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Mašhad, Kitābhāna-i Āsitān-i Quds-i Raḍawī 300, f. 1v; Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, grec 1853, f. 186v

Why do Methods Change?

On the Significance of the Year 815 for the History of the Byzantine Thought

Christophe Erismann

“Controversy was a stimulus to learning: it called for knowledge of the Bible, of patristics, of logical argument”.
Cyril Mango¹

Abstract

This article proposes a revised chronology and analyses the conditions of emergence of a new argumentative strategy developed by Theodore the Studite and Nicephorus to defend the cult of images in reaction to the reintroduction of iconoclasm as the official religious position of the Byzantine Empire by Emperor Leo V in 815. It outlines the three main characteristics of this method, based on Aristotelian logic: the use of logical concepts, the production of numerous deductive arguments, and the denigration of the opponent on the basis of his (alleged) poor knowledge of logic.

Even if the current trend in historical studies seems to lean towards the study and valuation of long periods of time, rather than specific dates some precise dates remain fundamental turning points. This is true for Byzantium in political and cultural terms (e.g. 1204, the sack of Constantinople by the fourth crusade and its implications²), religious politics and arts (e.g. 843, the restauration of the veneration of images, the so-called “triumph of orthodoxy”), but this is also true for intellectual history. In the present contribution, I would like to claim that the year 815 is a significant turn in the Byzantine history of philosophy and theology. From this date onwards, Byzantine iconophile thinkers changed their methods in the controversy

¹ C. Mango, “Greek Culture in Palestine after the Arab Conquest”, in G. Cavallo – G. de Gregorio – M. Marniaci (eds.), *Scritture, Libri e Testi nelle Aree Provinciali di Bisanzio. Atti del seminario di Erice (Tp) (18-25 settembre 1988)*, Centro italiano di studi sull’alto medioevo, Spoleto 1991, pp. 149-60, p. 159.

² 1204 was a traumatic time for the Byzantines, also because of the looting of numerous works of art, the destruction of many manuscripts and the interruption of a tradition of study. While P. Agapitos (“The insignificance of 1204 and 1453 for the history of Byzantine literature”, *Medioevo Greco* 20 [2020], pp. 1-58) has offered some very good arguments for downplaying the importance of 1204 for Byzantine literature, the situation is nevertheless different for philosophy and theology. In fact, regular contact with the Latins and the establishment of Latin convents in Byzantine territories created a dialogue that strongly influenced Byzantine philosophical questioning. The translation into Greek of authors such as Boethius, Augustine and Thomas Aquinas further reinforced this phenomenon.

against iconoclasm.³ The fact that in 815 iconoclasm was for a second time⁴ adopted as the official religious politics of the Byzantine Empire led the iconophiles to acknowledge that the theological answer to the question of image veneration adopted by the iconophile council of Nicaea II in 787, based exclusively on the patristic tradition and quotes from the Church Fathers, was not enough and that a new kind of answer was needed. This new answer was based on Aristotelian logic and offered a thorough rational argumentation.⁵ From 815 onwards, there arose a new way of writing about theological questions in a polemical context and to solve theological questions thanks to logic. This new method forged in the framework of iconoclasm was used in several subsequent religious controversies (about the respective intrinsic rationality of Christianity and Islam against Muslim theologians, on the procession of the Holy Spirit and the so-called *Filioque* formula against the Franks). Most interestingly, the emergence of this new methodology in Byzantium was contemporary to the development of rational theology (*kalām*) in Jewish and Muslim Arabic thought.

The hypothesis that guides this article is that much more was at stake in 815 than just the solution of the theological problem of the rational justification of the cult of images. It was a way of doing theology that was proposed, namely the development of a rigorous form of natural or rational theology in which logic was the privileged tool.

I will proceed in five steps in this article: In a first section, I will discuss the chronology of events to show that the start of the use of Aristotelian logic is a precisely datable phenomenon and that its date is 815. This point of chronology is also important to establish the character of the doctrine, which is fundamentally determined by its origins within a polemical context. This will allow us to propose a new chronology. Secondly, I will briefly sum up the methods used previously in the controversy about image veneration by John of Damascus and in the Acts of Nicaea II (787) in order to have a compendium with the new post-815 method of argumentation. Thirdly, I will discuss a precise historical event: the arrival of Palestinian monks, mainly Sabaites, in Constantinople fleeing the anarchy that followed the death of Hārūn al-Rašīd (809-813). This is important for the *translatio studiorum* that happened between the Levant and Constantinople and may have contributed to the emergence of the

³ For an excellent presentation of the main arguments of the controversy on iconoclasm, see C. Barber, *Figure and Likeness. On the Limits of Representation in Byzantine Iconoclasm*, Princeton U.P., Princeton 2002. G. Dagron has given a remarkable analysis of the theoretical issues involved in *Décrire et peindre: Essai sur le portrait iconique*, Gallimard, Paris 2007. For a study of the historical context, cf. J. Haldon – L. Brubaker, *Byzantium in the Iconoclastic Era, c. 680-850: A History*, Cambridge U.P., Cambridge 2011. A good summary of the historical data is given in M.-F. Auzépy, “The Iconophile Intermission and Second Iconoclasm, 780–843”, in M. Humphries (ed.), *A Companion to Byzantine Iconoclasm*, Brill, Leiden 2021 (Brill’s Companions to the Christian Tradition 99), pp. 368-97.

⁴ Emperor Leo III first established iconoclasm in 726. This imperial religious policy lasted until the Second Council of Nicaea in 787, which (temporarily) restored the cult of images. This iconophile interlude came to an end in 815 with the decision of Leo V to re-establish iconoclasm.

⁵ On the use of Aristotelian logic during the second iconoclasm, see C. Erismann, “The Depicted Man: The Byzantine Afterlife of Aristotle’s Logical Doctrine of Homonyms”, *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 59 (2019), pp. 311-39; Id., “Venerating Likeness: Byzantine Iconophile Thinkers on Aristotelian Relatives and their Simultaneity”, *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 24/3 (2016), pp. 405-25. K. Parry, *Depicting the Word: Byzantine Iconophile Thought in the Eighth and Ninth Centuries*, Brill, Leiden 1996 (The Medieval Mediterranean 12), pp. 52-63; id., “Aristotle and the Icon: The Use of the *Categories* by Byzantine Iconophile Writers,” in S. Ebbesen et al. (eds.), *Aristotle’s Categories in the Byzantine, Arabic and Latin Traditions*, Det Kongelige Danske Videnskabernes Selskab, Copenhagen 2013, pp. 35-57; T. Anagnostopoulos, “Aristotle and Byzantine Iconoclasm”, *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 53 (2013), pp. 763-90.

new method. Fourthly, I will discuss the new method itself, as developed simultaneously by Nicephorus of Constantinople and Theodore the Studite. In my reconstruction, this new method is constituted by three elements: the use of logical concepts, the constitution of lists of arguments, and the valorisation of the knowledge of logic along with the accusation raised against the adversaries of ignoring the rules of logic. Fifthly, I will discuss the posterity of this method by demonstrating its posterity in the ninth century and its use by Photius of Constantinople, notably in the context of the dispute with the Franks about the *Filioque* and by Nicetas of Byzantium in his polemical writings against Islam. In a last section, I will make some remarks about the later development of the question.

1. A revised Chronology

The year 843 marks the official end of iconoclasm, the so-called “triumph of Orthodoxy”. It is a date that is even commemorated by a particular kind of icons, a specimen of which dating from the fourteenth century is now at the British Museum in London.⁶ 843 is often presented as the beginning of a new era in Byzantium, the end of a dark age, the end of iconoclast ignorance. The Macedonian renaissance started to unfold. The reality is much more nuanced; it appears that many of the developments of the second half of the century were prepared beforehand and that the alleged ignorance of the iconoclasts was, with a few exceptions, more due to iconophile propaganda than to historical reality. In this article, I would like to argue that, for Byzantine intellectual history, 815 is a date at least as important as 843, because it is from this date onwards, and not in 843, that the working method of Byzantine thought (theology and philosophy) changed fundamentally. From this date onwards, Byzantine thinkers worked differently than their predecessors. This change of method concerned the defence of the cult of images at first, but the method was soon used in other contexts. What is interesting for us, is that this change resulted from an evaluation of the situation; the change resulted from a decision and was made explicit; it resulted from the observation that the methods used until then were insufficient to prevent a second outbreak of iconoclasm and that it was necessary to develop a new one. It was no longer just a matter of invoking quotations gathered in anthologies and debating their exact meaning, but of reasoning, of arguing. Nicephorus⁷ and Theodore the Studite⁸ focused their work on three points: the integration of philosophical concepts into their position, the use of logical reasoning, often called syllogisms, to prove an aspect of their position or to reduce the opponent’s position to absurdity, and finally the

⁶ Cf. D. Kotoula, “The British Museum Triumph of Orthodoxy icon”, in A. Louty – A. Casiday (eds.), *Byzantine Orthodoxies. Papers from the Thirty-sixth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies*, University of Durham, 23-25 March 2002, Routledge, Aldershot 2006, pp. 121-30; A. Weyl-Carr, “Icon with the Triumph of Orthodoxy”, in H.C. Evans (ed.), *Byzantium: Faith and Power (1261-1557). Metropolitan Museum of Art*, MetPublications, New York 2004, pp. 154-5; R. Cormack, “Icon of the Triumph of Orthodoxy”, in M. Vassilaki (ed.), *Mother of God: Representations of the Virgin in Byzantine Art*, Skira, Milano 2000, p. 340. See also R. Cormack, “Icon of the Triumph of Orthodoxy”, in D. Buckton (ed.), *Byzantium*, British Museum, London 1994), pp. 129-30. Id., “Icon with the triumph of orthodoxy”, in R. Cormack – M. Vassilaki – E. Dimitriadou (eds.), *A Catalogue of the Byzantine and Greek Icons in the British Museum*, London (forthcoming).

⁷ On Nicephorus: see *Prosopographie der mittelbyzantinischen Zeit*, ed. R.J. Lillie, De Gruyter, Berlin-New York 1998-2013, # 5301.

⁸ On Theodore Studites: *Prosopographie der mittelbyzantinischen Zeit*, # 7574/corr. See also T. Tollefsen, *St Theodore the Studite’s Defence of the Icons: Theology and Philosophy in Ninth-Century Byzantium*, Oxford U.P., Oxford 2018.

accusation of ignorance brought against the opponent to discredit him. Theology was no longer just only a matter of faith, it was also a matter of demonstration.

This change is well documented, as we have examples of the treatment of the same issue before and after the Aristotelian turn or logical turn that is 815. Theodore and Nicephorus wrote about images and defended their veneration in a new way. This new conceptualisation of the image was taken up again throughout the ninth century; but even more durably, it was their rational method in theology that was influential for about three centuries. This method was endorsed by thinkers for an application which went well beyond the question of images to become the preferred Byzantine tool for discussing theological questions. The method of Nicephorus and Theodore was born of a polemic, of the need to defend one's position and to criticise that of the opponent. Its agonistic character has ensured its success, as it corresponds to the nature of theological debates. Debates in theology are rarely calm, but often polemical. Anyone who does not think like oneself in theology very quickly becomes a heretic. It is a field where a plurality of opinions is not valued; the person who thinks otherwise is mistaken; but his error quickly takes on another dimension to become heresy. The later debates on the *Filioque* or the controversies with the defenders of Islam provided opportunities to put this method into practice, again in a polemical context.

