about the distinction between *ousia* and *hypostasis* which was for long considered to be *Letter 38* of Basil of Caesarea and is now largely but not unanimously considered to be by Gregory of Nyssa⁷ and referred to as his *Letter 35, To Peter his own brother on the divine ousia and hypostasis*. In this text we find the following statement:

Τοῦτο οὖν ἐστὶν ἡ ὑπόστασις, οὐχ ἡ ἀόριστος τῆς οὐσίας ἔννοια μηδεμίαν ἐκ τῆς κοινότητος τοῦ σημαυνομένου στάσιν εὐρίσκουσα, ἀλλ’ ἡ τὸ κοινόν τε καὶ ἀπερίγραπτον ἐν τῷ τινὶ πράγματι διὰ τῶν ἐπιφαινομένων ιδιωμάτων παριστῶσα καὶ περιγράφουσα (Epistula 38 [§ 3, 8–12 COURTONNE]).

(This therefore is the hypostasis: not the indefinite notion of the essence, which finds no firm basis because of the commonality of what is signified, but [the hypostasis is] what gives stability and circumscribes the common and uncircumscribed in this given thing by the manifest properties.)

The terminology which will be used during the ninth century—*ἀπερίγραπτον*, *περιγράφουσα* and *ιδιωμάτων*—together with the conceptual scheme are present: an indefinite entity without sensible particular existence gains reality, individuality and circumscription when it is instantiated by a particular sensible and defined entity, this hypostasis. As a concept the essence is not realised in individuals and therefore not circumscribed. It is something indefinite, but when it is realised in a precise hypostasis, i.e. in this given individual (the grammatical structure of the expression of Gregory of Nyssa ἐν τῷ τινὶ πράγματι indeed reminds one of Aristotle’s ὁ τις ἄνθρωπος of *Cat.* 2a11–14, as a reference to a single individual). By circumscribing the essence, the hypostasis gives it a sensible existence.

As often, the transmission of ideas, concepts and terminology to the ninth century is not necessarily a direct one. In this case, an extremely probable intermediary step has to be mentioned, an anonymous Christological florilegium called the *Doctrina Patrum de Incarnatione Verbi*. The *Doctrina Patrum* was compiled by Anastasius Apocrisarius, a disciple of Maximus the Confessor, in the second half of the seventh century⁸. Our oldest copy of the text is an eighth/ninth-century manuscript, today the Vaticanus Graecus 2200 (*Diktyon* 68831)⁹. In a section about the difference between nature and hypostasis, the florilegium quotes, with only slight modifications, Gregory’s text:

⁷ On the question of the attribution of the letter to Gregory, see, among others, R. HÜBNER, Gregor von Nyssa als Verfasser der sog. Ep. 38 des Basilius. Zum unterschiedlichen Verständnis der ousia bei den kappadozischen Brüdern, in: *Epektasis*. Mélanges patristiques offerts au Cardinal Jean Daniélou, ed. J. Fontaine – Ch. Kannengiesser. Paris 1972, 463–490; J. ZACHUBER, Nochmals: Der “38. Brief” des Basilius von Cäsarea als Werk des Gregor von Nyssa. *Zeitschrift für Antikes Christentum* 7 (2003) 73–90.

⁸ Cf. F. DIEKAMP, *Doctrina Patrum de incarnatione Verbi*. Ein griechisches Florilegium aus der Wende des 7. und 8. Jahrhunderts. Münster 1907, repr. 1981. This florilegium quotes principally theological authorities, but also, interestingly, Alexandrian philosophers, such as Elias and Stephanus.—It is worth noting that the florilegium was used in ninth-century Byzantium, as attested by the writings of Nicephorus, Patriarch of Constantinople from 805 to 815. On Nicephorus’ use of the florilegium, see LXXIV.

⁹ On this manuscript, see S. LILLA, *Codices Vaticani graeci. Codices 2162–2254 (Codices Columnenses)*. Vatican 1985. This manuscript has been digitised and is accessible online: http://digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS_Vat.gr.2200.

Τὸ μὲν τῆς οὐσίας ὄνομα ἀόριστον ἡμῖν τινα παράστησιν ἔννοιαν, μηδεμίαν ἐκ τῆς κοινότητος τοῦ σημαινομένου στάσιν εὐρίσκουσιν. τὸ δὲ τῆς ὑποστάσεως τὸ κοινόν τε καὶ ἀπερίγραπτον ἐν τῷ τινι πράγματι διὰ τῶν ἐπιφαινομένων ιδιωμάτων παράστησι τε καὶ περιγράφει (35.9–13 DIEKAMP).

A further testimony will illustrate the diffusion of the Cappadocian understanding of the concept of circumscription, which was soon to become a standard view among Chalcedonian theologians. This testimony is given by an adversary of Chalcedonian Christology, John Philoponus, in his *Arbiter*, a treatise in which he discusses the terminology used in the antagonistic Chalcedonian and Miaphysite Christological explanations (the term “Arbiter” is glossed by Philoponus in the title of his book as “the examiner of the words of the two sides that contend against each other on the Incarnation of God the *Logos*”). The entire *Arbiter* is preserved in Syriac but only fragments survive in Greek in the already mentioned *Doctrina Patrum* and in John of Damascus’s treatise *On heresies*, as well as in the theological writings of the late twelfth-century historian Nicetas Choniates¹⁰, a fact which allows us to assume that the Greek text of the *Arbiter* was still available in Constantinople before 1204¹¹. The seventh chapter of the *Arbiter* is relevant for the notion of circumscription. Before presenting his own view, Philoponus starts with a summary of the traditional view on nature and hypostasis, from which he already distances himself. This text is quoted in Greek both by the *Doctrina Patrum*¹² and by John of Damascus in his supplement to the *Heresy* 83:

Φύσιν μὲν οὖν οἶεται τὸν κοινὸν τοῦ εἶναι λόγον τῶν τῆς αὐτῆς μετεχόντων οὐσίας, ὡς ἀνθρώπου παντὸς τὸ ζῶον λογικὸν θνητὸν νοῦ καὶ ἐπιστήμης δεκτικόν· τούτῳ γὰρ οὐδεὶς ἀνθρώπων διενήνοχεν. Οὐσίαν δὲ καὶ φύσιν εἰς ταυτὸν ἄγει. Ὑπόστασιν δὲ ἡγουν πρόσωπον τὴν ἰδιοσύστατον τῆς ἐκάστου φύσεως ὑπαρξιν καί, ἴν’ οὕτως εἶπω, περιγραφὴν ἐξ ἰδιοτήτων τινῶν συγκεκριμένην, καθ’ ἃς ἀλλήλων οἱ τῆς αὐτῆς κεκοινωνηκότες φύσεως διαφέρουσι καί, συντόμως εἰπεῖν, ἄπερ ἄτομα προσαγορεύειν τοῖς ἐκ τοῦ Περιπάτου φίλον, ἐν οἷς ἡ τῶν κοινῶν γενῶν τε καὶ εἰδῶν ἀποτελευτᾶ διαίρεσις (Liber de haeresibus, Haeres. 83 addit. [51.31–38 KOTTER]).

(On the one hand, nature is believed to be the common explanation of those things which share the same essence; for example, being a rational animal which is mortal and capable of understanding and knowing [is common] to every man, for in this, no man differs [from the others]. And so essence and nature amount to the same thing. On the other hand, hypostasis, that is to say, person, is the concrete individual existence of each nature, and, so to speak, a circumscription made up of certain properties, by which those who have the same nature in common differ [from each other]. To speak briefly, those which the followers of Aristotle usually call “individuals”, in which the division of common genera and species comes to an end.)

It seems clear that the text could be read in the following way: Ὑπόστασιν περιγραφὴν (τῆς ἐκάστου φύσεως) ἐξ ἰδιοτήτων τινῶν συγκεκριμένην. The hypostasis is the circumscription of the nature thanks to particular properties.

An understanding of circumscription like the one described by Gregory of Nyssa, which will be diffused thanks to its later re-use or incorporation in popular florilegia such as the *Doctrina Patrum*, will become standard. It describes the circumscription of the common essence in a particular

¹⁰ U. M. LANG, Niketas Choniates, A Neglected Witness to the Greek Text of John Philoponus’ *Arbiter*. *Journal of Theological Studies* 48.2 (1997) 540–548.

¹¹ U. M. LANG, John Philoponus and the Controversies over Chalcedon in the Sixth Century. A study and translation of the *Arbiter*. Leuven 2001, 22: “it can reasonably be assumed that the *Arbiter* in its original language was still available to Niketas, when in the late twelfth century he added further source material to his history of the anti-Chalcedonian party.”

¹² *Doctrina Patrum* (274, 6–16 DIEKAMP).

entity, the hypostasis, thanks to individualising properties. Theodore will keep the same ontological components (nature or essence, hypostases and particularizing properties); he will also endorse the metaphysical thesis of the realisation of the universal essence in the particular hypostases; but he will nevertheless change the scope of the concept of circumscription, so that it may better fit his theory of icons.

THEODORE’S ONTOLOGICAL LEXICON

Before discussing Theodore of Stoudios’s views on circumscription, it is necessary to render more precisely some points of his conceptual terminology. This terminology is not specific to Theodore and is traditional. It stems from the Aristotelian and Porphyrian logical tradition through its Christian adaptation and from (late) patristic Christology.

Theodore’s ontology admits several kinds of entities in order to explain how reality is structured and how beings are constituted¹³. Three kinds of beings are relevant for our purpose:

The first kind of entities are essences or natures, like man; they cause what an individual is, for example Paul is a human being since he has the essence man. Specific essences or natures express the common definition (ὄρος); thus man is, for example, defined as “animate, rational, mortal, and capable of understanding and knowing” (ζῶον λογικόν, θνητόν, νοῦ καὶ ἐπιστήμης δεκτικόν, III.α.34, 405B). Essences and natures are the species of the individuals placed under them, like man is the essence and the species for all existing human beings. As such, they are universal entities in the sense that they are common to several distinct individuals; this is intended by Theodore when he says, using a logical vocabulary, that “this [the definition of man] does not define just Peter, but also Paul and John and all those who belong to the same species” (τοῦτο γὰρ οὐ μόνον Πέτρον ὀρίζει· ἀλλὰ γὰρ Παῦλον καὶ Ἰωάννην, καὶ πάντας τοὺς ὑπὸ τὸ αὐτὸ εἶδος, III.α.34).

