The Medieval tradition of the *Topics* has a distinctive feature, when in comparison with other parts of the *Organon*. As it involves the persistent interplay between Aristotle on the one hand and Cicero and Boethius on the other hand, *Topics* permitted fruitful considerations about the concept of probable, as well as a fruitful approach to cognitive phenomena in terms of intellectual disposition or belief. It is not the place, here, to retrace all of the steps of this interaction, from the 12\textsuperscript{th} to 15\textsuperscript{th} century. My concern is rather to inquire whether this propulsive force is still active in the 15\textsuperscript{th} century or if, on the contrary a slow decline will be observable, the end of which will render something completely different.

As it has been noticed by many scholars, it seems that the genuine Aristotelian tradition of the *Topics* did undergo a significant decline in importance during the 15\textsuperscript{th} century. In the last chapter of his pivotal monograph, Green-Pedersen claims that, despite both the growing number of commentaries produced at that time and their length, it would be difficult to find any new idea in them\textsuperscript{1}. Authors, indeed, focused more on singular issues linked to dialectical reasoning rather than on the theory of dialectical reasoning in general. This interpretation seems only partly justified, even if in counterpart it manifests the permanence of the Aristotelian text and the questions it conveys, especially about the definition of probable, the species of argumentation, and the detailed examination of a certain number of *loci*. On the other side, following in the footsteps of P. Boehner, O. Bird and J. Pinborg, E. Stump has proposed an alternative interpretation of the supposed decline of the *loci*, namely that they were absorbed into consequences\textsuperscript{2}. Actually some

\textsuperscript{1} N.J. Green-Pedersen, *The Tradition of the Topics in the Middle Ages. The Commentaries on Aristotle’s and Boethius ‘Topics’*, Philosophia Verlag, München - Wien 1984 (here after abbreviated as *The Tradition*) pp. 321, 328. According to Green-Pedersen, this conclusion can be extended also to the commentaries on Peter of Spain. After more than thirty years from its publication, this book still stands unrivalled as the pivotal monograph on the reception of Aristotle’s book in the Middle Ages. See also S. Ebbesen, *The theory of loci in Antiquity and the Middle ages*, in K. Jacobi (hrsg.), *Argumentationstheorie: scholastische Forschungen zu den logischen und semantischen Regeln korrekten Folgerns*, Brill, Leiden 1993, pp. 15-39.

masters, such as John Buridan, seem to testify to the possibility of dealing with consequences, in a technical and deep way, without neglecting the theory of the *Topics*; one should also bear in mind that some texts from Buridan had a wide circulation and were used as university textbooks in Paris as well as other places in Central Europe. Yet the tendency described by Stump is actually present.

This trend is especially evident in Italy, where it was present since the end of the 14th century, at the time of Blasius of Parma. In his *Questions on the Treatises of Peter of Spain* (written in the 1380s), the treatise on the *loci* is distinct from the treatise on consequences, the latter being written prior. But one does not find any general question about the nature of *locus*. It only begins with a question about the four species of argumentation, followed by a passage on the validity of the various consequences – from definition to what is defined, from superior to inferior, from the whole to the part, etc. So one covers the traditional list of *loci*, each time in a very succinct manner and through the validity of inferences. Some years later, topics themselves seem to have disappeared in the *Logica magna* of Paul of Venice (ca. 1396-1399). Almost one century later, in the *Compendium logicae* of Paul of Pergola (ca. 1481), treatises on consequences can be found, on obligations and on insolubles, however there is no tract dedicated to the *loci*. If, then, one turns to the totally different context of Parisian Nominalism around the turn of the 15th up until the 16th century, the same trend can be found in some, not all, of the texts. In the first part of his *Libri logicae*, John Mair includes a *Tractatus de locis*, with a reference to Peter of Spain. But after some short terminological indications and a division of argumentations, one can scarcely find the definition of *locus*: the classical definition deriving from Boethius and Themistius is given, and then followed by some definitions of consequences, and finally some considerations about what is to be searched and what is to be avoided. All of these issues extend to only two folios (recto and verso), and this is surprising if one considers that Mair was a rather verbose author!