815 is also an important date because it is the beginning of the Constantinopolitan chapter of Byzantine philosophy and logic. We have very little elements attesting work done in the fields of philosophy, logic and rational theology in the capital before that date. During the fifth and sixth centuries, the intellectual centre was Alexandria which was a centre for theology, medicine, natural sciences and philosophy. The philosophical work of that period is characterised by the redaction of impressive commentaries on Aristotle⁹ and in a lesser proportion on Plato. It is also in Alexandria that John Philoponus, probably also to contribute to keep the school open, produced his well-argued criticism of Aristotle and of Proclus on the question of the eternity of the world. It is also there that he defended his monophysite Christology and wrote his *Arbiter*. For the seventh and eighth centuries, an overwhelming majority of texts written in Greek in the field of philosophy or rational theology were produced in the region encompassing Alexandria, the Sinai peninsula, Syria and historical Palestine: Anastasius of Sinai, Leontius of Byzantium, Leontius of Jerusalem, Maximus the Confessor¹⁰ and John of Damascus were all active in this Levantine territory. The capital was the place of politics, power and imperial administration, but hardly the place of higher learning.¹¹ The loss of territories with a dense network of schools (Alexandria for philosophy,

⁹ These commentaries have been published in the series *Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca* (Berlin). Many commentaries have been translated into English, in the collection ed. by R. Sorabji, *Ancient Commentators on Aristotle*.

¹⁰ For the latest discussion on Maximus's intellectual environment, see L.J. Salés, "The Other Life of Maximus the Confessor: A Re-evaluation of the Syriac and Greek Lives and the Case for His Alexandrian Origin", *Journal of Late Antiquity* 13 (2020), pp. 407-39.

¹¹ This has been established by Guglielmo Cavallo, who speaks of "the recognizable asymmetry in the eastern Byzantine world, between Constantinople and the outlying provinces during the period between the sixth century and the late eighth in the domain of literary culture, authors and texts. That is to say, in Constantinople itself we can see the slow triumph of *agroikía* ('rusticity'), whereas in the outlying provinces the evidence points to cultural continuity. [...] even after they had been lost to the (Roman/Byzantine) empire", "Theodore of Tarsus and the Greek culture of his time," in M. Lapidge (ed.), *Archbishop Theodore: Commemorative Studies on His Life and Influence*, Cambridge U.P., Cambridge 1995, p. 55 and 57.

theology and medicine, but also Gaza and Beirut for law), monasteries (Saint Catherine's monastery in Sinai, Mar Saba near Jerusalem, etc.)¹² and places of learning, made it necessary to revitalise the intellectual and scholastic environment of Constantinople. From the eighth century onwards, Constantinople became the intellectual centre of an empire which, due to the Arabic conquests, became linguistically and theologically more homogeneous, being deprived of the non-Chalcedonian provinces.

Re-establishing the importance of 815 also offers an additional argument against a chronology of Byzantine history which postulates a so-called dark age from the mid-seventh to the mid-ninth century. First because a proper assessment of 815 and of the quality of the contribution by Theodore and Nicephorus show that the intellectual debate at the time was of a high level and second because it makes clear that in the 780s, an excellent education was still given to the elite in Constantinople. The proof is simple, Theodore and Nicephorus received their education in Constantinople. Without denying the proper part of their genius or their personal or even self-taught research, it is clear that they received an excellent education in rhetoric and logic (the art of reasoning is not learned alone, or from a book, you need a master with whom to practice it).

The historical context of 815 is well-known; following the defeat of Michael I against the Bulgarians, Leo V took power in 813. In 814, he ordered a group of scholars to collect the passages of the church fathers in favour of iconoclasm. In 815, he re-established iconoclasm as the official doctrine thanks to a council held in Constantinople.¹³ Various reasons may explain this move: possible pressure from the army that remained iconoclast, the desire to regain the military success that he associated with the iconoclast emperors of the eighth century, and even the desire for a long reign, which he believed was characteristic of iconoclast emperors.

It is probably impossible to distinguish between political calculation, external pressure, opportunism and genuine conviction. And that is not my purpose here. Nor am I going to speculate, as has been done, on the role that the search for texts and the composition of the anthology of patristic passages by the iconoclasts may have played in the revival of scholarship.¹⁴ It is probable that the work of the committee headed by John the Grammarian contributed to the rediscovery of some manuscripts and aroused interest in certain texts; it certainly enriched the patristic culture of the future patriarch of Constantinople.¹⁵

Paul Alexander was the first to emphasise in his great book on Nicephorus¹⁶ in 1958 that the debate on images went through different changes and phases. Three phases of iconophile

¹² On the importance of monasteries as place of learning, see L. Larsen – S. Rubenson (eds.), *Monastic Education in Late Antiquity: The Transformation of Classical 'Paideia'*, Cambridge U.P., Cambridge 2018.

¹³ On this council, see P. Alexander, "The Iconoclastic Council of St. Sophia (815) and Its Definition (Horos)", *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 7 (1953), pp. 35-66.

¹⁴ This hypothesis according to which the preparation of the iconoclastic florilegia occasioned the rediscovery of classical texts and therefore started a kind of renaissance was proposed by B. Hemmerdinger (*Essai sur l'histoire du texte de Thucydide*, p. 35). It has been definitely rejected by P. Lemerle, *Le premier humanisme byzantin: Notes et remarques sur enseignement et culture à Byzance, des origines au X^e siècle*, Presses universitaires de France, Paris 1971, p. 140.

¹⁵ On John the Grammarian and his knowledge of logic, see C. Erismann; "John the Grammarian and Photius. A Ninth-Century Byzantine Debate on Depiction, Visual Perception and Verbal Description", *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik* 70 (2020), pp. 67-87.

¹⁶ P.J. Alexander, *The Patriarch Nicephorus of Constantinople: Ecclesiastical Policy and Image Worship in the Byzantine Empire*, Oxford U.P., Oxford 1958.

theory have been identified by P.J. Alexander: the “traditional period,” the “Christological period” beginning under Constantine V in 741, and the “scholastic period” starting sometime after the Seventh Ecumenical Council of Nicaea in 787. Alexander points out that there was a shift in the debate on images from the so-called Christological period marked by the thought of Constantine V to the Scholastic period of the debate characterised by the use of Aristotelian logic. His book remains the reference work on the subject; it has opened up a field of research. Nevertheless, it needs to be amended on some important points: the first is the chronology, the second is the role played by Nicephorus and Theodore, and the third is the importance of the event, i.e. the change in method.

Paul Alexander’s position is that the use of logic to defend images began soon after the iconophile council of Nicaea II in 787, although it is not clear who initiated it and why. Then, an anonymous commentator of the Gospel of John – whose text was edited by Karl Hansmann¹⁷ – would have made use of this theory in his commentary and this before 812. Nicephorus and Theodore the Studite would then have extended this theory in their own works; in the case of Theodore, this happened also during the iconophile intermezzo, thus before 815. I quote Alexander, here about Hansmann’s anonymous author:

“From these illustrations it will be seen that the author was acquainted with the scholastic theory of images. Since the commentary was written before the end of the Moechian Controversy in 812, it is clear that this scholastic theory of images was fully developed by that date. [...] by the time when the commentary was written, i.e. shortly before 812, the scholastic theory of images had become traditional. *In all probability it was developed in the decade following the Seventh Council of Nicaea*”.¹⁸

Paul Alexander’s chronology is based on two texts: the anonymous commentary on the Gospel of John, in fact homilies on John and Matthew, edited by Hansmann, which Alexander following Hansmann dates to “shortly before 812” on the one hand; and Theodore’s letter to John the Grammarian (a namesake, not the future patriarch) which Alexander considers, following a date suggested by Grumel,¹⁹ to have been written before 814, on the other. But it turns out that both of these dates are inaccurate. Hansmann’s anonymous text was recently attributed by Peter van Deun with good arguments to Metrophanes of Smyrna,²⁰ a supporter of Ignatius in his struggle with Photius. The homilies thus date from the last third of the ninth century. And for the second text, Georgios Fatouros, the editor of Theodore the Studite’s letters, proposed 821-826 as date for what is now the letter 528²¹ as the Plato referred in the letter is not the famous uncle of Theodore, Plato of Sakkoudion, but probably a Studite monk (the date of death of Plato of Sakkoudion is therefore not the terminus ante quem of the letter as Grumel suggested). Thanks to this new dating of these two key-texts, the picture

¹⁷ K. Hansmann, *Ein neuentdeckter Kommentar zum Johannesevangelium. Untersuchungen und Text*, Schöningh, Paderborn 1930 (Forschungen zur christlichen Literatur und Dogmengeschichte 16,4/5).

¹⁸ P. Alexander, *The Patriarch Nicephorus of Constantinople: Ecclesiastical Policy and Image Worship in the Byzantine Empire*, Oxford U.P., Oxford 1958, p. 197. Italics mine.

¹⁹ V. Grumel, “Jean Grammaticos et saint Théodore Stoudite”, *Échos d’Orient*, t. 36, 18 (1937), pp. 181-9, p. 186.

²⁰ P. Van Deun, “La chasse aux trésors: la découverte de plusieurs œuvres inconnues de Métrophane de Smyrne (IX^e-X^e siècle)”, *Byzantion* 78 (2008), pp. 346-67.

²¹ “Der Brief stammt wahrscheinlich aus den Jahren 821-826”, M. Fatouros (ed.), *Theodori Studitae epistulae*, De Gruyter, Berlin 1992, p. 470*.

has changed. There are no more documents testifying to the use of logic in a discussion about images before 815.

On the other hand, we have a consistent refutation of iconoclasm in form of antirrethical treatises or antirrethics written shortly after 815; an antirrethic is a work or speech whose main purpose is to refute the arguments or theses of an opponent. Nicephorus and Theodore wrote antirrethics which both massively use the new kind of argumentation and method of reasoning based on Aristotelian logic.

This gives a much more natural sequence of events. In 815, Leo V re-established iconoclasm as the official position of the Byzantine Empire. The iconophile thinkers had to react. The second appearance of iconoclasm made a new theory necessary as the standard method had not prevented a second adoption of iconoclasm as an official imperial position. This explanation makes much more sense than imagining that iconophiles who had just composed the Acts of Nicaea II, in which logic played no role, suddenly invented a new theory. There was no need for that.

In this regard, history has to be rewritten and the role of Theodore and Nicephorus reassessed. Theodore and Nicephorus are no longer followers of an already established doctrine as Alexander claimed,²² but its initiators. This too is more natural. The logical explanation of images is a sophisticated doctrine, and it took people with philosophical skills and good knowledge of Aristotle's *Categories* and the commentaries on this text to formulate it. This fits well with the profile of both Theodore and Nicephorus.

For Alexander the shift to what he calls the scholastic period of the debate is one change among others, just as there was a shift between the so-called traditional period and the period he calls Christological. This does not do justice to what had happened. Certainly, Constantine V changed the terms of the debate on images by moving it to Christology, maybe to make it appear more justified to devote a council to the question of images as councils were usually devoted to central – i.e. Trinitarian and Christological – aspects of the dogma. The emperor transformed, into a theoretical and theological debate, a discussion that had previously been essentially about the application of the precepts of the Old Testament. But what happens in 815 is of a different nature. It is a change of method decreed by the two leaders of the iconophile cause to meet a new challenge.