This leads us to the second kind of entities in Theodore’s ontology, hypostases (ὑποστάσεις) or individuals (ἄτομοι). The two terms are of different origin, the first one is typical, in this meaning, in the Christian tradition, whereas the second goes back to Aristotle. They refer to individuals, like Peter, Paul or this cat. Only individuals are endowed with independent existence, as for Theodore, universals exist only as instantiated (or realised) in individuals¹⁴. Theodore expresses this point in a very Aristotelian way¹⁵: “Universals have their existence in individuals: for example, humanity (ἀνθρωπότης) in Peter and Paul and the others of the same species. If the individuals did not exist, the universal humanity would be eliminated.”¹⁶ We cannot expect a clearer Aristotelian statement. Universals have no existence separated from individuals. It is worth noting that Theodore makes his own a well-known principle stating that “there is no such thing as a nature that is not hypostasized”, i.e. realised in a hypostasis: οὐκ ἔστιν φύσις ἀνυπόστατος. Theodore quotes this principle in III.α.22. This principle, originally formulated by the Monophysites is a *topos* of Christological discussions

¹³ In his writings Theodore sets out elements of a constituent ontology. A constituent ontology is based on the conviction that properties are in some sense constituents of the particulars that have (or instantiate) them; in its Byzantine Aristotelian version, it means that an individual is constituted of essential properties (i.e., its essence) and of accidental properties.

¹⁴ On Theodore on universals, see C. ERISMANN, Photius and Theodore the Studite on the humanity of Christ. A neglected Byzantine discussion on universals. *DOP* 71 (2017) 175–192.

¹⁵ Also noted by Ch. SCHÖNBORN, *L’icône du Christ. Fondements théologiques*. Paris 1986, 219: “Dans un sens aristotélicien saint Théodore refuse de voir dans la nature commune, dans l’idée d’humanité, la vraie réalité de l’homme comme le pense le platonisme. Les existences individuelles ne sont pas des diminutions de ‘l’homme véritable idéal’; au contraire, il n’y a d’humanité que dans les individus subsistants. A cause de cela, l’homme considéré seulement en sa nature commune est un être de raison.”

¹⁶ *Antirrhethici* III.α.16: τὰ γὰρ καθόλου ἐν τοῖς ἀτόμοις τὴν ὑπαρξιν ἔχει· οἷον, ἡ ἀνθρωπότης ἐν Πέτρῳ καὶ Παύλῳ καὶ τοῖς λοιποῖς ὁμοειδέσι. Μὴ ὄντων δὲ τῶν καθ’ ἕκαστα, ἀνήρηται ὁ καθόλου ἄνθρωπος.

since Leontius of Byzantium (*Contra Nestorianos et Eutychianos* 1277d–1280a2¹⁷). Its philosophical implication is that for every existing nature, there is at least one individual instantiating it, i.e. a member of this species¹⁸.

Following Cappadocian teaching, Theodore of Stoudios affirms the unity of essence for all the members of the same species and places the difference between them not at the level of the essence—which is one and the same—but at that of the hypostases which are numerous: “Members of the same species are one in essence but hypostatically differentiated one from another: there is this one and there is that one” (III.α.21). Difference between individuals occurs at the level of hypostases. The difference between the individuals of the same species is constituted by the third kind of entities admitted by Theodore.

The third kind of entities are the accidental properties; they are called hypostatic properties or hypostatic idioms, as they belong to a given hypostasis. They include all the accidental properties possessed by an individual, and play a key role in Theodore’s ontology as they are the explanation of the individuality of individuals. Individuals of a same species—which are called ὁμοειδῆς ἄτομοι—are not distinguished by the essence, which is common to all the members of the species, but by accidental properties, which are proper to a given individual. Theodore follows here an explanation of individuality codified by Porphyry¹⁹. According to this pattern, every individual possesses a unique bundle of non-essential properties, the same collection of which cannot be found in any other individual. It is this unique bundle of properties which makes one individual distinct from other individuals of the same species, as the essence—the specific universal—is common to all the members of the species. The bundle is unique and particular, whereas the properties that compose it may be universal. Speaking of Peter, Theodore says, in a Porphyrian tone²⁰: “insofar as he adds along with the common definition certain properties, such as being hook-nosed or snub-nosed, having curly hair, a good complexion, bright eyes or whatever else characterizes his particular appearance, he is distinguished from the other individuals of the same species” (*Antirrhethici* III.α.34)²¹. It is not clear whether Theodore thinks like Porphyry that the bundle of properties is unique or whether he considers each property as particular.

Theodore seems to use a rather limited list of hypostatic idioms, since when he describes an individual, he carefully limits his enumeration to depictable properties, like physical traits. The most

¹⁷ Leontius of Byzantium 132.26–134.3 (ed. B. DALEY. *Leontius of Byzantium. Complete Works*. Oxford 2017).

¹⁸ For a discussion of the significance of this axiom for the debate about the ontological status of universals, see C. ERISMANN *Non est natura sine persona: the issue of uninstantiated universals from late Antiquity to the early Middle Ages*, in: *Methods and Methodologies: Aristotelian Logic East and West, 500–1500*, ed. M. Cameron – J. Marenbon (*Investigating Medieval Philosophy* 2). Leiden 2010, 75–91.

¹⁹ The key text is the following: “Socrates is said to be an individual, and so are *this* white thing, and *this* person approaching, and the son of Sophroniscus (should Socrates be his only son). Such items are called individuals because each is constituted of proper features the assemblage of which will never be found the same in anything else—the proper features of Socrates will never be found in any other of the particulars. On the other hand, the proper features of man (I mean, of the common man) will be found the same in several items—or rather, in all particular men in so far as they are men” (*Eisagoge* 7.19–27 [Busse], transl. BARNES 8).

²⁰ Cf. *Eisagoge*, 8.13–16 (BUSSE), transl. BARNES 9: “One item is said to differ properly from a diverse item when it differs from it by an inseparable accident—inseparable accidents are, for example, blue-eyedness or hook-nosedness or even a hardened scar from a wound.”