Considering these facts, one may be tempted to conclude that the renewal of dialectics brought about by authors like Agricola, and then Melanchthon and Ramus, was a real ‘renaissance’ due to both the combination of topics and rhetoric, and to the rediscovery of other works of Cicero such as the *Partitiones oratoriae* and the *Insti-

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6 Johannes Maioris Scotos, *Libri quos in artibus in collegio Montis Acuti Parisius regendando in lucem emissit*, Lugduni 1519, ff. CLIII*-CLV*. The summary of the second part does not mention any part nor chapter on the *loci*.
7 This book proposes another definition of the argument, where we find again the notion of trust (*fides*); see Cicero, *Partitiones oratoriae*, II.5: «Quid est argumentum? Probabile inventum ad faciendum fidem» (*Les divisions de l’art oratoire (Partitiones oratoriae)*, ed. et trad. par H. Bornèque, Les Belles Lettres, Paris 1960, p. 3. This definition of the argument, along with Boethius’, is mentioned by Valla: *Retractatio*, III.1, in
tutiones oratoriae of Quintilian. But is this the final word on the matter and should one consider this question as closed? I do not believe this is the case because what was the most fertile in the Medieval tradition is still underlying. I shall give two examples that are very different from each other.

The Topics of John Versoris

A commentary from the 15th century that had a wide diffusion is the Quaestiones super libros Topicorum of Jean Letourneur, or John Versoris († ca. 1485). One is still able to find in it the combination of Aristotle and Boethius that produced the main results of the Medieval tradition of Topics.

In its form, the commentary combines exposition and questions: the text of Aristotle appears as commented lemmas but the explanation, sometimes very near the text, also takes the form of questions. By its content, this commentary does not seem to bring any conceptual revolution. The book opens with the customary division of syllogism in four species, one of which is the dialectical syllogism, which is the subject matter of the Topics, as it is stated in the first question one meets: «Circa primum librum Thopicorum queritur primo utrum de syllogismo dialectico sit scientia quam de subiecto attributionis huius libri».

But the important point is not the traditional analysis of the different kinds of syllogism and what it implies (or not) in relation to the probable. Rather, it is a redistribution of the fields of the «new logic» (that is the logical texts of Aristotle rediscovered at the end of the 12th century, from the Prior Analytics to the Sophistical Refutations) according to the Cicero-Boethian division of inventio and resolutoria that will be in the foreground of the new dialectics during the 16th century:

Sciendum primo quod secundum Boethium in suo libro Thopicorum, tota nova logica dividitur in duas partes, scilicet in inventivam et resolutoriam.

The invention is treated in the Topics and the Sophistical Refutations, while the resolution is treated in the Prior and Posterior Analytics:

Resolutoria traditur in libris Priorum et Posteriorum. Inventiva vero traditur in hoc libro et in libro Elenchorum.

The link between the topics and the inventive part of logic is based on Boethius and Albert the Great – a reference that we often find in Versoris:

Secundum Albertum [Boethius] duo ostendit. Primum est quod hec scientia est inventiva. Secundum est quod istam scientiam non habuit Aristoteles ab aliis sed ipsam pro maiori parte adinvenit.
Indeed, Albert had already carried out this distribution more completely, without mentioning Boethius:

Cum ratio disserendi\(^{14}\), quam veteres Peripatetici logican sive rationalem scientiam vocaverunt, dividatur per scientiam inveniendi et scientia iudicandi, consequenter\(^{15}\) esse videtur de his etiam determinare in quibus non perfecte attingit sua consequentiae ultimum [...]. Cum ergo logica complectatur utrumque, id est inventionem et judicium, et cum tradita sit ars iudicandi et de consequentia in Prioribus et de consequente in Posterioribus, et per hoc sciamus syllogismum esse perfectam ratiocinationem, per quam ignotum cognoscitur per notum, superest ut de inventione dicamus ut partes logicae perfecte cognoscantur\(^{16}\).

