

Aristotle's *Topics* in the Greek Neoplatonic Commentaries on the *Categories**

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Preface

Even though the *Topics* were studied and commented on by the Greek Neoplatonists, there is no comprehensive analysis of the way in which these philosophers interpreted the work. This paper aims to provide a preliminary analysis by examining the explicit citations of the *Topics* in the commentaries on the *Categories*. It will reveal several interesting trends, in particular, that all the post-Proclean commentators share the same conception of the *Topics*, according to which dialectic is useful both as a means to identify apodictic reasoning by contrast and as an exercise. This paper will also show that Porphyry, Dexip-

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pus and Simplicius are the only commentators who use the *Topics* to provide an enhanced interpretation of some passages in the *Categories*.

Although the tradition of Aristotle's *Topics* in the ancient world has been extensively investigated with regard to Peripatetic and Latin authors,¹ there are no studies on the tradition of this work among the Greek Neoplatonic philosophers.² However, the *Topics* were part of the Neoplatonic curriculum designed by Iamblichus. It is well known that after Porphyry – who was influenced both by the critical interest of his teacher Plotinus for Aristotle and by the concordist attitude of some Middle Platonists – the works of Aristotle played a key role in the Neoplatonic curriculum. This accounts for why some Neoplatonic teachers – such as Ammonius, son of Hermias – commented on the *Topics*.³ Peters (1968: 20) cites some testimonies about a commentary on the *Topics* written by an “Ammonius”; Ishāq translated this commentary into Syriac, and Yaḥyā ibn ‘Adi (a Christian author who wrote in Arabic) used it to develop his own exegesis of the *Topics*. Peters (1979: 23) also reports that Ibn al-Nadīm cites the translation of this commentary in Arabic. In addition, Stump (1978: 212) supports the hypothesis that the words of these Syriac and Arab authors demonstrate that Ammonius, son of Hermias, wrote a commentary on the *Topics*. Moreover, Philoponus claims to have commented on the *Topics*.⁴ However, no Neoplatonic commentary on the *Topics* is found in the manuscripts available nowadays.

It is possible to study how Greek Neoplatonists received the *Topics* in several ways. For example, one could consider the references to Aristotelian dialectic in the works of the Neoplatonists;⁵ more specifically, one could study the explicit quotations of the *Topics*. Also, since Stump (1978: 212) has noted that Boethius may have used Ammonius' commentary,⁶ Boethius might be a useful source for assessing how Greek Neoplatonists interpreted the *Topics*.

This paper studies the reception of the *Topics* in Greek Neoplatonism, by analysing all the explicit citations of the work in the commentaries on the *Categories*.⁷ The reasons

¹ For example, Wallies (1891); Thielscher (1908); Riposati (1944); Solmsen (1944); Bird (1962); Stump (1974, 1978: 205–212, 1988); Ebbesen (1993); van Ophuijsen (1994, 2001); Rubinelli (2009) and Spranzi (2011).

² On Neoplatonists using concepts mentioned by Aristotle in the *Topics* (among other works) cf. Lloyd (1955).

³ Furthermore, it was following the example of the *Topics*, as well as that of the *Prior* and *Posterior Analytics*, that Simplicius reformulated into syllogistic arguments the theses of the works of Aristotle.

⁴ Phlp. *In Apo.* 3, 3–4. Cf. I. Hadot (1990b: 83).

⁵ Useful information about it can be found in P. Hadot (1990).

⁶ Boethius also draws from Themistius' paraphrase of the work.

⁷ Some of these commentaries include *prolegomena* to Aristotle's philosophy and to the *Categories* – indeed, as will be seen, most of the citations of the *Topics* are in these *prolegomena*. Olympiodorus' *Prolegomena* have not been treated as something distinct from his commentary on the *Categories*, because such a division has not been made by the editors of the commentaries of Ammonius, Simplicius, Philoponus and David (Elias). It should be noted that the title *Prolegomena to the logic* given in the manuscripts to these Olympiodorus' passages is believed to have been added at a later time. This is how the list of the citations of the *Topics* has been compiled. The commentaries remained in their entirety, or at least for the most part, are collected in the *Commentaria in*