²¹ The Greek of this passage contains two difficulties. The first one relates to the meaning of οὔλον, translated by the expression “curly hair” by both C. Roth and T. Cattoi, even if Theodore speaks only of οὔλον (and not for example of οὔλαι κόμαι). It seems possible that οὔλον may be caused by an error in the transmission of the text, i.e. a change in Porphyry’s expression in the aforementioned passage of οὔλη, as Porphyry speaks of “a hardened scar from a wound” (οὔλη ἐκ τραύματος ἐνσκιρωθεῖσα). The second difficulty concerns the exact meaning of the adjective εὐόματος, which is respectively translated as “keen-sighted” (LSJ), “having both eyes” in opposition to μονόφθαλμος (Lampe) or “schönäugig”, i.e. “having beautiful eyes” (LBG). Porphyry’s example is γλαυκότης, the blueness (of the eyes).

striking absence is relations (like “being the son of”), which are very often used when it comes to characterising a given individual. Profession (“being a doctor”) or intellectual capacities (“knowing grammar”) are not mentioned either²². This seems to indicate that he focuses on one of the various dimensions of the problem of individuality. For him, individuality is fundamentally understood as distinction, as separation from the other human beings or from the other members of the species. Individuality is the distinction of each and every individual from all other individuals, including those belonging to the same species. The high frequency of Greek verbs expressing the idea of differentiating of, separating from or distinguishing from—like διακρίνω or διαστέλλω—which Theodore uses, makes this clear from the lexical point of view; and there is no need to say that such an idea of differentiating is also behind the concept of περιγραφή, of circumscription. Circumscription is a way to separate something from other things, but which things and how?

WHAT CIRCUMSCRIBES?

In a highly significant passage, Theodore offers a list of the various kinds of circumscription:

“There are many species of circumscription (εἶδη περιγραφῆς)—comprehension (κατάληψις), quantity (ποσότης), quality (ποιότης), position (θέσις), places (τόποι), times (χρόνοι), shapes (σχήματα), bodies (σώματα)—all of which are denied in the case of God, for divinity has none of these” (III.α.13, 396A).

This passage allows several precisions regarding the concept of circumscription, but at the same time it raises a conceptual difficulty related to the concept of circumscription. Theodore lists here various ways of being circumscribed. One can, for example, be circumscribed by a body, if one is a corporeal entity, like a human being, or not, if one is an incorporeal entity like God.

As the concept of circumscription is traditional, we need first to establish what the proper contribution of Theodore to the understanding of the concept is and what has already been stated by his predecessors or contemporaries. As we have seen, the idea of circumscription is traditional in patristic discourse. Now, to determine precisely the peculiarity of Theodore’s position, we need to compare him with authors sharing his main concern—the defence of images—and who use the concept of circumscription in the same kind of perspective. The two closest comparanda are certainly John of Damascus and Nicephorus of Constantinople.

John of Damascus offers a definition of circumscription in his treatise *De fide orthodoxa*:

“Now, to be circumscribed means to be determined by place, time, or comprehension, while to be contained by none of these is to be uncircumscribed. So the divinity alone is uncircumscribed, who is without beginning and without end, who embraces all things and is grasped by no comprehension at all. [...] The angel, however, is circumscribed by time, because he had a beginning of being; and by place, even though it be spiritually, as we have said before; and by comprehension, because their natures are to some extent known to each other and because they are completely defined by the Creator; bodies (τὰ σώματα) are also circumscribed by beginning (ἀρχῆ), end (τέλει), corporeal place (τόπω σωματικῶ) and comprehension (καταλήψει).” (De fide orthodoxa I.13 [39.42–50 KOTTER])

²² For a discussion of a far more extensive list of hypostatic idioms also given by a ninth-century author, see C. ERISMANN, Meletius Monachus on individuality: a ninth-century Byzantine medical reading of Porphyry’s *Logic*. *BZ* 110.1 (2017) 37–60.

Nicephorus (*PG* 100, 356B–357A) follows John and mentions four kinds of circumscription, by place, time, beginning and comprehension²³. He explains the last one by adding that being circumscribed by comprehension is that which is understood by thought and knowledge (διανοία και γνώσει, 356D). For Nicephorus, this mode is the one by which the angels mutually know their nature. He clearly states that the list is complete and that what is not circumscribed by one of these kinds of circumscription is not circumscribable.

So, if we summarize the three accounts of circumscription, we have the following list of circumscribing items:

John of Damascus	Nicephorus	Theodore
Comprehension	comprehension	comprehension
Time	time	times
Beginning	beginning	
End		
Place	place	places
corporeal place		quantity
		quality
		position
		shapes
		bodies

It clearly appears that Theodore integrates the traditional elements. *Beginning* and *end* are not listed as such, but it is not difficult to see them as subsumed under *times*. The same goes for *corporeal place* under *place*. So we can clearly see that Theodore added five elements to his list of the species of circumscription, namely, quantity (ποσότης), quality (ποιότης), position (θέσις), shapes (σχήματα) and bodies (σώματα).

The main difficulty for a correct assessment of Theodore's passage consists in the proper evaluation of the terms added. First, one should note that Theodore speaks of *species* (εἶδη) of circumscription. The term εἶδος is technical and is used in classification of the various subdivisions of a given genus²⁴. This immediately places the passage in the field of logic. There is a general agreement in secondary literature that some of the terms listed in the passage are related to Aristotle's *Categories*. I would like to claim that, in fact, all the terms added by Theodore are related to the Aristotelian treatise, being either a category—i.e. one of the ten highest genera of things or beings (τῶν ὄντων, *Cat.* 1a20) or a subdivision of one of them²⁵.