On the other hand one does not find in Versoris’s commentary, as far as I know, the Boethian definitions of *locus* and argument. So the characteristic formula «sedes argumenti» is absent, though it has been present in many 13\(^{th}\) and 14\(^{th}\) century commentaries on the *Topics*, rather Versoris only reminds us that the *locus* is the foundation of dialectical syllogism. As it was customary in Medieval commentaries, Versoris provides us with a metaphorical explanation of the topical science and of what a *locus* is, which is grounded in the Greek etymology of the Latin word *locus*:

Dicitur [ista scientia] thopica a thopos grece, quod est *locus* latine, et ycos, scientia, quasi scientia de locis quia considerat de locis dialecticis in quibus syllogismi dialectici fundantur, sicut corpus locatum firmatur et conservatur in suo loco naturali\(^{17}\).

The following questions of Book I are organized in a way that was very frequent during that period (one has *grosso modo* the same organization in the nominalist Raulin, for example\(^{18}\)). After these initial clarifications, Book I deals with questions about the division of syllogisms and the specification of dialectical syllogism, just as the scientific status of the *topics*. Book II is dedicated to the distinction of universal and particular problems, the types of opposition, and principally to the presentation of the «dialectical predicates», namely the accident, the definition, the genus, and the proper. The following books and chapters are then dedicated to the exam of dialectical arguments based on these predicates.

I shall not dwell at length on the precisions given by Versoris about the ontological status of the *locus*, namely if *locus* has to be understood as a relation between things or, rather, between concepts. In this section that deals with the four dialectical predicates, and particularly with definition, there is a question about the definition of the ‘term or definition’ as *oratio quid est esse rei significans*. By examining this notion,

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\(^{14}\) Correction suggested; Borgnet edition: *differendi*.

\(^{15}\) Correction suggested; Borgnet edition: *consequens*.


\(^{17}\) Versoris, *Super omnes libros nove logice*, sign. n iii ra; cf. *Albert the Great, Topica*, p. 235: «Titulus qui est quasi radius illuminans ea de quibus agitur in scientia est: Incipit liber topicorum, eo quod *topos* graece est *locus* latine, et id quod docetur in hoc libro est qualiter ad habitudine locali trahatur consideratio ad problematis determinationem».

\(^{18}\) *Magistri Iohannis Raulin Commentarius in logicam Aristotelis*, Parisiis 1500.
Versoris opposes the realist viewpoint to the semiological approach, which was peculiar to the nominalist view. In the preliminary remarks, he specifies that definition can be taken in two ways. Firstly, it can be taken as second intention, not ‘abstractedly’ – that is as second intention in itself qua mental act of understanding a thing – but rather concretively, that is insofar as the intellection expresses the quiddity of the thing understood. Secondly, definition can signify the thing underlying the intention – insofar as this thing is considered as (or equivalent to) a sentence (or at least a compound expression) consisting of a genus and a difference:

Sciendum secundo quod definitio potest capi dupliciter. Uno modo pro intentione secunda, non secundum se sed secundum quod est concretiva rei. Alio modo pro re subiecta intentioni ut est quedam oratio composita ex genere et differentia.  

We see in this difficult passage that the attitude of Versoris is very different from that of nominalists, who rigorously distinguish things and signs. Here, a definition does not refer to a pure thing nor to a concept, but rather to a combination of intentio and re: «Ideo presens definitio neque est rei absolute, neque intentionis absolute sed intentionis concretive rei». In that sense, according to him, definition signifies the essence of the thing and its being, «essentiam rei et totum esse rei», provided that esse is here taken as esse essentiae.  

But I will not expound further on this point. Instead, I shall concentrate on two issues.  

First, Versoris is wondering about the reason of the division between Topics and Rhetoric. This question, which arises mainly from the analysis of the loci in Book II of Aristotle’s Rhetoric, will assume a new importance at the end of the 15th century when Valla and Agricola will use the rhetorical works of Cicero, as well as of Quintilian, for their theory of argumentation. One can notice that, while posing this problem, Versoris contrasts Aristotle and Boethius:

Dubitatur secundo quare Aristoteles facit libros distinctos de locis dyaelectricis et de rhetoricis, et tamen Boetius in eodem libro determinat de ipsis.  