The inaccuracies of Alexander's chronology and the fact that recent studies focus on either Nicephorus or Theodore have obscured an important aspect of the story. The most spectacular point is not that either of them had a new idea, but that the two figures, who did not like each other to say the least, simultaneously adopted a complex, technical and original position. This is not a matter of chance, but of conferring – the solution is too technical and the vocabulary too specific to be simultaneously adopted without cooperation and coordination. I believe that the joint development of a new method focused on logic reflects a sense of urgency and, above all, the common diagnosis that the solutions provided by Nicaea II were not sufficient on the theoretical level, since iconoclasm had returned. The emergence of a doctrine is one thing, its reappearance is another. And this reappearance required a different reaction. Theodore and Nicephorus did not like each other, but they united, politically and theoretically, to defend their common cause. The simultaneous emergence in their writings

²² “It is best to suppose that the anonymous commentator [NB edited by Hansmann], Theodore and Nicephorus reproduced a theory which had been developed by Byzantine schoolmen”, p. 198.

of a complex doctrine is not the result of chance, but of shared elaboration, resulting in all likelihood from joint discussions.

The new date for the origin of the method tells us something about its nature. This method is born from a polemical context. It is a way to criticise the position of the adversary and to defend own's one position. It is a dialectical method.

I should add that I am not convinced by the term “scholastic” used by Paul Alexander to describe the new argumentative method of the iconophile thinkers. To me, “scholastic” implies the presence of a strong school structure, a well-established institution of higher education, like the university in the medieval west. And this was not the case in Constantinople at that time. Teaching was mainly done in small groups by private teachers. “Scholastic” also implies a systematic project; here it is more a pragmatic and realistic effort. The last Byzantine writer with systematic ambition was John of Damascus, with his *De Fide orthodoxa*.

I will therefore refer to their position as the “relational explanation of images” (REI) for the content and applied logic as the general method.

2. *The methods previously used: John of Damascus and the Acts of Nicaea II*

A precise measure of the change realised in reaction to 815 is possible; for we have texts showing how the same problem was discussed before: John Damascene's three treatises on images²³ which correspond to what Alexander calls the traditional period, and the Acts of Nicaea II which correspond to the so-called Christological period.

John Damascene's solution is based on his patristic and late antique philosophical culture. From patristics he retained Basil of Caesarea's thesis that veneration passes to the person represented. This avoids the accusation of idolatry, because one does not venerate the object (i.e. the icon in its materiality), but what it represents, the depicted saint or Christ. Even more interesting is what John Damascene retains from his philosophical culture. John is the author of a text called *Philosophical Chapters*, better known as the *Dialectica*; there, John defines the essential concepts of Porphyry's *Isagoge* and the first books of Aristotle's *Organon* (*Categories*, *De Interpretatione* and the first chapters of the *Analytica Priora*). He knew perfectly well the concepts of relatives and homonymy on which the solution of Nicephorus and Theodore is articulated as he defined these concepts in his *Dialectica*, respectively at the paragraph 32 (pp. 101-2 Kotter) and 51 (pp. 117-19 Kotter). But he approached the problem differently. John reasoned like the thinkers of his milieu, i.e. like scholars from the sixth and seventh centuries in Syria, Palestine and Sinai; this milieu valued a form of elementary philosophy resulting from the work of the commentators of the Alexandrian school and their prolegomena to philosophy and to logic. This is obvious in several paragraphs of his third *Treatise on divine images*, for example, when he introduces his analysis of images:

But since this discourse is about the image [or icon] and veneration, let us examine thoroughly this matter in more detail and ask:
Firstly, what is an image?

²³ For a recent reappraisal of John's theology of images, see A. Chrysostomides, “John of Damascus's Theology of Icons in the Context of Eighth-Century Palestinian Iconoclasm”, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 75 (2021), pp. 263-96 and “Creating a Theology of Icons in Umayyad Palestine: John of Damascus' Three Treatises on the Divine Images”, *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* (2020), pp. 1-17.

Secondly, what is the purpose of the image?

Thirdly, what different kinds of image are there?

Fourthly, what can be depicted in an image and what cannot be depicted?

Fifthly, who first made images? (*Third Treatise*, § 14).²⁴

This way of defining the subject and dividing the questions is typical of the literature of Alexandrian origin. It is similar to the *Kephalaia* (“principal points”) that any commentator had to discuss before commenting on a work and even more to the *Prolegomena* to logic or to philosophy by Elias, David or Olympiodorus. John’s list of questions originated (certainly through several intermediaries) in the four questions Aristotle listed at the beginning of the second book of the *Posterior Analytics* (II 1, 89 b 23-25) as the “questions that are under enquiry” (τὰ ζητούμενα) in all scientific investigation. The existence (the Aristotelian question εἰ ἔστι) of icons is obviously assumed here, but it is also discussed in the form of Damascene’s fifth interrogation. The question of what the thing is (Aristotle’s τί ἐστίν question) and the question of why (Aristotle’s τὸ διότι) are clearly present, in John’s first and second questions respectively. It is tempting to see the question of the fact (Aristotle’s question τὸ ὅτι, is it a fact that a thing has this property?) in John’s fourth question.

Moreover, John of Damascus was a scholar of what we can call the “age of definitions” – the time frame of the sixth to the eighth century during which the belief was strong that a correct definition solved many difficulties and avoided errors, or to phrase it more theologically, that a correct definition was the best way to avoid heresy and to offer a right explanation of a dogmatic question. This stems clearly from the importance of the lists of definitions in a simple form (like the examples edited by C. Furrer-Pillioid)²⁵ or in a more elaborated form attested for example in the handbooks of logic edited by Mossman Roueché²⁶ or in some of the short treatises written by or attributed to Maximus the Confessor. Solving a problem begins with a correct definition of terms. This is the spirit of John of Damascus’s *Source of Knowledge*, where the correct definition of terms allows one to refute the heresies that are usually based on a wrong definition of key terms, and then to propose an orthodox exposition of the dogma. For the question of the image John proceeds

²⁴ *Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos*, Vol. III: *Contra imaginum calumniatores orationes tres*, ed. B. Kotter, *Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos*, De Gruyter, Berlin-New York 1975, p. 125 (trans. A. Louth in John of Damascus, *Three treatises on the divine images*, St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, Crestwood, NY, 2003, p. 95): Ἄλλ’ ἐπειδὴ περὶ εἰκόνας ὁ λόγος ἐστὶ καὶ προσκυνήσεως, φέρε πλατύτερον περὶ τούτων τὸν λόγον διευκρινίσωμεν καὶ εἴπωμεν·

πρῶτον, τί ἐστὶν εἰκὼν;

δεύτερον, τίνος χάριν γέγονεν εἰκὼν;

τρίτον, πόσαι διαφοραὶ εἰκόνων;

τέταρτον, τί τὸ εἰκονιζόμενον καὶ τί τὸ μὴ εἰκονιζόμενον;

πέμπτον, τίς πρῶτος ἐποίησεν εἰκόνας;

²⁵ C. Furrer-Pillioid, *Horoi kai hypographai. Collections alphabétiques de définitions profanes et sacrées*. Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Città del Vaticano 2000 (Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana: Studi e testi 395).

²⁶ M. Roueché, “A Middle Byzantine Handbook of Logic Terminology”, *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik* 29 (1980), pp. 71-98. “Byzantine Philosophical Texts of the Seventh Century”, *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik* 23 (1974), pp. 61-76, at 72.2-4. See also B. Roosen – P. Van Deun, “Les collections de définitions philosophico-théologiques appartenant à la tradition de Maxime le Confesseur: le recueil centré sur ὁμώνυμον, συνώνυμον, παρώνυμον, ἑτερόνυμον”, in M. Cacouros et al. (eds.), *Philosophie et sciences à Byzance de 1204 à 1453. Les textes, les doctrines et leur transmission*, Peeters, Leuven 2006, pp. 53-76.

in this way by offering a first definition of the image followed by a list of other possible meanings of “image/*eikōn*”:

Firstly, what is an image? An image is a likeness and pattern and impression of something, showing in itself what is depicted; however, the image is certainly not like the archetype, that is, what is depicted, in every respect—for the image is one thing and what it depicts is another and certainly a difference is seen between them, since they are not identical. For example, the image of a human being may give expression to the shape of the body, but it does not have the powers of the soul; for it does not live, nor does it think, or give utterance, or feel, or move its members. And a son, although the natural image of a father, has something different from him, for he is son and not father.²⁷

Proposing a good definition of a term belongs to the domain of logic, especially if the definition is properly constructed from genus and specific differences. John, in his chapter on definition, the eighth of the *Dialectica*, mentions this Aristotelian definition, but to it, he adds the definition by matter and form (with the example of a statue, in which case, says John, matter corresponds to genus, and form to specific difference), as well as by subject and purpose (as for example when one defines medicine by its subject, the human body, and by its purpose, the search for health). However, the definition is not an argument or a logical reasoning.

The other interesting testimony is offered by the Acts of the Second Council of Nicaea of 787. There, Patriarch Tarasius undertakes a refutation of the theses on the image developed at the iconoclastic Council of Hieria in 754. The sixth session of the Acts gives us the text of the refutation composed by Tarasius and his assistants²⁸ of the Horos of the council of Hieria. As it is a refutation, we might expect a massive use of logic; but this is not the case. The refutation offered by Tarasius is based on the rhetorical tradition, it is an *ἀνασκευή*. The *ἀνασκευή* has to be clearly distinguished from the more Aristotelian *ἀνατροπή* (later on, Nicephorus entitled his refutation of Hieria: *ἐλεγχος καὶ ἀνατροπή*). Tarasius is very faithful to Aphthonius’s precepts for this kind of exercise. According to Aphthonius, in his *progymnasmata* (i.e. his exercises to develop rhetorical skills), refutation (*ἀνασκευή*) has the following characteristics:

Refutation (*ἀνασκευή*) is an overturning of some matter at hand. One should refute what is neither very clear nor what is altogether impossible, but what holds a middle ground. Those engaged in refutation should first state the false claim of those who advance it, then add an exposition of the subject and use these headings: first, that it is unclear and incredible,

²⁷ *Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos*. Vol. III: *Contra imaginum calumniatores orationes tres* (above, n. 24), p. 125 Kotter:

Πρῶτον, τί ἐστὶν εἰκῶν;

Εἰκῶν μὲν οὖν ἐστὶν ὁμοίωμα καὶ παράδειγμα καὶ ἐκτύπωμά τινος ἐν ἑαυτῷ δεικνύον τὸ εἰκονιζόμενον,

πάντως δὲ οὐ κατὰ πάντα ἔοικεν ἢ εἰκῶν τῷ πρωτοτύπῳ τουτέστι τῷ εἰκονιζομένῳ—ἄλλο γὰρ ἐστὶν ἢ εἰκῶν καὶ ἄλλο τὸ εἰκονιζόμενον—καὶ πάντως ὁρᾶται ἐν αὐτοῖς διαφορά, ἐπεὶ οὐκ ἄλλο τοῦτο καὶ ἄλλο ἐκεῖνο. Οἷόν τι λέγω· Ἡ εἰκῶν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, εἰ καὶ τὸν χαρακτῆρα ἐκτυποῖ τοῦ σώματος, ἀλλὰ τὰς ψυχικὰς δυνάμεις οὐκ ἔχει· οὔτε γὰρ ζῆ οὔτε λογίζεται οὔτε φθέγγεται οὔτε αἰσθάνεται οὔτε μέλος κινεῖ. Καὶ ὁ υἱὸς εἰκῶν φυσικῆ ὄν τοῦ πατρὸς ἔχει τι παρηλλαγμένον πρὸς αὐτόν· υἱὸς γὰρ ἐστὶ καὶ οὐ πατήρ. Trans. Louth (above, n. 26), p. 95.