²³ On Nicephorus on circumscription, see P. ALEXANDER, *The Patriarch Nicephorus of Constantinople: Ecclesiastical Policy and Image Worship in the Byzantine Empire*. Oxford 1958, 206–213.

²⁴ Theodore knows well this technical sense of the term εἶδος, which is attested in the following passage: “εἶδος is said of what is distinguished from genus [i.e. the species]: for example, man in general (ὁ καθόλου ἄνθρωπος)”, *Antirrhetici* III.δ.13, 433C.

²⁵ Places and times are indeed related to the *Categories* as well. At first glance, places (τόποι) indeed remind one of the category of where (ποῦ) and times of the category of when (πότε). But they could also be related to the category of quantity. In a passage about delimitation—exactly the topic Theodore is discussing!—Aristotle says in the *Categories*: *Cat.* 5a: “Similarly in the case of a body (ἐπὶ τοῦ σώματος) one could find a common limit (κοινὸν ὄρον)—a line or a surface—at which the parts of the body join together. Time (χρόνος) also and place (τόπος) are of this kind. For present time joins on to both past time and future time. Place, again, is one of the continuous quantities. For the parts of a body occupy some place, and they join together at a common limit. So the parts of the place occupied by the various parts of the body, themselves join together at

Quantity (ποσότης) is Aristotle’s second category, which is also referred to as ποσόν.

Quality (ποιότης) is Aristotle’s third category, also called ποιόν.

Position²⁶ (θέσις) is a species of the fourth category, the category of relatives (πρός τι)²⁷. Aristotle says in *Categories* 6b3–6 that: “The following, too, and their like, are among relatives: state, condition, perception, knowledge, *position*” (ἔστι δὲ καὶ τὰ τοιαῦτα τῶν πρὸς τι οἶον ἕξις, διάθεσις, αἴσθησις, ἐπιστήμη, θέσις·)²⁸. He explains a bit later that “A state is called a state of something, knowledge knowledge of something, *position position of something*, and the rest similarly.” (6b6 for καὶ ἡ θέσις τινὸς θέσις). Theodore probably chooses this precise species of relatives as it is depictable, as opposed to several other species of relations, like friendship, filiation, paternity or brotherhood.

Shapes (σχήματα) also come from the *Categories*. Σχήμα is, together with form, the fourth species of quality as stated by Aristotle in *Categories* 10a11–10a16:

“A fourth kind of quality is shape and the external form of each thing, and in addition straightness and curvedness and anything like these. For in virtue of each of these a thing is said to be qualified somehow; because it is a triangle or square it is said to be qualified somehow, and because it is straight or curved. And in virtue of its form each thing is said to be qualified somehow.”

In his commentary on the *Categories*, Ammonius mentions shape together with form as the last of the four pairs of species of quality: τέταρτον σχῆμα καὶ μορφήν (81.7). “Bear in mind that Aristotle provides us with four species of quality: 1. State and condition; 2. Capacity and incapacity; 3. Affective quality and affection; 4. Figure and shape.”

The insistence on qualities—expressed by a double occurrence in the list—is easy to explain by Theodore’s concern with depictability. Qualities are the most easily depicted properties.

Bodies (σώματα) have been mentioned by John of Damascus but as something which is circumscribed, and not as something which circumscribes, so this element constitutes a real addition by Theodore. Body is not as such a concept of the *Categories* but it belongs to its interpretative context. One should never forget that a Byzantine reader of logic, when thinking about essence or *ousia*, would immediately have in mind the famous division of *ousia* better known by the appellation of Porphyry’s tree²⁹. The first division which occurs is the division of *ousia* between body (σῶμα) and incorporeal (ἀσώματον). This scheme is frequently represented in manuscripts according to the following outline:

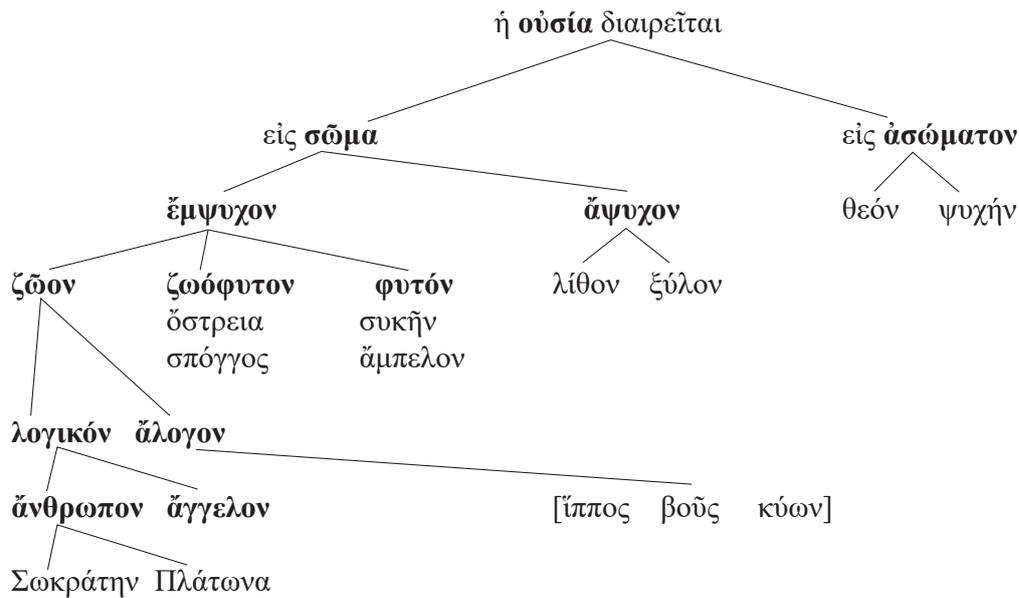
the same limit at which the parts of the body do. Thus place also is a continuous quantity, since its parts join together at one common limit.”