Versoris answers the question by applying the distinction between a thing’s essence and its use to dialectical and rhetorical loci. Boethius can be considered as a theorist, since in his De topicis differentiis he worried about the substance of the loci, both dialectical and rhetorical. Aristotle, instead, can be seen as ‘practitioner’. He, indeed, considered the loci according to their different goals, and accordingly he dealt with them in two distinct books, namely the Topics and the Rhetoric:
Ad dubium respondatur quod causa est quia Philosophus considerat locos dialecticos et rhetoricos secundum usum eorum et quia isti loci diversimode se habent ad usum et different in usum eorum, ideo Philosophus determinat de ipsis in diversis libris. Sed Boetius considerat ipsos secundum suam substantiam et non secundum usum eorum et quia isti loci secundum substantiam parum different, Boetius in eodem libro determinat de ipsis\textsuperscript{25}.

It should be noted that this partition was usual in the 13th century, in questions that compared Aristotle and Boethius, as can be seen in Kilwardby or Radulphus Brito\textsuperscript{26}.

Then there is a slightly different partition: dialectic and rhetoric examine arguments that are illative et probative (by opposition to those which are illative tantum). Dialecticians consider the arguments, dealing with general matters, about which one opines, while the arguments dealing with particular matters, of which one can have a mere suspicio are considered by rhetoricians\textsuperscript{27}.

The second point I want to underline is the link, already present at that time, between topics and method. Here, again, one can trace back this connection to Boethius’ Latin translation of Aristotle’s work, in which the first lines of the Greek texts are translated as follows:

Propositum quidem negotii est methodum invenire a qua poterimus syllogizare de omni problemate ex probabilibus\textsuperscript{28}.

Even if the term methodus, that is a transliteration from Greek, was already known, it does not seem to have been the object of a specific reflection, at least in logical works, from the previous centuries. However, it is found again in Albert the Great the starting point for Versoris’s reflections on methodus. In his commentary on the Topics, indeed, after having stated the general object of Aristotle’s work, Albert went on to explain the metaphorical meaning of the term «method». As methodus signifies a short and compendious way to knowledge similarly it can be used for art and science, as they are compendious ways of learning and dealing with the many speculables and practical items:

Est autem quod dicimus methodum metaphorice: dicitur enim methodus brevis via, quæ via est compendii, et vulgariter vocatur summa. Per similitudinem ergo transfertur ad istam scientiam proprie et artem; quia cum speculabilia et operabilia multa offerantur, sua multitudine et longitudine, distantiae ipsorum dispendium faciunt, nisi per formam scientiae et artis ad compendium redigantur; et ab hac similitudine nomen methodi ad artem et scientiam transfertur\textsuperscript{29}.

\textsuperscript{25} See ibi, n iii rb-va. This difference between Aristotle and Boethius will be evoked again about the different species of dialectical syllogism: see sign. o iv va, answer to the second argument.


\textsuperscript{27} See Versoris, Super omnes libros nove logice, tr. 2us, sign. o iv rb.


\textsuperscript{29} Albertus Magnus, Topica, pp. 235-236.
The explanation of this transfer of meaning, that justifies the use of the term «method», is interesting. For Albert, the term «method» has a general meaning and it is not coextensive with topics nor with any special part of the *ars disserendi* as will be the case with Petrus Ramus. In other words, Albert does not seem to assimilate method and topics. On the contrary, and despite his mention of Albert, Versoris seems to imply such a coincidence between method and topics by appealing to the analogical interpretation of the term «methodus»:

*Sed methodus, ut dicit Albertus, uno modo dicitur proprie, et sic dicitur via brevis et utilis obliquitatis declinans et faciliter ducens ad terminum, et illo modo non capitur hic. Sed capitur similitudinarie et transumptive quia dialectica est quaedam ars brevis et utilis per quam habemus potestatem ad prompte syllogizandum ex probabilitibus de unoquoque proposito.*

It seems that Versoris is original in his explanation of the texts, since even though he takes Albert’s exegesis as his starting point, he then goes beyond this and identifies dialectic with method. Finally, Versoris queries into the more or less important utility of dialectic and demonstrative science. His answer is balanced. From one point of view, demonstrative science is absolutely more useful than dialectic since only demonstration produces perfect science, while dialectic, on the other hand, only produces a disposition for science. From another point of view, however, in so far as it serves to raise objections, dialectic tends to acquire a universal value:

*Tamen quantum ad hoc quod est obviare cuilibet propositioni communiter arguendo ad utramque partem contradictionis, et quantum ad hoc quod est valere tam ad principia quam ad conclusiones scientiarum, dyalectica potest dici utilior extensive.*

This affirmation must not be overestimated – fundamentally, dialectic in its different utilities (namely training in disputation, casual conversations and the philosophical sciences) is exposed in the eight books of the *Topics*; it could nevertheless sketch an interpretation of the *Organon* which would put dialectic as the basis of the whole science of language and thought, subordinating to it analytics or the demonstrative science, as will do the dialectics of the 16th century.

As a matter of fact one finds, within the widespread commentary to Aristotle’s *Topics* such as Versoris’s work, two different tendencies. On the one hand the appeal to tradition, in particular to Boethius (and Albert), on the other hand the emergence of some questions that will be at the heart of further developments, such as the notion of method or the amplitude of dialectic compared to demonstration.

**Parisian Buridanism at the end of 15th century**

John Versoris was an exponent of the realist trend in 15th century philosophy and more precisely of Albertism. His adherence to realism emerges in his conception of the *locus*, even though it does not have much influence on the technical analysis of

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31 Ibi, sign. n V ra.
32 See ibi, tr. VII*, sign. x IV ra.
topics. It is worthwhile to turn the attention now to the commentaries on the 5th treatise of Peter of Spain’s *Summulae logicales* and to the corresponding treatise of John Buridan’s *Summulae logicales*. Starting in the 13th century, and continuing more in the following century, Peter’s text, along with Buridan’s, was another main source of the theory of topics. An interesting author for our analysis is Georges of Bruxelles who is labelled as *praestantissimus nominalium opinionum recitator* in the 1489 edition of his commentary on Petrus Hispanus’ *Summulae*33. In his works, Georgius provides lemmata of Peter’s *Summulae*, and then comments on them, paying special attention to the different meanings of the main concepts.

As a preliminary remark, I should specify that Georges has also written commentaries on the whole *Organon*, including a commentary on the *Topics* that is a not detailed exposition of the text followed by short questions34. Just to give an example, in the Book I George gives a detailed summary, then he quotes the passage about *methodus*, but without elaborating in detail on it, and he indicates the different species of syllogism. Subsequently, he goes on to quote the lemmata and briefly paraphrase Aristotle’s text. The form of the literal exposition of Aristotle’s text accompanied by doubts and questions is rather frequent in texts produced by nominalistically oriented philosophers, such as John Mair’s *Libri logicae*, in which the author confines himself to rather basic explanations, before turning off to a presentation of consequences. However, this form is not limited to nominalists’ texts35.

While Georgius’ commentary on the *Topics* does not seem to provide deep insights about topics, his exposition on Peter of Spain is more interesting, though the form is also that of a paraphrasis. Indeed, his analysis of the meaning of the key terms of the Cicero-Boethian topics shows the continuity between the 14th century concepts of belief and probable and the Georgius’ view on that subject. Undoubtedly, one does not find new theories in it, but the text does gives evidence to the permanence of this tradition – the same that was some years earlier, in 1479, in the forefront of the *De inventione dialectica* of Rodolph Agricola. Let us therefore underline some elements of that exposition, in order to better evaluate how these questions are perceived in the second half of the 15th century.