²⁸ On this session, see the remark by R. Price: “Historians have generally presumed that its unnamed author was Tarasios himself. It makes little difference whether Tarasios himself was the author, or a team in the patriarchate acting under his instructions”, in R. Price (transl.), *The Acts of the Second Council of Nicaea (787)*, Liverpool U.P., Liverpool 2017, p. 426.

in addition that it is impossible and illogical and inappropriate, and finally adding that it is inexpedient. This *progymnasma* includes in itself all the power of the art (of rhetoric).²⁹

This is exactly what Tarasius does. Tarasius does not use logic, but quotes from the tradition and uses rhetoric. And more broadly logical terminology is absent from the Acts, even when it could be used. For example, when Tarasius states the commonality of name and clearly rejects an identity of essence between the icon and the model, it would have been the right place to introduce the Aristotelian terminology of homonyms.

Therefore, since Christ is depicted according to his human nature, it is obvious, as the truth has proved, that Christians confess that the icon which is seen has in common with the archetype only the name, and not the essence (κατὰ τὸ ὄνομα μόνον ὁμολογοῦσιν οἱ Χριστιανοὶ κοινωνεῖν τὴν ὁρωμένην εἰκόνα τῷ ἀρχετύπῳ καὶ οὐ κατὰ τὴν οὐσίαν). However, these senseless men say that there is no difference between an icon and the prototype and they decide for the identity of essence in things which are different in essence (αὐτοὶ δὲ κεπρωθέντες ἀδιάφορον λέγουσιν εἶναι εἰκόνα καὶ πρωτότυπον καὶ ἐν ἑτεροουσίοις τὸ ταῦτὸν τῆς οὐσίας κρίνουσι) (p. 658.16-20 Lamberz).

It is impossible to say whether Tarasius and his collaborators did not have the concept in mind or whether they deliberately chose not to use it. What is clear is that Aristotelian logical terminology was not used here.

It is worth noting that John of Sardis, an iconodule and correspondent of Theodore the Studite who writes after the 815 turning point at a period which strongly valorises logic, adds to Aphthonius's definition of *ἀνασκευή* the following remark: "Refutation is an overturning of some proposed subject. He ought to have added 'by syllogisms' to the definition so that it becomes 'an overturning by syllogisms of some proposed subject,' since there is an overturning also by witnesses". It is interesting to observe that John feels the need to logicize Aphthonius's definition by introducing the explicit mention of syllogistic reasoning.³⁰

3. *The arrival of the Sabaites*

An event, the importance of which for the Byzantine intellectual history still has to be properly assessed, shall be mentioned, as it probably played a role in the Constantinopolitan debate. This event is the arrival in Constantinople of monks from the monastery of Mar Saba, fleeing the anarchy that followed the death of Hārūn al-Rašīd (†809) in 813.³¹ There is good reason to believe that they may have played a role in the evolution of the iconophile

²⁹ Ed. H. Rabe, *Aphthonii progymnasmata*, Teubner, Leipzig 1926 (Rhetores Graeci 10): Ἀνασκευή ἐστὶν ἀνατροπὴ προκειμένου τινὸς πράγματος. Ἀνασκευαστέον δὲ τὰ μῆτε λίαν σαφῆ μῆτε ἀδύνατα παντελῶς, ἀλλ' ὅσα μέσῃν ἔχει τὴν τάξιν. Δεῖ δὲ ἀνασκευάζοντας πρῶτον μὲν εἰπεῖν τὴν τῶν φησάντων διαβολήν, εἶτα ἐπιθεῖναι τὴν τοῦ πράγματος ἔκθεσιν, καὶ κεφαλαίους χρήσασθαι τοῖσδε· πρῶτον μὲν ἀσαφεῖ καὶ ἀπιθάνῳ, πρὸς τοῦτοις ἀδυνάτῳ καὶ ἀνακολούθῳ καὶ ἀπρεπεῖ, καὶ τελευταῖον ἐπάγειν ἀσύμφορον. Trans. G. Kennedy, *Progymnasmata. Greek Textbooks of Prose Composition and Rhetoric*, Society of Biblical Literature, Atlanta 2003, p. 101.

³⁰ John of Sardis' interest in logic has been well analysed by B. MacDougall, "John of Sardis' Commentary on Aphthonius' *Progymnasmata*: Logic in Ninth-Century Byzantium", in *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 57 (2017), pp. 721-44.

³¹ For a discussion of the arrival date in Constantinople, see S. Vaillhé, "Saint Michel le syncelle et les deux frères Grapti, saint Théodore et saint Théophane", *Revue de l'Orient Chrétien* 9 (1901), pp. 313-32 and 610-42.

response by bringing with them their own culture of theological disputation and specific textual sources.

Our main source for these events is the *Chronicle* of Theophanes Confessor. According to the narration given by Theophanes, the monastery of Mar Saba was plundered soon after the death of the caliph.³²

[*anno mundi* 6301, *anno domini* 808/9]

In this year Aaron, the leader of the Arabs, died in inner Persia, called Chorasán, in the month of March, indiction 2. His son Mouamed, who was incompetent in all respects, succeeded to power, but his brother Abdelas as well as his father's army revolted against him in that same country of Chorasán and caused an internecine war among their nation. For this reason, the inhabitants of Syria, Egypt, and Libya were divided into different principalities and destroyed the common weal as well as one another, confounded as they were by slaughter, rapine, and various misdeeds among themselves and against their Christian subjects. For this reason, also the churches in the holy city of Christ our God were made desolate as well as the monasteries of the two great lavras, namely that of Sts Chariton and Kyriakos and that of St Sabas, and the other koinobia, namely those of St Euthymios and St Theodosios. The slaughter resulting from this anarchy, directed at each other and against us, lasted five years.³³

One of the results of this phase of insecurity and uncertainty was the flight of part of the Christian population from the areas concerned (Egypt, Syria, Palestine). Among the religious people who sought refuge in the capital were Sabaite monks.

[*anno mundi* 6305, *anno domini* 812/13]

In the same year many of the Christians of Palestine, monks and laymen, and from all of Syria arrived in Cyprus, fleeing the excessive misdeeds of the Arabs. For, as a result of the general anarchy that prevailed in Syria, Egypt, Africa, and their entire dominion, murders, rapes, adulteries, and all manner of licentious acts that are abhorred by God were committed in villages and towns by that accursed nation. In the holy city of Christ our God the venerable places of the holy Resurrection, of Golgotha, and the rest were profaned. Likewise, the famous lavras in the desert, that of St Chariton and that of St Sabas, and the other monasteries and churches were made desolate. Some Christians were killed

³² It has been argued that this account of the damage inflicted on the Palestinian monasteries was exaggerated: S.H. Griffith, "Greek into Arabic: life and letters in the monasteries of Palestine in the 9th century; the example of the *Summa theologiae Arabica*", *Byzantion* 56 (1986), pp. 117-38.

³³ Theoph., *Chronographia*, p. 484 de Boor: Τούτω τῷ ἔτει Ἀαράων, ὁ τῶν Ἀράβων ἀρχηγός, τέθνηκεν εἰς τὴν ἐνδοτέραν Περσίδα, τὴν καλουμένην Χωρασάν, μηνὶ Μαρτίῳ, ἰνδικτικῶνος β'. καὶ διεδέξατο τὴν ἀρχὴν Μουάμεδ, ὁ υἱὸς αὐτοῦ, ἀφυῆς κατὰ πάντα. πρὸς ὃν Ἀβδελᾶς, ὁ ἀδελφὸς αὐτοῦ, στασιάζσας ἐκ τῆς αὐτῆς χώρας τοῦ Χωρασάν ἅμα ταῖς πατρικαῖς δυνάμεσιν ἐμφυλίῳ πολέμῳ τῷ κατ' αὐτοὺς ἔθνευ γέγονεν αἴτιος. ἀντεῦθεν οἱ κατὰ τὴν Συρίαν καὶ Αἴγυπτον καὶ Λιβύην εἰς διαφόρους κατατμηθέντες ἀρχὰς τὰ τε δημόσια πράγματα καὶ ἀλλήλους κατέστρεψαν, σφαγαῖς καὶ ἀρπαγαῖς καὶ παντοίαις ἀτοπίαις πρὸς τε ἑαυτοὺς καὶ τοὺς ὑπ' αὐτοὺς Χριστιανοὺς συγκεχυμένοι. ἔνθεν δὴ καὶ αἱ κατὰ τὴν ἁγίαν Χριστοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμῶν πόλιν ἐκκλησίαι ἠρήμωνται, τὰ τε μοναστήρια τῶν δύο μεγάλων λαυρῶν, τοῦ ἐν ἁγίοις Χαρίτωνος καὶ Κυριακοῦ, καὶ τοῦ ἁγίου Σάβα, καὶ τὰ λοιπὰ κοινόβια τῶν ἁγίων Εὐθυμίου καὶ Θεοδοσίου. ἐπεκράτησε δὲ τῆς τοιαύτης ἀναρχίας ἡ κατ' ἀλλήλων καὶ ἡμῶν μαιφονία ἔτη ε'. Trans. C. Mango – R. Scott, *The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor: Byzantine and Near Eastern History, AD 284–813*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1997.

like martyrs, while others proceeded to Cyprus and thence to Byzantium and were given kindly hospitality by the pious emperor Michael and the most holy patriarch Nicephorus. The emperor made a gift of an important monastery to those who had come to the City, while to those who had remained in Cyprus, both monks and laymen, he sent a talent of gold and provided for them in every way.³⁴

Interestingly, a link to Nicephorus, then patriarch, is made explicit. This is obviously due to his position as patriarch, but the information is nevertheless worth noting.

My point is not to say that the Sabaites brought the new methodology and the relational explanation of images as a ready-to-go solution. We have no reason to believe this as the contribution to the discussion of images closest to the Sabaites' is that of John of Damascus who does not make any use of logic.³⁵ The treatise on image- veneration by Theodore Abū Qurra is also completely different. If the Sabaites played a role, it may only be in bringing with them their different competences and manuscripts. First, the Sabaites had a good Aristotelian (logical) culture; it was of a different nature than the one in Constantinople, being based more on compendia, handbooks and Alexandrian commentaries than on the Aristotelian text itself. Then, the Sabaites may have brought with them texts unknown in Constantinople which offered examples of logic applied to theological problems like the Christological florilegium called *Doctrina Patrum de Incarnatione Verbi*³⁶ or maybe a copy of some work of Theodore Abū Qurra (which circulated in Constantinople at the latest at the end of the ninth century as attested by the copy owned by Arethas, Moscow Greek MS 231);³⁷ the Sabaites also brought their experience in religious controversies and their argumentation culture coming from