²⁶ Theodore gives the following examples in III.a.13: “He ... stood, sat, and lay down.”

²⁷ So T. TOLLEFSEN’s comment that “However, relation (πρός τι, σχέσις) is among important items that are missing”, p. 38, has to be nuanced as relatives (πρός τι) are mentioned through one of their species.

²⁸ It is also listed by the commentators, like Olympiodorus (in cat. 99.21–23) and Elias (in cat. 202.11–13) in their lists of the ten species of relatives (τὰ εἶδη τῶν πρὸς τι).

²⁹ Here is the famous text by Porphyry which is the basis of the diagram: “Essence is itself a genus. Under it is body, and under body animate body, under which is animal; under animal is rational animal, under which is man; and under man are Socrates and Plato and particular men. Of these items, essence is the most general and is only a genus, while man is the most special and is only a species. Body is a species of essence and a genus of animate body. Animate body is a species of body and a genus of animal. Again, animal is a species of animate body and a genus of rational animal. Rational animal is a species of animal and a genus of man. Man is a species of rational animal, but not a genus of particular men—only a species” (4.21–32 [BUSSE], transl. BARNES 6, slightly modified).



Σῶμα is one of the species of *ousia*. So we have to keep this in mind when we come across the concept in Theodore’s writings. A body is indeed an organised set of accidental properties—mainly quantities and qualities—but being a body, in a more general characterisation, is also one of the most generic characteristics of beings for the entire Aristotelian tradition. As Porphyry says, “Body is a species of essence and a genus of animate body”. Being a body is part of the essence of all existing things except God. From his mention of the two opposite couples rational/irrational and animate/inanimate (ἐν τε λογικοῖς καὶ ἀλόγοις· ἐν ἐμψύχοις καὶ ἀψύχοις) in I.12 it is obvious that Theodore knows the Porphyrian structure.

The fact that body is listed among the kinds of circumscription is interesting, because it states that body is not something which *is* circumscribed, but something which circumscribes. So bodies could not be the thing which is circumscribed. This is an important point to which we will come back.

It means that we obtain the following presence of Aristotle’s categories in Theodore’s list of circumscribing elements:

Aristotle	Theodore
Essence (<i>ousia</i>)	Body (species of essence)
Quantity	Quantity
Quality	Quality + shapes (species of quality)
Relatives	Position
Where	Places
When	Times

We should also have a look at what Theodore chose not to mention in his list, i.e. the four last categories (Categories 1b25–2a4): the seventh, posture or being in a position (κεῖσθαι); the eighth, having (ἔχειν); the ninth, acting or doing (ποιεῖν); and the tenth, being acted upon or being affected (πάσχειν). We can claim that the category of κεῖσθαι is covered by the mention of position, which though being among relatives is also linked to it. Not mentioning the category of having is easy to explain, it may not be a circumscription. Having is related to an external object. The same reasoning goes for acting and suffering, which cannot express a circumscription; they are interactions with something or someone else. They require already existing entities. So Theodore’s list includes all

the categories which could contribute to the delimitation of an entity. An entity is delimited or circumscribed by its body, which contains qualitative properties (shapes, colours, etc.) and quantitative properties (size, weight, etc.), the position of this body, and its spatio-temporal dimensions.

By this characterisation of circumscription Theodore gave a definitely Aristotelian flavour to the concept, using all the applicable categories.

The passage nevertheless presents a difficulty. The way in which it is phrased raises the question whether circumscription is a unique phenomenon or a multiple one, i.e. if one given object is circumscribed once but by several properties, or if every property among the properties listed below causes a (partial) circumscription. It seems reasonable to think that circumscription is done once by several properties. For the properties listed by Theodore are mutually inclusive, and it is not possible to have one without having the other. For example, if a given entity has a body and is circumscribed through it, it is clear that this entity has also a place, a posture, at least all the qualities and quantities of its body.

WHAT IS CIRCUMSCRIBED?

Theodore has a precise view on the question. He presents it notably as follows:

“The same applies to the case of Christ. It is not because of the fact that He is simply man, along with being God, that Christ can be portrayed; but rather because He is differentiated by his hypostatic properties from all others individuals of the same species. He is crucified and has a certain appearance. Therefore, Christ is circumscribed in respect to hypostasis (καθ’ ὑπόστασιν), but he is uncircumscribed in his divinity or with respect to the natures of which he is composed” (Antirrhетици III.α.34).

This fundamental passage contains both a *pars destruens* and a *pars construens*. I start with the negation. Theodore says that the natures of which Christ is composed are not circumscribed. A part of this statement is obvious, as Christ’s divine essence is not circumscribed, since divinity is by definition not circumscribable. This is often claimed both by iconoclasts and by Theodore (cf. Antirrhетици III.α.3: “uncircumscribability belongs to God’s essence”). The more innovative part of the statement is the clear negation of the circumscription of Christ’s human nature. As nature and essence are the same thing, it means that Theodore explicitly rejects the traditional understanding of circumscription according to which the nature or essence is circumscribed in the hypostasis. So the essence or the nature is not what is circumscribed³⁰. Christ is circumscribed in respect to his hypostasis. The entity which, according to Theodore, is circumscribed is the hypostasis.