From the beginning, after having listed the different meanings of the term *ratio*, the author distinguishes two meanings of *fides*, in order to clarify the Boethian use of *fides* in the definition of the argument as *ratio dubie rei faciens fidem*. As it is known, in commenting on the definition of argument authors have to deepen the problem of what the cause is that justifies one’s assent to a proposition. First, insofar as science was conceived as mental disposition, the aforementioned definition required a qualification of the type of justification which makes scientific such *habitus*. At the same time, Boethius’ definition of argument gave rise to questions about faith or belief in the religious sense. The exposition of Georges of Bruxelles accentuates the opposition between two

33 See GEORGII BRUXELLIENSIS *Expositio super Summulis Petri Hispani*, Lugduni 1489, sign. a ii ra.
34 See Io., *Questiones super totam logicam secundum viam modernorum et secundum cursum Magistri Georgii, per magistrum Thomam Bricot emendate*, Basileae s.d. [ca. 1491-1495].
35 Georgius’ text seems to rely on Chretien Foliot’s commentary on the *Topics*, which does not seem to be nominalistic oriented; Georgius added some questions and arguments on Foliot’s text, which, along with specific terminology, are borrowed from Buridan’s works, such as the *Quaestiones on Topics* and the *Summulae*. On Foliot’s and Georgius’ commentaries see GREEN-PEDERSEN, *The Tradition*, pp. 322, 411-412.
meanings of belief, namely broad and strict. In both cases, the *fides* is an assent to a proposition, or a *notitia adhesiva*, that is a knowledge subscribing to what is proposed. Furthermore, in both acceptations, *fides* concerns a true proposition without regard to its status and the different causes that induce our assent. But in its narrow sense, *fides* is supported by authority alone, and not by any compelling reason and, consequently, it depends on a free act of the will as in the case of the article of faith, such as God’s trinity:

Notandum est secundo quod iste terminus «fides» capitur dupliciter. Uno modo stricte, et sic descriptitur: *fides* est *notitia vera firmiter adhesiva* alicuius propositionis generata per solam auctoritatem dicentis et per liberum arbitrium voluntatis sine aliqua ratione cogente; sic capitur cum dicitur quod fide credimus deum esse trinum et unum36.

The broad sense of *fides* includes the strict one, but also the belief resulting from a compelling reason, namely from a scientific demonstration:

Alio modo sumitur large pro omni assensu vero, sive talis sit generatus per aliquam rationem cogentem sive per auctoritatem dicentis, et sic capitur in diffinitione argumenti37.

And Georges of Bruxelles clarifies that it is in the broad sense that one should understand *fides* as it relates to the definition of the argument given by Peter of Spain, following Boethius. It is patent that Georgius’ explanation oversimplifies the complicated question of the role played by will and intellect in producing probable arguments, upon considering that a probable argument cannot be reduced to a simple act of the will that excludes any reason. However, by offering a narrow and a broad meaning of *fides* Georgius intends to relax the conception of *ratio faciens fidem* in a way that comprehends not only demonstrative reasoning, but also acts of the will. Let us underline however, as the answer to an objection will explain, that the broad sense also includes the properly scientific *habitus* generated by the demonstration38.

The definition of the argument will endeavour to distinguish the argument from the simple antecedent of a consequence, or, in other words, to consider it as a restricted species of antecedents:

Argumentum est antecedens alicuius consequentie ex cuius antecedentis notitia et notitia bonitatis consequentie generatur vera noticia de conclusione que prius erat dubia vel fuisset, si fuisset proposita39.

In his definition of argument, Georgius stresses the non-coexistence and the difference between arguments and antecedents of consequences. Every argument is the antecedent of a consequence, which, through the knowledge (*notitia*) of both the antecedent and of the validity of the consequence, produces true and firm knowledge (*notitia*) of something doubtable. If, however, it is true that every argument is an antecedent of a conse-

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37 Ibidem.
38 See ibi, sign. A 1 va-vb: «Ad primum dicitur quod licet argumentum demonstrativum non generet fidem capiendo stricte fidem, bene tamen generat fidem generaliter capiendo illum terminum».
39 Ibi, sign. A 1 rb. Cf. ibidem: «Omne argumentum [est] antecedens, sed non econtra». We reach here a point of resistance to the absorption of the topics in the theory of consequences, even if this tendency is present somewhere else – see for example John Mair.
quence, the contrary is not the case. Not all antecedents, indeed, are arguments. Thus, an argument can be considered as a species falling under the genus «antecedent».