³⁴ Theoph., *Chronographia*, pp. 499 de Boor: τῷ δ' αὐτῷ ἔτει πολλοὶ τῶν κατὰ Παλαιστίνην Χριστιανῶν μοναχοὶ καὶ λαϊκοὶ καὶ ἐκ πάσης Συρίας τὴν Κύπρον κατέλαβον φεύγοντες τὴν ἄμετρον κάκωσιν τῶν Ἀράβων. ἀναρχίας γὰρ καθολικῆς κατασχούσης Συρίαν καὶ Αἴγυπτον καὶ Ἀφρικὴν καὶ πᾶσαν τὴν ὑπ' αὐτοὺς ἀρχήν, φόνοι τε καὶ ἀρπαγαὶ καὶ μοιχεῖαι, ἀσέλγειαί τε καὶ πᾶσαι πράξεις θεοστυγεῖς ἐν κόμαις καὶ πόλεσι ὑπὸ τοῦ θεολέστου ἔθνους αὐτῶν ἐπράττοντο, οἱ τε κατὰ τὴν ἁγίαν Χριστοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμῶν πόλιν σεβάσμιοι τόποι τῆς ἁγίας ἀναστάσεως, τοῦ κρανίου καὶ τῶν λοιπῶν ἐβεβηλώθησαν. ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ αἱ κατὰ τὴν ἔρημον διαβόητοι λαῦραι τοῦ ἁγίου Χαρίτωνος καὶ τοῦ ἁγίου Σάββα, καὶ τὰ λοιπὰ μοναστήρια καὶ αἱ ἐκκλησίαι ἠρημώθησαν. καὶ οἱ μὲν ἀνηρέθησαν μαρτυρικῶς, οἱ δὲ τὴν Κύπρον κατέλαβον καὶ ἐκ ταύτης τὸ Βυζάντιον, οὗς Μιχαήλ, ὁ εὐσεβῆς βασιλεὺς, καὶ Νικηφόρος, ὁ ἁγιώτατος πατριάρχης, φιλοφρόνως ἐξένισαν. τοῖς μὲν γὰρ ἐλθοῦσιν ἐν τῇ πόλει μοναστήριον ἐπίσημον ἐδωρήσατο, τοῖς δὲ κατὰ τὴν Κύπρον ἐναπομείνασι μοναχοῖς τε καὶ λαϊκοῖς τάλαντον χρυσοῦ ἀπέστειλεν, καὶ παντοίως τούτους ἐθεράπευσεν. Trans. Mango–Scott (above, n. 32), p. 683.

³⁵ On the iconophily of the Sabaites, Cf. M.-F. Auzépy, “Les Sabaites et l’iconoclasme”, in J. Patrich (ed.), *The Sabaite Heritage in the Orthodox Church from the Fifth Century to the Present*, Peeters, Leuven 2001 (Orientalia Lovaniensia analecta 98), pp. 305-14. Cf. also, Ead. “De la Palestine à Constantinople (VIII^e-IX^e siècles): Étienne le Sabaïte et Jean Damascène”, *Travaux et Mémoires* 12 (1994), pp. 183-218.

³⁶ F. Diekamp, *Doctrina Patrum de incarnatione Verbi. Ein griechisches Florilegium aus der Wende des 7. und 8. Jahrhunderts*, Aschendorffsche Verlagsbuchhandlung, Münster 1907. This text is important in that it incorporates, without mentioning the author by name, numerous passages by Theodore of Raithu. Theodore, abbot of Raithu in the Sinai-peninsula, has written, probably in the sixth century, one of the most cleverly done and deeply informed handbooks of logic intended for Christian theologians. It constitutes the second part of his apologetic handbook known as the *Praeparatio* (Προπαρασκευή) or *Liber De Incarnatione*. Theodore’s *Praeparatio* offers an analysis of Christological formulas of the Council of Chalcedon as well as a vade mecum of philosophical terminology, including definitions of the terms *ousia*, *hypostasis* and person.

³⁷ For a thorough description of this manuscript, see L.G. Westerink, “Marginalia by Arethas in Moscow Greek MS 231”, *Byzantion* 42 (1972), pp. 196-244 which includes the edition of the glosses by Arethas to the text of Theodore Abū Qurra.

numerous Christological controversies. These scholars were used to debate, with other Christian denominations like the Jacobites, but also with Jews. They had a deep culture of controversy and the tools for leading it. Finally, the Sabaites were aware of the nascent *kalām* method among Arabic-speaking thinkers, being like Michael perfectly bilingual in Greek and Arabic. It is difficult to precisely assess the Sabaite contribution, but we have good reasons to believe that the move to Constantinople of several learned monks from Palestine, maybe with manuscripts, constituted a small-sized *translatio studiorum*, bringing to the capital the Palestinian theological and philosophical culture. Their exact role in the revival of Aristotelianism in ninth-century Constantinople is not measurable; what we can say is that there is interesting and concordant information regarding their proper knowledge of Aristotelian philosophy.

I leave aside the debated question of the link of John of Damascus to Mar Saba, as this link seems now to be insignificant.³⁸ If we focus on the group of Sabaites who moved to Constantinople in various waves at the beginning of the ninth century, we find several traces of Aristotelianism; this is true for Michael Synkellos and for his two students Theodoros (Sabaites) and Theophanos (Sabaites), both later known as the “Graptoi”, the “written upon”, due to some verses in favour of iconoclasm that the Emperor Theophilos ordered to be tattooed on their face in 836.

For Michael the Synkellos, we have two important elements of information regarding his philosophical culture. The first one is that, being bilingual in Greek and Arabic, he translated at least one writing of Theodore Abū Qurra into Greek. Now Theodore was an excellent Aristotelian and the author of a text dealing precisely with the use of logic in theology (his second treatise is entitled: “*Distinction and Clarification of the Terms in which Philosophers Deal, and Refutation of the Mortal Heresy of the Acephalic Severians, that is, the Jacobites*”).³⁹ Michael’s proximity to Theodore and the fact that he partly translated his work makes the hypothesis of Michael’s familiarity with Theodore’s Aristotelianism very credible.

In the *Life of Michael the Synkellos*, the biographer states that Michael taught philosophy to both brothers Theodoros and Theophanes: “He [= Michael] taught them [Theodore and Theophanes] grammar, philosophy and a number of works of poetry, so that in a short time the all-holy brothers were proclaimed supremely wise and their fame spread to the ends of that land, even to the one who administered the apostolic throne well and in an orthodox manner”.⁴⁰ “Philosophy” in such a context means probably “logic” as it would be expected

³⁸ See V. Conticello, “Jean Damascène,” in R. Goulet (ed.), *Dictionnaire des philosophes antiques*, CNRS-Éditions, Paris 2000, T. 3, pp. 1001–27. See also the useful volume of collected studies by V. Kontouma, *John of Damascus: New Studies on His Life and Works*, Routledge, Farnham 2015.

³⁹ PG 97, 1469–1492. This treatise begins with a clear statement of a theologian’s need to know logic: “Nothing is more necessary, for whomever likes true doctrines and wants to defend them, than a distinction and clarification of the terms with which the philosophers first and foremost deal. Indeed, by lack of precise knowledge of these terms, many people who were thought to be wise missed the target of truth and deviated towards absurd and blasphematory positions” (1470c).

⁴⁰ *The Life of Michael the Synkellos: Text, Translation and Commentary*, ed. M.C. Cunningham, Belfast Byzantine Enterprises, Belfast 1991 (Belfast Byzantine Texts and Translations 1), p. 52.25, trans. p. 53: Ἀποκείρας δὲ τούτους κατὰ τὴν πρόσταξιν τοῦ προσετώτου καὶ δεδωκῶς αὐτοῖς τὸ ἀγγελικὸν τοῦ μονήρους βίου σχῆμα ἦν σὺν αὐτοῖς ἐκτελῶν τὴν τοῦ Θεοῦ δοξολογίαν, προβιβάζων αὐτοὺς ἐν τῇ τῆς σωτηρίας ὁδῷ, ὡς καλὸς παιδοτρίβης, διδάξας αὐτοὺς τὴν τε γραμματικὴν καὶ φιλοσοφίαν καὶ τῶν ποιητικῶν οὐκ ὀλίγα σκέμματα, ὥστε ἐν ὀλίγῳ χρόνῳ πανσόφους ἀναδειχθῆναι τοὺς πανιέρους ἀταδέλους καὶ διαδραμεῖν τὴν φήμην αὐτῶν μέχρι τῶν περάτων τῆς γῆς ἐκείνης, καὶ ἕως αὐτὸν τὸν ἀποστολικὸν θρόνον καλῶς καὶ ὀρθοδόξως διέποντα.

in such a context describing *paideia*.

The last element worth mentioning is the fact that Theophanes Graptos is listed as an author of a commentary on the *Analytiks* of Aristotle in a 16th century catalogue of manuscripts preserved at Constantinople: “ν’ τοῦ αὐτοῦ θεοφάνου μοναχοῦ τοῦ γραπτοῦ ἐρμηνεία εἰς τὰ ἀναλυτικὰ τοῦ ἀριστοτέλους”.⁴¹

It seems quite possible to me that the Sabaites, who were received as distinguished guests in Constantinople, contributed to turning the discussion about images into a new direction. Accustomed to religious polemics and witnessing the development of rational theology in Arabic, they were able to contribute to the debate in an innovative way.

Having established a corrected chronology and the circumstances of the development of the method proposed by Theodore and Nicephorus, we can come to its description. The application of logic to the question of images is definitely new as we have seen, but the application of logic to theological problems is not a ninth-century innovation.⁴² In their own way Gregory of Nyssa, John Philoponus, Theodore of Raithu, Leontius of Byzantium, Maximus the Confessor, or John of Damascus, among others, applied logic as well. Positions in Trinitarian or Christological disputes had been defended using logic. Nevertheless, the method proposed by the two Byzantine iconophile thinkers was unprecedented. Here is why.

4. *The new method*

The method proposed by Nicephorus and Theodore in reaction to the synod of 815 and the revival of iconoclasm as the official religious policy of the Byzantine Empire integrates Aristotelian logic in several ways. Logic is at the heart of the solution. The solution is articulated on three components: the first component is the terminology used for the formulation of the solution: logical concepts are used to formulate and state the iconophile position itself. The theory of the image itself is conceived with the help of various Aristotelian logical concepts including the theory of relatives (*ta pros ti*) and homonymy; the second component is the use of syllogisms and the constitution of a list of arguments: logical reasonings are used. They are often called *sylogismoi*. They are very rarely Aristotelian syllogisms in the strict sense, but rather longer deductive reasonings. The emphasis on reasoning and syllogism (and not only on definitions of terms) and the praxis of offering not one or two arguments, but

⁴¹ R. Foerster, *De antiquitatibus et libris manuscriptis Constantinopolitanis commentatio*, Adler, Rostock 1877, p. 28; cf. C. Mango, “Greek Culture in Palestine after the Arab Conquest” (above, n. 1).

⁴² See J. De Ghellinck, “Quelques appréciations de la dialectique et d’Aristote durant les conflits trinitaires du IV^e s.”, *Revue d’histoire ecclésiastique* 26 (1930), pp. 5-42; M. Frede, “Les Catégories d’Aristote et les Pères de l’Église grecs”, in O. Bruun – L. Corti (eds.), *Les Catégories et leur histoire*, Vrin, Paris, 2005, pp. 135-73; M. Edwards, *Aristotle and Early Christian Thought*, Routledge, London 2019. J. Zachhuber, *The Rise of Christian Theology and the End of Ancient Metaphysics. Patristic Philosophy from the Cappadocian Fathers to John of Damascus*. Oxford U.P., Oxford 2020; C. Erismann, “*Non Est Natura Sine Persona*: The Issue of Uninstantiated Universals from Late Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages”, in M. Cameron – J. Marenbon (eds.), *Methods and Methodologies: Aristotelian Logic East and West, 500–1500*, Brill, Leiden 2011 (Investigating Medieval Philosophy 2), pp. 75-92; Id. “Maximus the Confessor on the Logical Dimension of the Structure of Reality,” in P. Annala – T. Lankila – A. Lévy (eds.), *The Architecture of the Cosmos in the Thought of Maximus the Confessor*, Luther-Agricola-Society, Helsinki 2015, pp. 51-69; Id. “The Trinity, Universals, and Particular Substances: Philoponus and Roscelin”, *Traditio* 53 (2008), pp. 277-305; U. Criscuolo, “Aristotele a Bisanzio”, in Y. Lehmann (ed.), *Aristoteles Romanus. La réception de la science aristotélicienne dans l’Empire gréco-romain*, Brepols, Turnhout 2013, pp. 389-421.

a long enumeration of arguments are innovations. These arguments are used positively and negatively. Positively, that is, to prove one's own theory, to demonstrate it. And negatively to criticise the opponent's position; this generally consists of reducing the opponent's position to absurdity. One shows that one's opponent's position leads either to a logical impossibility or to an absurd conclusion. The third component is the valorisation of the knowledge of logic and its use as an argument from authority: one criticises one's opponent for being incompetent in logic. This ignorance of logic is supposed to discredit him.