This is confirmed in several other passages in which we find similar statements.

In *Antirrhетици* III.α.17, Theodore equates hypostasis and circumscription: “when I say ‘man’, I mean the common essence. When I add ‘a’, I mean *the hypostasis*: that is the self-subsisting existence of that which is signified, and (so to speak) *the circumscription by certain properties* through which those who share the same nature differ one from another, like for example, Peter and Paul” (italics mine).

In III.α.24 he states clearly: “but if it is true [that he assumed humanity], as we confess, then the *hypostasis of Christ is circumscribed* (περιγραπτὴ ἡ Χριστοῦ ὑπόστασις), not according to the divinity, which no one ever saw, but according to the humanity which is considered in an individual manner

³⁰ This point has been well noted by T. TOLLEFSEN, *St Theodore* 37: “Theodore says that ‘nature’ as such is not circumscribed” but without further comment.

in the hypostasis.” He states clearly that it is the hypostasis which is circumscribed; this is possible because this hypostasis is also the hypostasis of a man, an instantiation of the human nature. A purely divine hypostasis would indeed not be circumscribable.

Why did Theodore choose such a metaphysical view? And further, if our claim that this represents a rupture with the authoritative patristic view is correct, why did he introduce such a break? Why did he not follow the tradition and several of his influential predecessors and admit that the hypostasis circumscribes the nature or essence? The answer is clear: this would be of no help for his icon-theology and would not sustain his refutation of the iconoclasts’ arguments. In order to be coherent, his theory of icons needs a different view of circumscription than the traditional one. We have to remember that circumscription is what allows representation for Theodore. Circumscription is the condition of the possibility of depictability. Something can be represented only if it has been previously circumscribed. Or what is represented in an icon according to Theodore? Not the essence but the hypostasis. Theodore is crystal clear on this point (*Antirrhetici* III.α.34, 405AB): “In the case of anyone represented pictorially it is not the nature but the hypostasis which is represented” (Παντός εικονιζομένου, οὐχ ἡ φύσις, ἀλλ’ ἡ ὑπόστασις). Theodore develops this point, displaying his logical culture in the process: “For example, Peter is not portrayed insofar as he is animate, rational, mortal, and capable of understanding and knowing; for this does not define only Peter, but also Paul and John, and all of the same species. But insofar as he adds along with the common definition certain properties, such as being hook-nosed or snub-nosed, having curly hair, a good complexion, bright eyes or whatever else characterises his particular appearance, he is distinguished from the other individuals of the same species” (III.α.34, 405BC). This text shows well that it is not Peter’s essence—i.e. the set of essential properties common to all human beings, like rationality and mortality—which is represented, but the properties which constitute his hypostasis and distinguish him from all the other men. So, if circumscription is the condition for the depiction and if the entity which is represented is the hypostasis, then it has to be the hypostasis which is circumscribed. A circumscribed essence would not help, as it is not the essence which is depicted. Theodore claims circumscription for the entity which is represented, the hypostasis.

Now that we know what circumscribes and what is circumscribed, it is possible to clarify one further aspect of Theodore’s view on circumscription, the distinction between individuality and circumscription.

INDIVIDUALITY AS A CONDITION FOR CIRCUMSCRIPTION

If it is the hypostasis that is circumscribed, then it is clear that Theodore distinguishes individuality and circumscription, as the hypostasis is by definition individual. So if what is circumscribed is already individual “before” circumscription, then circumscription is not a kind of individualisation. But there is more; not only does Theodore establish a clear distinction between individuality and circumscription³¹, but he also states an equally clear link of what follows from what. Individuality for Theodore is the condition of circumscription. It is because an entity—the hypostasis—is individual that it is circumscribed. In III.α.36, Theodore states that a universal entity is, by definition, not circumscribable: “Every moving creature is not the species, as defined in general—for it is invisible, formless, shapeless and therefore uncircumscribable—but is rather the individual which naturally consists of properties.” A species, or a genus, as a universal entity is not visible—as is well known,

³¹ TOLLEFSEN, *St Theodore* 65, considers individuation and circumscription as two ways to describe the same thing (“the problem of individuation or, in other words, of circumscription”). I think that we have to distinguish the two, as the first is a *conditio sine qua non* of the second.

I see this horse, but never equinity as such—, nor perceptible or endowed with what circumscribes like forms and shapes.

They are different steps of the process. The essence is realised in a hypostasis, and on this basis thanks to the hypostasis it is possible to say that it is circumscribed. The sequence of what follows from what is not chronological, as the two elements appear simultaneously, but metaphysical. First an essence has to be realised in a hypostasis, i.e. in an individual characterised by his hypostatic properties (τοῖς ὑποστατικοῖς ιδιώμασι κεχαρκτηρισμένος, *Antirrhētics* III.α.20, 400AB). This is the metaphysical condition for circumscription. Then, “because” the hypostasis is constituted, circumscription can occur. Theodore formulates it about Christ as follows, but the principle is the same for other individuals:

“[Christ] is differentiated from all other men by his hypostatic properties; *and because of this*, he is circumscribed” (*Antirrhētics* III.α.19; italics are mine).