Here as before, the analysis of the logical concept of argument is carried out from the epistemological vantage point of the notitia. And, consequently, logic became a theory of knowledge, or at least it was integrated in a psychological epistemology. This assimilation of logic to epistemology is fully accomplished by the distinction between the different meanings of argumentatio. In one sense, every proposition formulated as a consequence, be it valid or not, can be called argumentation; in a second sense, one shall speak of argumentation only if it is of a valid consequence; finally, one shall reserve the term «consequence» for a valid consequence whose antecedent proves the conclusion (is probativus). What does this mean? One finds a distinction already invoked by Buridan: the argumentation, and principally the dialectical argumentation, is not only valid formally but has to be proven, or in other words it has to justify a true knowledge40. According to Georges of Bruxelles, it is indeed in this strictest sense that Peter of Spain understands the argumentation.

This conceptual device is completed by a conception of the relation between thought and language, which leans on Boethius, while referring, as we shall see, to a certain semiology of the locus. Following Boethius, Peter of Spain claimed that «argumentatio est argumenti per orationem explicatio»41. There were two ways of understanding the distinction between argumentum et argumentatio. If the explanation stays on the linguistic level then the argument, alike the ratio, is conceived of as the basis of the topical relation and the argumentation is considered its discursive development – and this is the most immediate interpretation of Boethius. If, however, the explanation of the differences between argument and argumentation involves the mental and the vocal levels, then the argument is referred to at the mental level, and the argumentation is referred to at the properly vocal level. The latter approach was the one adopted by Buridan42, and then endorsed by Georgius:

Boetius tamen dicit quod argumentatio et argumentum differunt penes hoc, scilicet quod argumentum est antecendens mentale ultimatum et argumentatio est antecedens vocale quia exprimit argumentum sive antecedens mentale43.

Georgius’ explanation is developed within a logic-linguistic context that considers the dialectical locus as a sign of second intention. While commenting on the lemma that provides the Boethian definition of locus as sedes argumenti, Georgius states that the dialectical locus should be considered not as a first intention or physical place, but, rather, as a sign of second intention, more precisely as a logical or dialectical locus:

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42 JOHN BURIDAN, S.L., VI, I,2 : «Sed illud non apparat mihi esse intentio Boethii quod aliquem unicum terminum vocavit ‘argumentum’, immo intentio Boethii videtur esse quod argumentum et argumentatio differunt sicut processus mentalis et processus vocalis».

43 GEORGES OF BRUXELLES, Expositio super… De locis, sign. A II ra.
Notandum est primo quod hic non capitur locus prime intentionaliter pro corpore locante sive pro superficie circumdante eo prius locatum, sed secunde intentionaliter pro loco logicae, et non pro loco sophistico sed dyaleitico\textsuperscript{42}.

Considering the dialectical locus, Georgius proposes the traditional bipartition of a locus in a locus-maxim, a sentence which confirms the dialectical argument, and locus-difference, which are the terms making up the locus-maxim. Georgius’ explanation of the differences between the locus-maxim and the locus-difference is clearly metalinguistic:

Locus dyaleiticus est oratio confirmativa argumenti dyaleitici, vel termini ex quibus talis oratio componitur, ex quorum terminorum habitudine adinvicem talis oratio habet veritatem, et argumentum propter talem orationem habet unitatem et evidentiam\textsuperscript{45}.

Consequently, the locus is situated at the level of terms (simple or complex) and not at the level of the relation between things. The analysis also clearly concerns the vocal language or the mental domain. This primacy of the mental level clearly emerges in Georgius’ examination of many loci such as, for example, the locus a causa. By analysing this locus he departs from the interpretation given by Peter Hispanus, according to which causa has to be taken as a first intention and thus refers to things that cause something. For Georgius both causa and effect should be considered as second intentions: they are terms standing respectively for the thing that causes and its effect.

From that logical viewpoint, the topical inference holds in virtue of the «cause»; from a proposition, one term of which stands for the cause, a proposition can be inferred, one term of which stands for the cause’s effect:

Conclusions

Despite the evident innovations and adjustment introduced by humanists (such as the new order of matter and the new subdivision of the arts of language, or the fact that the relation of the use to the logical norm is reversed at times, thus provoking change in the relation between thought and language), one can find an unbroken, common thread between the late medieval tradition of the topics and Valla or Petrus Ramus. First, the modifications dialectic underwent and that are found in the works of Valla and, especial-

\textsuperscript{42} Ibi, sign. A v ra-rb.