We will first examine these three points in the context of the proposed solution to the question of the legitimacy of the cult of images, before proposing a more general reconstruction of the principles governing this method.

4.1. *The concepts*

This is the best-known part of the question, on which several articles have been written.⁴³ Both Theodore and Nicephorus formulate their conception of images thanks to logical concepts taken from Aristotle's *Organon*, first and foremost the *Categories*. The two key concepts are the concept of relatives (πρός τι) and of homonyms (ὁμώνυμα). In both cases the concepts are used in their strict Aristotelian definition and with all the characteristics Aristotle attributes to these two kinds of entities. The result is an understanding of the icon as being one of the two relatives of the relation existing between the model (Christ, Virgin Mary or a Saint) and the image conceived here as a copy. Christ can be said to be a model only when an image exists and the image is a copy only when Christ as model exists. This relation allows Theodore and Nicephorus to state a distinction between a true image and an idol, as only the first one has a real co-relative.⁴⁴ Then the true image and the model share the same name (like "Christ" or "Paul") but not the same essence. As Paul is a rational living being and the image a piece of wood with some colours, they are therefore perfect homonyms.

To make this point clear, it is sufficient to quote three important passages which clearly show that the relation between the model and the image is analysed through the lenses of the Aristotelian category of relatives.

The image is related to the pattern and is the effect of a cause. Therefore, necessarily it belongs to, and is called, a relative (τῶν πρὸς τι). Relatives are said to be such as they are from their being of some other thing, and through their relation (σχέσει) they are mutual correlatives. A father for instance, is called the son's father... thus a pattern is called the pattern of an image and an image the image of a pattern, and nobody will call the image of an individual an unrelated image; for the one and the other are introduced and considered together.⁴⁵

⁴³ See the references above, n. 5, p. 86.

⁴⁴ The idol is not a likeness of a real person, but the representation of a fiction, an invented thing.

⁴⁵ Nicephorus, *Antirrheticus* 1.30, PG 100, 277C-D: [...] ἡ εἰκὼν σχέσειν ἔχει πρὸς τὸ ἀρχέτυπον, καὶ αἰτίου ἐστὶν αἰτιατόν· ἀνάγκη οὖν διὰ τοῦτο καὶ τῶν πρὸς τι εἶναι τε ταύτην καὶ λέγεσθαι. Τὰ δὲ πρὸς τι, αὐτὰ ἅπερ ἐστὶν, ἑτέρον εἶναι λέγεται, καὶ ἀντιστρέφει τῇ σχέσει πρὸς ἄλληλα· ὡσπερ ὁ πατήρ υἱοῦ πατὴρ, καὶ ἔμπαλιν ὁ υἱὸς πατρός λέγεται υἱός, ὡσαύτως καὶ φίλος φίλου, καὶ δεξιὸς ἀριστεροῦ, καὶ ἔμπαλιν ἀριστερὸς δεξιοῦ· ὁμοίως καὶ δεσπότης δούλου δεσπότης, καὶ ἔμπαλιν, καὶ εἶ τι τούτοις προσόμοιον. Οὕτως οὖν καὶ ἀρχέτυπον, εἰκόνας ἀρχέτυπον· καὶ εἰκὼν ἀρχετύπου εἰκὼν· καὶ οὐκ ἔν τις ἀσχετον εἰκόνα τοῦ τινος εἰκόνα φαίη. Ἄμα γὰρ συνεισάγεται καὶ συνεπιθεωρεῖται

Nicephorus not only verbally quotes Aristotle's definitions of *pros ti*, but he also underlines the impossibility to have a relative alone as well as the necessary simultaneity in being for the two relatives (cf. *Cat.* 14 b 27-30):⁴⁶ if there is a son, there is necessarily a father. And both individuals receive the relational property simultaneously: the first individual becomes a father when the second becomes a son, i.e. is born. Identifying one entity as a relative according to Aristotle also implies knowing the second entity in the couple of *pros ti*.⁴⁷ It is only possible to call someone a master when one knows at least one disciple of him. This implication of knowledge is rendered by Nicephorus with the expression that both are "considered together".

In a second passage, the same Nicephorus introduced the concept of homonymy to render the fact that the image and the model share the same name (*μία προσηγορία*) but not the same essence (*παρὰ τὸ τῆς οὐσίας διάφορον*):

Moreover, the resemblance confers homonymy on the icon and its archetype. The designation (*προσηγορία*) is one and the same for both the icon and the archetype. The icon of the king is called "the king", and might well say: "the king and I are one", despite the evident fact that they are different in essence. We have said these things in order to demonstrate the way in which the image, which is considered together with the archetype, is related to it'.⁴⁸

Theodore the Studite uses exactly the same terminology with an identical level of conceptual precision. The relatives are characterized by their ontological simultaneity: they can only exist together and the suppression of one implies the destruction of the second⁴⁹. He then quotes the Aristotelian definition of homonyms literally (cf. *Cat.* 1 a 1-6).

For relation, as they say, belongs to the "*pros ti*". For they both [i.e. the model and the image

θατέρω τὸ ἕτερον· κἄν που οἴχοιτο τὸ ἀρχέτυπον, ἀλλ' ἢ γε σχέσις οὐ συναπολήγει.

⁴⁶ Arist., *Cat.*, 14 b 27-30: "But those things are called simultaneous by nature (*φύσει δὲ ἅμα*) which reciprocate as to implication of existence, provided that neither is in any way the cause of the other's existence, e.g. the double and the half. These reciprocate, since if there is a double there is a half and if there is a half there is a double, but neither is the cause of the other's existence". Trans. Ackrill, p. 40 (cf. Aristotle, *Categories*, Translated by J.L. Ackrill, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1963).

⁴⁷ Arist., *Cat.*, 8 a 37 - 8 b 10: "It is clear from this that if someone knows any relative definitely he will also know definitely that in relation to which it is spoken of. This is obvious on the face of it. For if someone knows of a certain 'this' that it is a relative, and being for relatives is the same as being somehow related to something, he knows that also to which this is somehow related. For if he does not in the least know that to which this is somehow related, neither will he know whether it is somehow related to something. The same point is clear also in particular cases. For example, if someone knows definitely of a certain 'this' that it is double he also, by the same token, knows definitely what it is double of; for if he does not know it to be double anything definite neither does he know whether it is double at all. Similarly, if he knows of a certain 'this' that it is more beautiful, he must also, because of this, know definitely what it is more beautiful than". Trans. Ackrill (above, n. 46), p. 23.

⁴⁸ Nicephorus, *Antirrheticus* 1.30, PG 100, 280B: 'Ἐκ περιουσίας δὲ καὶ τὴν ὁμωνυμίαν χαρίζεται ἡ ὁμοίωσις· μία γὰρ ἐπ' ἀμοιβῶν ἡ προσηγορία· βασιλεὺς γὰρ καὶ ἡ βασιλέως εἰκὼν λέγεται· εἶποι δ' ἄν, 'Ἐγὼ καὶ ὁ βασιλεὺς ἐν ἔσμεν, δῆλον δὲ ὅτι παρὰ τὸ τῆς οὐσίας διάφορον. Ταῦτα δὲ ἡμῖν εἴρηται, ὥστε παραδεῖξαι τὸν τῆς εἰκότος τρόπον· καθ' ὃν πρὸς τὸ ἀρχέτυπον θεωρουμένη, τὴν σχέσιν ἔχει.

⁴⁹ Cf. Arist., *Cat.*, 7 b 15-21: "For there is at the same time a double and a half, and when there is a half there is a double, and when there is a slave there is a master; and similarly with the others. Also, each carries the other to destruction; for if there is not a double there is not a half, and if there is not a half there is not a double". Trans. Ackrill (above, n. 46), p. 21.

as the terms of the relation] exist together with one another and convert with respect to one another, as archetype to image. For the one could not exist if the other were not present, as has been philosophized also in the case of things that exist at the same time. There is added as well the word “homonyms”, and this word too is of the same meaning. For a name is a name of something that is named. Thus in this case too, the reasoning belongs to the “*pros ti*”, since according to the definition used in philosophy we are taught that homonyms are those things “which have only their name in common, while the statement of essence that corresponds with the name is different”, such as Christ himself and Christ when he has been depicted. (Theodore, *Letter 528*).⁵⁰

The logical terminology here has a key-function as it is implied in the formulation of the solution itself. It brings exactitude and clarity. The logical concepts are used in their precise Aristotelian sense with precise reference to the definition given by Aristotle, and even more interestingly, both Byzantines show an excellent knowledge and understanding of the very text of Aristotle’s *Categories*. They certainly worked with the treatise itself and not a compendium of logic. They also make good use of the properties of the entities described, insisting in particular on the ontological simultaneity of the relatives.

4.2. *The arguments*

Both Nicephorus and Theodore frequently use arguments and even like to pile them up. This is perhaps the most surprising aspect of the method. They build up arguments. Our modern mind is somewhat surprised here, for it seems to me that we prefer two or three well-chosen arguments to a dozen that are not all equally effective. A good example is provided by Nicephorus.⁵¹ He wanted to prove the superiority of the icon

⁵⁰ Theod., *Epist.* 528, pp. 789.51-790.59 ed. Fatouros: ἡ γὰρ σχέσις, ὡς φασι, τῶν πρὸς τί ἐστιν· ἅμα τε γὰρ ἐστὶ καὶ ἀντιστρέφει πρὸς ἄλληλα, οἷον ἀρχέτυπον πρὸς εἰκόνα. οὐ γὰρ ἂν εἶη θάτερον μὴ θατέρου παρόντος, καθὼ καὶ τῶν ἅμα πεφιλοσόφηται. πρόσκειται δέ, ἤγουν ὁμωνυμική, καὶ γε τῆς αὐτῆς ἐμφάσεως καὶ ἥδε ἡ λέξις· τὸ γὰρ ὄνομα ὀνομαζομένου ὄνομα. ὥστε κἀνταῦθα τῶν πρὸς τι ὁ λόγος, ἐπεὶ καὶ κατὰ φιλοσοφίας ἕρον ὁμώνυμά ἐστι διδασκόμεθα, ὧν ὄνομα μόνον κοινόν, ὁ δὲ κατὰ τοῦνομα λόγος τῆς οὐσίας ἕτερος, οἷον αὐτὸς Χριστὸς καὶ ὁ ἐγγεγραμμένος.