That causality is at play is clear—καὶ διὰ τοῦτο περιγραφόμενος—, it is because Christ, as hypostasis, is distinct from all the other members of the species, that he can be circumscribed. Individuality is the condition for circumscription. Theodore states this explicitly when he says “Therefore, although he assumed the universal [human] nature, yet he assumed it as considered in an individual; for this reason, the possibility of circumscription exists (ἐφ’ ᾧ καὶ τὸ περιγράφεσθαι πέφυκε)” (III.α.17).

So, the essence or nature is realised in a hypostasis which is individual, i.e. distinct from others of the same species, due to its properties. Only then, the hypostasis is circumscribed in its body and by the other properties which circumscribes it.

The theoretical advantage of Theodore’s solution is real, as it allows one to work with two different sets of properties, one for the explanation of the individuality of the individual and another for his circumscription and its depictability. The second set is responsible for the appearance of the individual and is mainly related to his body. It is mostly composed of physical traits and dispositions of the body (with some spatio-temporal properties which are indeed related to the place of the individual’s body at a given place at a given time). Theodore equates circumscription and tangibility (τὸ ψηλαφητόν III.α.12). For him the circumscription is fundamentally related to the possession of a body. Only bodily creatures are circumscribed—the body may be immaterial like for angels, but this is only a very special case.

On the other hand, it is problematic to link individuality to physical characteristics, as they are changing. One of the problems with an explanation of individuality through accidental properties is the identity of the individual through time. Socrates with ten kilos more or less should still be Socrates. In order to avoid the problem, preference is usually given to stable—not to say inseparable—accidental properties, like the shape of the nose, the colour of the eyes and, on occasion, scars, as they will accompany the individual during his entire life. For circumscription, on the other hand, there is no problem if the properties change. It is fine to admit that the representation of the young Christ does not look the same as a thirty-year old Christ.

The icon represents, as was already well noted by the iconoclast John the Grammarian³², only a part of the properties of an individual; it includes the properties involved in circumscription. Several

³² See J. GOUILLARD, *Fragments inédits d’un antirrhétique de Jean le Grammairien*. *REB* 24 (1966) 171–181, and, for a diplomatic edition, A. EVDOKIMOVA, *An Anonymous Treatise against the Iconoclastic Patriarch John the Grammarian*. *Scrinium* 7 (2011) 144–168. John states that the accidents which make this individual particular and distinguish him from the other members of the same species are in no way to be comprehended in a visual way. His justification is that neither his ancestry, nor his fatherland, his profession, his acquaintances, nor his praiseworthy or dishonourable conduct can be made known by any device whatsoever except that of discourse so that it is impossible truly to distinguish a given human being through likenesses (ff. 202^v–203^r).

properties are not depicted, for we have seen that essential properties are not depicted as, in addition to being extremely difficult to represent (how do you depict rationality?), they are part of the common essence and are not proper to this individual. Several immaterial properties are not depicted as well—like some kinds of relations, being the son of Peter for example, place of birth, family origin, some intellectual capacities, knowledge, experiences, deeds—even if these properties are crucial in constituting the individuality of the individual. But as the two aspects of the question are separated, this is no problem for Theodore, who clearly distinguishes between being a hypostasis, i.e. an individual, and being circumscribed. As the fact that Peter is a hypostasis and the fact that Peter is circumscribed are two separated—though correlated—ontological facts, they do not have to be explained by the same causes.

CONCLUSION

Theodore of Studios inherits a traditional concept, which he finds partly inadequate for the problem he has to solve. His main concern is to safeguard the legitimacy of the representation of existent sensible creatures. In order to ensure the maximal coherence of his theory of icons, he decided to apply the concept of circumscription not to essence, but to hypostasis, i.e. to what is depicted. In order to do this, he felt the need to give a more precise account of the concept. He did so by drawing on his logical education. His understanding of circumscription implies, as we have seen, several logical tools: the Aristotelian doctrine of the ten categories, the structure of Porphyry's tree, the distinction between universals and particulars (here often in the form of the distinction between essence or nature and hypostasis), and the Porphyrian explanation of individuality through accidental properties. Here as well³³, Theodore uses his logical culture to strengthen his theological view on icons³⁴.

³³ Other examples of the use of logic are the understanding of the prototype and the image as Aristotelian relatives and the use of the Aristotelian doctrine of homonyms in the case of Christ and the image of Christ; on Theodore and Aristotelian logic, see K. PARRY, Aristotle and the Icon: The Use of the Categories by Byzantine Iconophile Writers, in: Aristotle's Categories in the Byzantine, Arabic and Latin Traditions, ed. S. Ebbesen – J. Marenbon – P. Thom. Copenhagen 2013, 35–57; T. ANAGNOSTOPOULOS, Aristotle and Byzantine Iconoclasm. *GRBS* 53 (2013) 763–90; C. ERISMANN Venerating Likeness: Byzantine Iconophile Thinkers on Aristotelian Relatives and their Simultaneity. *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 24/3 (2016) 405–425, and C. ERISMANN, The depicted man. On a fortunate ninth century byzantine afterlife of the Aristotelian logical doctrine of homonyms, *GRBS* 59 (2019) 311–339.

³⁴ This paper was written under the auspices of the research project “Reassessing Ninth Century Philosophy. A Synchronic Approach to the Logical Traditions” (9 SALT) generously granted by the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (grant agreement No. 648298). I am especially indebted to the two anonymous reviewers of the *JÖB* for their insightful remarks. I would also like to thank Byron MacDougall, Christian Gastgeber and Dirk Krausmüller for their comments.