for starting from the commentaries on the *Categories*. First, to explore whether the approaches of various Greek Neoplatonists to the *Topics* are similar or differ significantly, requires an investigation of what a number of different authors say about the same features of the *Topics*. Accordingly, a select body of texts has been chosen as the basis for the analysis. Many authors answer the same questions in their commentaries on the same work;⁸ the *Categories* are the work on which there are a higher number of commentaries written by Greek Neoplatonists. Also, I. Hadot (1990b: 169–177) has shown how all the Neoplatonic commentators on the *Categories* after Proclus deal with the same questions on Aristotle's philosophy.⁹ So comparing what the different commentators on the *Categories* say about the same features of the *Topics* can be a useful way to get a preliminary answer to the question as to whether the approach of the Greek Neoplatonists to the *Topics* is uniform or not.

Second, the *Categories* were the first work of Aristotle in the Neoplatonic curriculum after Iamblichus. So when the Neoplatonists commented on the *Categories* they also discussed issues relating to the study of Aristotle's philosophy in general; the discourse on some of these issues implied a certain conception of the doctrines set forth in the *Topics*. Moreover, I. Hadot (1990b: 177) has shown that, in addressing these issues, the commentators also use arguments taken from the introductions to their commentaries on the other works of Aristotle, including (as will be shown below) the *Topics*.

Third, in the *Categories* Aristotle discussed some key concepts that are also found in the *Topics*. For this reason, when the Neoplatonic commentators studied these concepts, in some cases they referred to what Aristotle had said about them in the *Topics*. For the

Aristotelem Graeca (CAG) series (Porphyry by question and answer = Busse [1887]; Dexippus = Busse [1888]; Ammonius = Busse [1895]; Simplicius = Kalbfleisch [1907]; Olympiodorus = Busse [1902]; Philoponus = Busse [1898]; David [Elias] = Busse [1900]). For these commentaries, searches were made for Τοπικά and Τόποι (in all the plural cases), as well as for τοπική πραγματεία, in the Thesaurus Linguae Graecae (online edition, updated to 22 April, 2014) and the indices of names and of Loci Aristotelici of the CAG volumes were consulted. This search includes the fragments of the commentary of Iamblichus preserved in subsequent commentaries. The text and notes of the Bodéüs (2008) edition of Porphyry's commentary by question and answer were consulted. For the fragments of Porphyry's commentary *Ad Gedalium* reference was made to Smith's (1993) edition, as well as Chiaradonna, Rashed and Sedley's (2013). For the fragments and testimonies of Syrianus' commentary, Cardullo (1995) was referenced. There are no citations of the *Topics* in the anonymous paraphrase of the *Categories* published in the XXIII volume of the CAG, whose author is probably Sophonias anyway. Regarding the implicit references to the *Topics* in all these commentaries cf., among others, Evangelidou (1988: 54), I. Hadot (1990b: 132–134); Luna (1990: 30, 109, 2001: 235, 454, 470–482) and Gaskin (2000: 232).

⁸ Of course this does not mean that the same issues are not sometimes addressed in the commentaries on other works, or generally in other writings. Moreover, as pointed out by Chase (2003: 5–6), one should always keep in mind that the statements of the commentators cannot be abstracted from the context in which they are made: the same author addresses the same issue from different points of view when he comments on works about different subjects and/or of different depth levels, and this possibly also applies to the statements about the *Topics*.

⁹ Cf. Sorabji (1991: 1). Furthermore, Luna (1990: 127–146) has shown that some issues are common to all the commentaries on the first chapter of the *Categories*, although there are also other issues that are only found in one of the two branches of the exegetical tradition.

same reason it had been suggested that the title of the *Categories* could be *Pre-Topics*,¹⁰ so the commentators on the *Categories* often dealt with this hypothesis.¹¹

Among the commentaries on the *Categories* written by Greek Neoplatonists, only those that have survived, in a complete or fragmentary form, in Greek are considered. Those that we have in their entirety – or, at least, of which a substantial part has remained – are those by Porphyry by question and answer, Dexippus, Ammonius, Simplicius, Olympiodorus, Philoponus¹² and David (Elias).¹³ In Simplicius' commentary there are fragments of Porphyry's commentary *Ad Gedalium*; these fragments have been collected by Smith (1993: 35–59). Chiaradonna, Rashed and Sedley (2013) have brought substantial evidence in favour of the identification of the fragment of a commentary on the *Categories* in the Archimedes Palimpsest, with a section of the same commentary *Ad Gedalium*. Fragments of Iamblichus' commentary are preserved by later commentators.¹⁴ Fragments and testimonies of Syrianus' commentary are transmitted by Simplicius and David (Elias): they are collected and translated in Cardullo (1995).¹⁵ All these texts are considered here.