⁵¹ Such passages seem to confirm a piece of information given in the *Life of Nicephorus* by Ignatius the Deacon. According to the extensive information provided by his biographer, Nicephorus received a training in Aristotelian logic, starting from the usual definitions of philosophy transmitted in the prolegomena, to syllogistic, including the content of the *Categories* and the *On Interpretation*. Nicephorus also studied syllogistics: “[4. On syllogistics: he investigated] how many modes of syllogisms <there are>; <he studied> the kind and number of figures <of a syllogism> (τρόποι δὲ πόσοι τῶν συλλογισμῶν. ὅποια καὶ πόσα τὰ σχήματα); what sort is hypothetical, what sort is categorical, and in what way they differ” (ποῖος ὑποθετικός, ποῖος δὲ κατηγορητικός, καὶ τί διαφέρουσι). [5. On argumentation:] <he investigated > whether the <argument> *reductio ad impossibilem* acts as proof in every <case> (καὶ εἰ πάντας ἢ εἰς ἀδύνατον ἀπαγωγὴ βεβαυῖ); how and in how many ways <the figures of a syllogism> can be reduced; how one can come to a <syllogistic> conclusion and how many kinds <of syllogisms> there are (ὅπως δὲ καὶ ποσάκις ταῦτα κεράννυται, πῶς συμπεραίνεται καὶ ἀναλύεται). [6. On paralogisms:] <and> how a fallacious argument is formulated – what kind is sophistical and how it can be at once false and plausible (τίς παραλογισμοῦ σύνθεσις, τίς σοφιστικὸς καὶ πῶς ψευδῆς τε ἅμα καὶ πιθανός). [7. On enthymeme:] <he inquired into> what sort <of syllogism> has only one premise (καὶ οἷος ὁ μονολήματος). [8. On dialectical argument:] how the dialectical <syllogism> proves in so far as it is possible things which are <not necessarily but> probably true, and what an argument by induction is in the case of things that are probably true (ὁ λεκτικὸς δὲ ὅπως ἐνδεχόμενος συνάγει τὰ ἐνδοξα, καὶ τίς ἡ τούτων ἐπαγωγὴ). [9. On proof:] “<he considered>

of Christ over the representation of the cross in a lengthy section of his third *Antirrheticus* (§35, 428c-433c).⁵² He proposed ten arguments to prove this claim. Interestingly, one can observe that these ten arguments are also transmitted in manuscripts separately and independently from the rest of Nicephorus' text⁵³, probably because they have been taken as an example for teaching rational argumentation and logic or to be easily reused in an argumentation as ready-to-use material.

Here is an example of one of Nicephorus' ten syllogisms.

The name "Christ" is predicated homonymously of the image of Christ. It is called "Christ" as the image of the emperor is called "Emperor." But it is impossible to say this about the cross, as no one among the people who are of sound mind would call the cross "Christ" in any possible way. That which has come to participate in the name itself because it has already shared in the form of the body is more precious than that which participates in none of these. So, the image is more precious than the cross.⁵⁴

The reconstruction of the syllogism goes as follows:

What is homonymous with the model, i.e. what shares the name of the model, is more precious than what does not.

The icon of Christ is called "Christ," i.e. is homonymous with Christ.

The cross is never called "Christ," i.e. is never homonymous with Christ.

Therefore, the icon of Christ is more precious than the cross.

the demonstrative <sylllogism> and what sort of force it has to seek after truth from the weaker <arguments>" (ποῖαν ἀνάγκην ἔσχεν ὁ ἀποδεικτικὸς ἐκ τῶν χειρόνων θηρεῦσιν ἀλήθειαν); "<he examined> which sorts of these <premises> are problem<atic>, which are axiom<atic>, and which are so-to-speak like axioms, <and> what matter, mixtures, and combinations they admit of; <he studied> what the first principles of natural things are and how they are indemonstrable (τίνες τε πρῶται τῶν φυσικῶν ἀρχαὶ καὶ πῶς ἀναπόδεικτοι)" cf. Nicephori archiepiscopi *Constantinopolitani opuscula historica*, ed. C. de Boor, Teubner, Leipzig 1880, pp. 150-151. The quoted English translation is by E. Fisher, "Life of the Patriarch Nicephorus I of Constantinople", in A.-M. Talbot (ed.), *Byzantine Defenders of Images*, Dumbarton Oaks, Washington DC 1998 (Dumbarton Oaks Byzantine Saints' Lives in Translation), pp. 54-6 with the modifications proposed by O. Goncharko – A. Goncharko, in "A Byzantine Logician's "Image" within the Second Iconoclastic Controversy. Nikephoros of Constantinople", *Scrinium* 13 (2017), pp. 291-308, part. pp. 293-4 and my modifications.

⁵² On this section, see C. Erismann, "Nicephorus I of Constantinople, Aristotelian Logic, and the Cross", in M. Knezevic (ed.), *Aristotle in Byzantium*, Sebastian Press, Alhambra CA 2020, pp. 193-206.

⁵³ The passage was first integrated in a tenth-century manuscript – a remarkable codex containing treatises by Maximus the Confessor, Theodore of Raithu, John of Damascus and Theodore Abū Qurra – the Milano, Biblioteca Ambrosiana Q 74 sup., ff. 247v–250v. The ten syllogisms were then to appear in at least six manuscripts, often with the title *On the difference between the Image of Christ and the Cross demonstrated in ten different ways* (Τοῦ αὐτοῦ διαφορὰ εἰκόνας Χριστοῦ καὶ Σταυροῦ, ἐν δέκα ἀποδείξεων συλλογισμῶν τρόποις), between the eleventh and the twelfth century (Moscow, *Sinod. gr.* 467 (Vlad. 318) – Venice, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, *gr.* III 17 – London, Lambeth Palace Library, *Sion* L40.2, G06 – Roma, Biblioteca Vallicelliana, *Allacci* XXXVIII, and the Città del Vaticano, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, *Vat. gr.* 2198), followed by at least eight more recent copies.

⁵⁴ PG 100, 432B: Τὸ Χριστὸς ὄνομα ὁμωνύμως κατὰ τῆς εἰκόνας Χριστοῦ κατηγορεῖται· Χριστὸς γὰρ καὶ αὐτὴ λέγεται ὡσπερ καὶ βασιλεὺς ἢ τοῦ βασιλέως εἰκὼν· κατὰ τοῦ σταυροῦ δὲ κατηγορεῖσθαι ἀδύνατον, οὐδεὶς γὰρ ἂν φαίη τῶν σωφρονούντων Χριστὸν τὸν σταυρὸν οὐδενὶ τρόπῳ· ὁ τοῖνον ἐν μεθέξει καὶ αὐτοῦ τοῦ ὀνόματος γέγονεν, καθάπερ ἤδη καὶ τῷ τοῦ σώματος τύπῳ κεκοινωνήκεν τοῦ μηδενὸς τούτων μετασχόντος τιμιώτερον· ἢ εἰκὼν ἄρα τοῦ τύπου τοῦ σταυροῦ τιμιωτέρα.

This section of Nicephorus and his ten arguments are interesting for two reasons: they prove Nicephorus's interest in this type of deductive argument and affirm its validity in a theological context. The fact that Nicephorus then formulates ten arguments illustrates the quantitative aspect involved in this method; it is not only a question of formulating syllogisms, but of formulating many of them.

Theodore himself says in the introduction to his third *Antirrheticus*: "I will collect all the arguments (*theôremata*) that pertain to the same goal". This habit of stockpiling arguments becomes more and more developed in later Byzantine thought. The impression one gets is that of a Byzantine conviction that the quantity of arguments produced plays a role. That is, the more arguments one produces in favour of a thesis, the truer it must be.

If we look at the structure of Theodore's third treatise, the accumulation of similar arguments is obvious. He seems to be convinced that piling on the arguments makes them more effective and convincing.

4.3. Logical authority

The third and last component of the argumentative method used by Theodore and Nicephorus has to do with knowledge and expertise in logic.

Criticism of the educational level of one's opponent can be found on both sides. In 815, the iconoclasts described the participants of the iconophile Council of Nicaea II as follows: "assembling and following a thoughtless band of bishops without the slightest education" (*ἀπερίσκεπτον γὰρ ἄθροισμα συναγείρασα, ἀμαθεστάτοις ἐπισκόποις*).

In this case of Theodore and Nicephorus, the reproach is more precise because it concerns more specifically logic, which is only one component of *paideia*. But the reproach is mainly about the consequences of the ignorance of the rules of reasoning.

In Nicephorus, the criticism is straightforward. The lack of logic is related to heresy⁵⁵, because the adversary, failing to understand logic, cannot understand the theology of the image. And this is what Nicephorus says about Constantine V:

The man [i.e Constantine V] therefore does not possess the slightest spark of piety, nor can he boast the least bit of knowledge of logic. From where indeed will he be able to support an account of that which causes and that which is caused, or that of the comparison of what is similar, or how will he be able to discern that which itself participates in something from that which something else participates in, or otherness from difference? For all these distinctions can naturally be observed in the case of the archetype and the icon, since some indicate to us the relation and the quality that is in them, while others indicate to us the otherness of the subject".⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Cf. Theodore Abū Qurra whose second treatise begins with a clear statement of a theologian's need to know logic: "Nothing is more necessary, for whomever likes true doctrines and wants to defend them, than a distinction and clarification of the terms with which the philosophers first and foremost deal. Indeed, by lack of precise knowledge of these terms, many people who were thought to be wise missed the target of truth and deviated towards absurd and blasphematory positions" (1470c).

⁵⁶ Nicephorus, *Antirrheticus*, PG 100, 229b: Ὡς οὖν ἤμιστα αὐτῷ εὐσεβείας προσῆν ἔναυσμα πάποτε, οὐδὲ λογικῆς ἐπιστήμης καὶ βραχὺ γούν τι περιγέγονε. Πόθεν γὰρ αὐτῷ αἰτίου καὶ αἰτιατοῦ ἢ τῆς τοῦ ὁμοίου παραθέσεως

This is part of a larger criticism, as Patriarch Nicephorus was, as it has been well analysed by Averil Cameron, a master of the “vocabulary of denigration”. According to Nicephorus, the iconoclasts are “enemies of the holy, they are irrational, and they are the antithesis of culture and *oikonomia*”.⁵⁷

The interesting point here is the specific mention of logic and its understanding as the ability to reason in a sound and correct manner. What the lack of logical education of iconoclasts reveals, according to Nicephorus, is their inability to think correctly.

One question naturally arises when reading Nicephorus: what was the relationship of the iconoclasts to Aristotelian logic? The question is very difficult to answer, because we do not have the iconoclast writings. The iconophiles, once their victory was well established, meticulously destroyed the iconoclast texts. We only have a few fragments. The figure who embodies, in terms of ideas, the second iconoclasm is John the Grammarian. He is said erroneously to have a faulty logical culture. Jean Gouillard, who was the first to discuss the few surviving fragments of John’s writings, notes, not without remarking the scarcity of the material to assess, that the fragments show no particular logical knowledge. Such a claim is endorsed by subsequent scholarship. This dismissive evaluation is probably, at least partly, linked to Gouillard’s erroneous reading of the definition of human being in the Escorial manuscript (he has read and edited “*tô on* (τῷ ὄν) - the (particular) being” - instead of the traditional and correct “*zôon* (ζῷον), animal”, which is the correct reading of the text in the Escorial manuscript); this wrong reading in a continuously quoted edition of the fragment made it then possible to conclude that John was not acquainted with logic, as he was not even familiar with one of the most basic and trivial elements of Aristotelian logic. This representation is incorrect. According to my reconstruction, John the Grammarian is far more competent in logic.⁵⁸

If we abstract the method proposed by Theodore and Nicephorus from the specific context of the discussion on the veneration of images and formulate it as a method in more general terms, we obtain a method based on three elements: conceptual clarification and the elaboration of theological formulas through the concepts of Aristotelian logic, the frequent use of syllogisms or deductive reasoning and the constitution of lists of such arguments, and finally, the evaluation of the level of logical knowledge of the opponent and the criticism of his possible flaws.