\textsuperscript{45} Ibi, sign. A v rb. See all the rest of A v rb; for example: «Iste terminus ‘maxima’ non capitur in proposito prime intentionaliter et adjective, cum tunc esset oratio incongrua, sed capitur secunde intentionaliter et substantive»; «iste terminus ‘maxima’ et hoc complexum ‘locus maxima’ idem significant et pro eodem supponunt, sed tamen non convertibiliter, qua iste terminus ‘maxima’ est superius ad hoc complexum ‘locus maxima’».

\textsuperscript{46} Ibi, B v va. Cf. ibi B v vb: «Locus differentia maxime ab effectu cause efficientis est due termini, scilicet ‘effectus cause efficientis’ et ‘causa efficiens’ quorum unus, scilicet ly effectus cause efficientis verificatur de termino inferente etc.». 
ly, of Agricola – whose writings were a cornerstone for 16th century authors concerned with dialectic – cannot be explained as a mere change of reference books for humanists, namely as the passage from Aristotle’s to Cicero’s works. This is the case for two reasons.

The first reason is that the commentaries on Aristotle, although they partly lose their originality, remain places of reflection on ancient questions such as the relation of the necessary to the probable, but also on new themes such as the relation of invention to resolution or disposition. That is what I suggested with John Versoris’s influential and important commentary. So one can find in it the partition of logic in \textit{pars inventiva} and \textit{pars resolutoria} applied to Aristotelian logic, when referring to Boethius via Albert the Great. The second reason is that the Cicero-Boethian tradition is the common thread connecting the Medieval tradition and the new dialectics. That is why one finds the same key elements, newly reworked: equivocal relation of the argument to the argumentation, definition of the locus as \textit{sedes argumenti} (the seat of the argument), and above all as «reason producing the confidence, or belief» – true markers of these archives which are the basis of the theory of the probable since Boethius. Considering these basic elements, Cicero is still read through Boethius, or at least with him, and still it will be the case in Agricola. But this couple does not substitute for Aristotle. Because, one has to remind, all along the Middle Ages properly Aristotelian archives and Cicero-Boethian archives were constantly crossed, so that some commentators explicitly compared the two works – it is particularly the case of Boethius of Dacia or Raduphus Brito in their \textit{Questions on the Topics}. I have tried to show that it is still the case at the end of the 15th century with somebody such as Georges of Bruxelles. He deals separately with Aristotle and Peter of Spain (and consequently Boethius), but the commentary of the logical treatises is in line with Buridan’s commentary. So the presence of Aristotle in the topics of the 15th century must not be considered without that link but rather noted in its dynamic relation to Cicero, Boethius and Peter of Spain.

So who is negotiating with Aristotle? Everybody, even Agricola and perhaps Ramus. But with whom is Aristotle negotiating here? In the \textit{Topics}, it is, still in 15th century, with Boethius.

\textbf{Abstract}

The Medieval tradition of \textit{Topics} crosses Cicero and Boethius on the one side, Aristotle on the other. This crossing made his fecundity in the analysis of the different meanings of the probable, as well as in the approach of cognitive phenomena, considered as intellectual dispositions thanks to the notion of \textit{fides}. This article shows that the theory of dialectics in 15th century could not, in any way, be seen as a return to Cicero against Aristotle. It considers two examples, which represent one the Abertist school, John Versoris, the other the Nominalist school, Georges of Bruxelles. In any case, the two traditions are still combined. Commentaries on Aristotle are at the same time a place for recurrent interrogations on the probable or the relation between dialectics and demonstration, and the occasion of emergence of new questions, concerning the notion of method, or the relation between invention and resolution. The commentaries on the treatises of Peter of Spain, while including technical developments on the \textit{loci}, go on deepening the different possible uses of the \textit{fides}, from the religious belief to the disposition acquired by science, and the motives for adhering to a proposition.

\textbf{Keywords}: \textit{Topics}, belief, probable, dialectic, argument