Commentators' statements about the *Topics* are grouped according to the general questions settled by Neoplatonists after Proclus,¹⁶ when they introduced a work by Aristotle (or Porphyry's *Isagoge*). As noted by I. Hadot (1990b: 21–47), these were: purpose (σκοπός), usefulness (τὸ χρησίμῳ), authenticity (τὸ γνήσιον), place in the reading order (ἡ τάξις τῆς ἀναγνώσεως), reason for the title (ἡ αἰτία τῆς ἐπιγραφῆς), part of philosophy to which the work belongs, division into chapters (ἡ εἰς τὰ κεφάλαια διαίρεσις) and manner of the teaching (ὁ τρόπος τῆς διδασκαλίας, this can be found only in David's and Elias' commentaries on the *Isagoge*, but they treat it as customary).¹⁷ This arrangement, as

¹⁰ The view that the *Categories* are an introduction to dialectic, which is discussed in the *Topics*, is still present in secondary literature.

¹¹ Another interesting option would be to start from the examination of the commentaries on the *Prior Analytics*, because there one can find many interesting references to the *Topics*. On these references cf. I. Hadot (1990b: 159).

¹² I. Hadot (1990b: 22–23) believes that this commentary is derived from notes taken by Philoponus as he followed Ammonius' lectures.

¹³ Following a large part of recent literature (see, for example, Hoffmann and I. Hadot 1990; Luna 1990, 2001; Mansfeld 1994; Cardullo 1995; Chase 2003; Calzolari and Barnes 2009), this name is used to refer to the author of the commentary on the *Categories* that has been attributed to David in the manuscripts, to Elias (which according to Manandean is the Christian name of Olympiodorus) by Busse (1900) and Manandean (1928, cited in Mahé 1990), to David again by Arevšatyan (1969, cited in Mahé 1990) and Mahé (1990); Goulet (2000) and Calzolari (2009: 29–32) are unaligned. Shirinian (2009: 90–91) rejects the attribution to David, though she is unsure whether the author is Elias.

¹⁴ On Iamblichus' interpretation of the *Categories* cf. Cardullo (1997). Iamblichus' fragments have been collected by Dalsgaard Larsen (1972). Dillon (1990: 12) shows how one can identify fragments that are not listed by Dalsgaard Larsen.

¹⁵ Also cf. Cardullo (1986). One may remind Proclus' and Damascius' lost commentaries.

¹⁶ Cf. David (Elias) *In Cat.* 107, 24–26.

¹⁷ It is evident that the commentators ignore some of the problems on which modern scholars have focused, such as the chronological position of each work in the Aristotelian corpus. On *prolegomena* cf. also Mansfeld

will be shown, naturally derives (at least for some of these points) from how the commentators discuss the *Topics*. One should, however, keep in mind that the actual content of the *prolegomena* to the Neoplatonic commentaries on the *Topics* is not known (neither would an author writing a commentary on the *Topics* before Proclus have included this list of *prolegomena*). The discussion is arranged according to the *prolegomena* for ease of exposition, rather than to speculate about the actual content of the commentaries on the *Topics*.

Having set out the various statements on the *Topics*, it will be shown how all the commentators on the *Categories* after Proclus share the same general approach to the *Topics*, and that referring to the *Topics* to explain words and theses of the *Categories* appears to be a feature of a tradition that only includes Porphyry, Dexippus and Simplicius.

1. Purpose (σκοπός)

According to Philoponus, the purpose of the *Topics* is not plain.¹⁸ Even today there is a debate between different opinions on the definition of dialectical arguments, studying which is the purpose of the *Topics*.