Several convictions held by the thinkers applying this method support this method:

1. that the use of logical concepts helps to precisely formulate solutions to theological problems;
2. that syllogistic reasoning is useful in theology and should be used;
3. that the accumulation of such arguments increases the persuasive effect and underlines the correctness of the position defended;
- and 4. that a good logical education is necessary for the theologian to solve theological questions.

It is thus a true plea for rational theology.

ὁ λόγος διασωθήσεται, ἢ τὸ μετέχον καὶ μετεχόμενον, ἑτερότης τε καὶ διαφορὰ ἐπικριθήσεται; ἅπερ ἐπὶ τε τοῦ ἀρχετύπου καὶ τῆς εἰκόνης φυσικῶς ἐνθεωρεῖται, τὰ μὲν τὴν σχέσιν καὶ τὴν ποιότητα τὴν ἐν αὐτοῖς, τὰ δὲ τὸ τοῦ ὑποκειμένου ἡμῖν ὑπογράφοντα.

⁵⁷ A. Cameron, “How to Read Heresiology”, *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 33 (2003), pp. 471-92, part. p. 481.

⁵⁸ see C. Erisman; “John the Grammarian and Photius” (above, n. 15).

5. *The posteriority of the method: Photius and Nicetas of Byzantium*

In order to be able to speak of a real change of method, the method proposed must have at least some posterity. This posterity clearly exists, first and foremost, in no less a figure than the great intellectual of the ninth-century, Photius.⁵⁹ We know that he considered Nicephorus as his model, his master in theological matters. He not only followed his master's conceptual solution for the problem of images, but adopted more generally the method of Nicephorus, and in particular the rational reasonings. The best example for this is his *Mystagogy of the Holy Spirit* (Περὶ τῆς τοῦ ἁγίου Πνεύματος μυσταγωγίας), a polemical treatise against the western innovation of the *Filioque*. To criticise the Frankish theological position that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son, Photius offered numerous arguments to show the absurd logical consequences induced by this innovation.⁶⁰ The arguments are based on Aristotelian logical concepts, like the notion of proprium (ἕδιον) or characteristic property, one of the five predicables or terms defined by Porphyry in his introduction (*Isagoge*) to the *Categories*. The poor logic of the opponent is often mentioned along with the demonstration of the (logical) absurdity of the defended position.

A thinker close to Photius, Nicetas of Byzantium,⁶¹ used logic in his debate with Muslim theologians.⁶² He himself explained his approach by insisting on a double use of logic, to defend the truth and the logical coherence of Christianity, which had been questioned by his opponents, and to show in return that Islam was not coherent. We find the three elements: the logical concepts (referred to by Nicetas as κοινὰ ἔννοιαι),⁶³ the arguments (described as rational or natural arguments, φύσεως λογισμοί or φυσικοὶ λογισμοί) and the criticism of the poor logical culture of the adversary who defends an illogical position. The title of the first *Letter* by Nicetas is explicit: “Positive exposition of Christian doctrine, developed from common notions by means of dialectical method (διαλεκτικῆς μεθόδου), rational arguments, and multiple syllogistic proofs, followed by a confutation of the letter

⁵⁹ On Photius: *Prosopographie der mittelbyzantinischen Zeit* (above, n. 8), # 6253/corr. and # 26667. For a good account of Photius' life, education and work, see J. Schamp, “Photios” in Goulet (ed.), *DPhA*, CNRS-Éditions, Paris 2012, T. 5, part 1, pp. 585-610.

⁶⁰ See C. Erismann, “Theological Dispute, Logical Arguments: On Photios' Use of Syllogisms against the *Filioque* in the *Mystagogy*”, in A. Bucossi – F. Calia (eds.), *Contra Latinos et Adversus Graecos: The Separation between Rome and Constantinople from the 9th to the 15th Century*, Peeters, Leuven 2020 (*Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta* 286), pp. 89-104.

⁶¹ On Nicetas, see *Prosopographie der mittelbyzantinischen Zeit* (above, n. 8), # 25713; A. Rigo, “Nicetas of Byzantium”, in D. Thomas – B. Roggema et al. (eds.), *Christian-Muslim relations: A bibliographical History, Vol. 1 (600-900)*, Brill, Leiden 2009 (*The History of Christian-Muslim Relations* 11); A.T. Houry, *Les théologiens byzantins et l'Islam. Textes et auteurs. VIII^e-XIII^e s.*, Éditions Nauwelaerts, Louvain-Paris 1969, pp. 110-62; A. Rigo, “Niceta Byzantios, la sua opera e il monaco Evodio”, in G. Fiaccadori, (ed.), *In partibus Clus'*. *Scritti in onore di Giovanni Pugliese Carratelli*, La scuola di Pitagora, Napoli 2006 (Vivarium), pp. 147-87.

⁶² See C. Erismann, “Common Notions and Rational Arguments: Nicetas of Byzantium's Logical Arsenal and Ninth-century Byzantine Polemic against Islam”, in *Journal of Eastern Christian Studies* 72 (2020), pp. 273-90.

⁶³ For a list of the Aristotelian philosophical concepts used by Nicetas, see A. Houry, *Les théologiens* (above, n. 60), p. 110, n. 2. See also the remarks of B. de Lee, “Niketas Byzantios, Islam, and the Aristotelian Shift in Ninth-century Byzantium”, in Z. Chitwood – J. Pahlitzsch (eds.), *Ambassadors, Artists, Theologians. Byzantine Relations with the Near East from the Ninth to the Thirteenth Centuries*, Heidelberg, Propylaeum 2020 (*Byzanz zwischen Orient und Okzident* 12), pp. 217-25.

sent by the Hagarenes to the Emperor Michael, son of Theophilus, in order to slander the Christian faith”.⁶⁴ Nicetas likes to pile up arguments. His preferred formula is *καὶ ἄλλως*, “further, in another way” or “further, differently” which he uses to add a new argument on the same topic.

The tenth century is a very quiet century in terms of philosophical and theological production.

As Umberto Roberto summarizes it: “One of the hallmarks of the tenth-century Byzantine Renaissance is the increase in the production of corpora in Constantinople, including *excerpta*, *sylogai*, anthologies and *florilegia*. Three significant elements of late antique culture are henceforth revived: admiration for Hellenistic-Roman antiquity (*reverentia antiquitatis*), “encyclopaedic” learning (*ἐγκύκλιος παιδεία*), and, as a consequence, an increasing predilection towards the selection of texts and their synthesis”.⁶⁵

In the eleventh century, the use of logic is seriously questioned. This criticism is joined with criticism against the interest in certain philosophical texts such as the writings of Proclus. In a letter to Xiphilinos,⁶⁶ Michael Psellos defended the importance of the use of logic in theology. He was harassed and criticised, but never condemned. His student, John Italos, was condemned. And one of the points on which he was condemned is precisely that of the use of logic in theology. This is the first part of Italos’s condemnation according to the *Synodikon*:

To them who attempt by whatever means to introduce a new controversy or teaching into the ineffable Economy of our Incarnate Saviour and God, and who seek to penetrate the way wherein God the Word was united to the human substance and for what reason He deified the flesh He assumed, and who, by using dialectical terminology (*λόγοις διαλεκτικοῦς*) about nature and adoption, try to dispute (*λογομαχεῖν*) about the transcendent innovation of His divine and human natures, ANATHEMA!⁶⁷

Far from the time when a patriarch like Photius could teach logic and use it in his theological work, Italos was condemned for it. Paul Magdalino sees in the condemnation of Italos the end of an era. For him, this condemnation marks the great turning point by which Byzantium effectively renounces the development of the scholastic method which, in the West, also contributes to the scientific revolution.⁶⁸ I cannot discuss Magdalino’s fascinating thesis here, but we can nevertheless note that the working perspective and

⁶⁴ Ed. K. Förstel, *Niketas von Byzanz. Schriften zum Islam*, Echter, Würzburg 2000 (Corpus Islamo-Christianum. Series Graeca 5), p. 156.1-6.

⁶⁵ U. Roberto, “Byzantine Collections of late Antique Authors: Some Remarks on the *Excerpta historica Constantiniana*”, in M. Wallraff – L. Mecella (eds.), *Die Kestoi des Julius Africanus und ihre Überlieferung*, De Gruyter, Berlin-New York 2009 (Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur 165), pp. 71-84.

⁶⁶ *Epist.* 202, pp. 527-544 Papaioannou: Τῷ μοναχῷ κῆρ Ἰωάννη καὶ γεγονότι πατριάρχῃ τῷ Ἐπιφιλίνῳ. Cf. Michael Psellus, *Epistulae*, ed. S. Papaioannou, De Gruyter, Berlin-Boston 2019 (Bibliotheca scriptorum Graecorum et Romanorum Teubneriana).

⁶⁷ Ed. by J. Gouillard, “Le *Synodikon* de l’Orthodoxie: édition et commentaire”, *Travaux et Mémoires* 2 (1967), pp. 1-316, part. p. 57.185-9.

⁶⁸ P. Magdalino, *L’Orthodoxie des astrologues: La science entre le dogme et la divination à Byzance (VII^e-XIV^e siècle)*, Lethielleux, Paris 2006, p. 12.

method adopted in 815, which supported the theological work of the ninth century, was no longer unanimously accepted. Heresy had changed sides. Whereas logic had been seen as a means of combating heresy and defending positions deemed orthodox, it gradually became the source of heresy again.

Conclusion

Thanks to the new dates proposed for two important writings, it has been possible to put forward a new narrative for the emergence of a new argumentative strategy in defence of images in Constantinople in and after 815. It was also made possible to restore Nicephorus and Theodore the Studite to their role as innovators and authors of this new position. We have then shown that this new defence of images represents much more than the application of logic to a theological question, but is a new method of rational theology. It consists of the use of logical concepts to formulate one's own solution, the production of numerous deductive arguments, often listed one after the other, and the denigration of the opponent on the basis of his (alleged) poor knowledge of logic.

This method influenced both Photius and Nicetas in their respective polemics against the Franks and the Muslims. This method is a method of rational theology, but it functions above all in a polemical context. It is not only a matter of promoting one's own position, but also of doing so at the expense of the opponent's. The agonistic dimension of the method is inherent in it. The opponent may be present in the form of a literary fiction, but he remains indispensable.⁶⁹

⁶⁹ Most of the research for this article was carried out as part of the 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 (GA No. 648298). I had the pleasure of presenting some of the points discussed in this article at the Late Antique and Byzantine Studies Seminar in Oxford, at the conference "L'immagine nella Teologia patristica: il concilio di Nicea II" in Cesano Maderno (Milano), and at the Marquette Midwest Seminar in Ancient and Medieval Philosophy. I would like to thank Marek Jankowiak, Vito Limone, Claudio Moreschini and Owen Goldin for their kind invitation and above all for their insightful comments. I would also like to warmly thank Filippo Ronconi for our discussions, which were always particularly enlightening. My thanks go to Johanna Friedl for her suggestions for improving the English of this article. I want to express my gratitude to Cristina D'Ancona and Elisa Coda for having so kindly welcomed my work in their journal.