Simplicius and David (Elias) state that in the *Topics*, as in other works, Aristotle deals with those arguments that have only the appearance of the method; David (Elias) specifies that their premises are not always true.¹⁹ Likewise, Olympiodorus says that the *Topics* are one of the works in which Aristotle addresses sophistical syllogisms, that is, those arguments that misrepresent truth.²⁰ According to Philoponus, in the group of works to which the *Topics* belong, Aristotle discusses the reasonings found in paralogisms.²¹

As to the purpose of the *Topics* specifically, both Philoponus and David (Elias) cite dialectic. Philoponus states that the purpose (σκοπός) of the *Topics* is the study of the dialectical method and, paraphrasing Aristotle,²² he defines dialectic as the method of demonstration that starts from ἔνδοξα,²³ and that can be applied to any problem that can

(1994) and Militello (2010: 53–56).

¹⁸ Phlp. *In Cat.* 8, 7–19 (*prolegomena* to Aristotle's philosophy, and more specifically the one about which issues are to be addressed before reading an Aristotelian work).

¹⁹ Simp. *In Cat.* 4, 28–5, 1. David (Elias) *In Cat.* 116, 29–117, 14.

²⁰ Olymp. *Proll.* 8, 4–28. Ammonius too says that the writings that belong to the third group of Aristotle's instrumental works, which includes the *Topics* although these are not mentioned, are about sophistical syllogisms (Ammon. *In Cat.* 5, 6–29).

²¹ Phlp. *In Cat.* 5, 8–14. The passages on the subject of the logical works that are not directly about the method – passages which will be analysed in more detail in section 6 – are all found within the discussion of the *prolegomenon* concerning the classification of Aristotle's writings.

²² Busse (1898) refers to Arist. *Top.* I 1, 100 a 18–20.

²³ Nowadays the concept of ἔνδοξα is not interpreted in the same way by all scholars: some think that the ἔνδοξα are the opinions of most people or at least of some wise men, others interpret them as premises that are likely to be accepted by the other party in a dialectical debate.

be raised, hence to statements that are either true or false.²⁴ According to David (Elias) the *Topics* are about dialectical syllogisms, that is, those with premises that may be either true or false, but they are true more often than not.²⁵ One may note that these authors ground their definition of dialectical argument on its premises being not always true and not, as some modern interpreters do, on it being a process of asking questions to a party (who of course will reply according to their own opinions, which are not always true) in order to refute their thesis.

Finally, Simplicius states that the theories introduced in the *Topics* are more common (κοινότερον) than those provided in the other works by Aristotle, that is, they are within reach of a wider audience.²⁶

2. Usefulness (τὸ χρήσιμον)

Several commentators think that the usefulness of the *Topics* is not obvious. Olympiodorus mentions the concerns of those who do not understand what benefit can be derived from the study of the subjects of the works belonging to the third group of the logical writings, including the *Topics*.²⁷ As was stated, Philoponus believes that the purpose of this work is the dialectical method, which can also be applied to false statements; he adds that it is not clear how these statements could be useful. David (Elias) believes that the *Topics* seem to be a useless work, because one is taught to build and destroy the same arguments.

The usefulness of the *Topics* not being obvious makes the discussion of this issue a requirement, according to Philoponus and David (Elias).²⁸ The former notes that, in the case of the *Topics* – for example, as opposed to *On the Heavens* and *On the Soul* – the question of usefulness should be studied, even when the purpose of the work has been identified. The reason is because the solution of the question about usefulness does not follow from the discussion of the first *prolegomenon*.²⁹

It is now possible to look at the commentators' answers to the question on the usefulness of the *Topics*. According to Olympiodorus, in the *Topics* (as well as in the *Sophistical Refutations*, the *Rhetoric* and the *Poetics*) Aristotle dealt with sophistical syllogisms – which distort the truth and so cloud knowledge – as a means of helping to identify and

²⁴ Phlp. *In Cat.* 8, 7–19 (*prolegomena* to Aristotle's philosophy, and specifically the heading on which questions must be addressed before one can read a given Aristotelian work).

²⁵ David (Elias) *In Cat.* 116, 29–117, 14 (*prolegomenon* concerning the classification of Aristotelian writings).

²⁶ Simp. *In Cat.* 7, 1–22 (*prolegomenon* about the reason of Aristotle's obscurity).

²⁷ Olymp. *Proll.* 8, 4–28 (*prolegomenon* concerning the classification of the writings of Aristotle).

²⁸ David (Elias) *In Cat.* 127, 13–21 (*prolegomena* to Aristotle's philosophy, namely the one on the list of the issues that should be addressed before reading a work of Aristotle).

²⁹ Phlp. *In Cat.* 8, 7–19.

avoid these syllogisms. This is akin to physicians, who study not only the condition of good health but also diseases.³⁰ David (Elias)'s opinion is similar: according to him, studying all kinds of syllogism, that is, not only the apodictic but also the non-demonstrative, including the dialectical considered in the *Topics*, is useful in order to distinguish truth from falsehood (and at the same time good from evil). This is, according to the commentator, the goal of logic, which is used by philosophy as a tool, just as carpenters and architects use their tools in order to distinguish the straight from the curved or the tilted.³¹

But the commentators also discuss specifically about the usefulness of the *Topics*. According to Philoponus, Aristotle clarifies how this work is useful when he says that it helps exercise, conversation and philosophical methods.³² As for the latter reason, one can refer to Philoponus' assertion that the *Topics*, like the other works in which Aristotle discusses paralogsms, are useful for understanding the correct demonstrative method.³³ It is possible that the commentator – as Olympiodorus and David (Elias) do – means that, by comparing the correct method with the wrong one, a better understanding of the former is gained.

Also, David (Elias) states that the purpose of the *Topics* is exercise: according to the commentator, the pressure exerted on the soul by opposing dialectical arguments generates the light of truth. David (Elias) compares this phenomenon to the generation of heat and then light by rubbing two stones.³⁴ The similarity between these statements and those of Philoponus has already been pointed out by I. Hadot (1990b: 142; 158; 172).³⁵

It may be noted that such theses about the usefulness of the *Topics* do not match those of at least some of the modern interpreters, according to whom the dialectical debates that Aristotle referred to were a valuable exercise in the use of logic, not because they

³⁰ Olymp. *Proll.* 8, 4–28. Likewise, Ammonius thinks that the reason why Aristotle in some works – and, as will be seen, the commentator means the *Topics*, too – dealt with sophisticated arguments is that in this way it is possible to avoid such arguments. Aristotle acted as physicians do: they, when teaching how to get a healthy state, refer not only to what is to be achieved, but also to what should be avoided. Citing another simile, Ammonius says that discussing sophisticated syllogisms when dealing with the method is like studying the mistakes that you can make expressing yourself, when studying speech (Ammon. *In Cat.* 5, 6–29). The comparison with studying diseases and their causes is especially true for the *Sophistical Refutations*: indeed, it is mentioned by David (Elias) (David [Elias] *In Cat.* 127, 22–24), as well as by Ammonius in the commentary on *Prior Analytics* (Ammon. *In APr.* 3, 32–36), when they talk about the purpose of this work. All these passages have been compared by I. Hadot (1990b: 142, 175).

³¹ David (Elias) *In Cat.* 116, 29–117, 14. Both Olympiodorus and David (Elias) cite these arguments in the *prolegomenon* concerning the division of Aristotle's writings.

³² Phlp. *In Cat.* 8, 7–19 (*prolegomena* to Aristotle's philosophy, and specifically the one on the issues to be dealt with before reading each work). Busse [1898] refers to Arist. *Top.* 1.2, 101 a 26–28.

³³ Phlp. *In Cat.* 5, 8–14 (*prolegomenon* concerning the classification of the writings of Aristotle).

³⁴ David (Elias) *In Cat.* 127, 13–21 (*prolegomena* to Aristotle's philosophy, and more specifically the one about which issues should be discussed before reading an Aristotelian work).

³⁵ I. Hadot emphasises the fact that, although in both cases these statements are made in the *prolegomenon* concerning the issues to be addressed before reading a work of Aristotle, Philoponus' passage is at the end of the *prolegomenon*, after the commentator set out all the preliminary issues, while David (Elias)'s passage is within the discussion of usefulness.

led to the search for truth by other means (the validity of which would be demonstrated by its contrast with dialectic, as the Neoplatonists thought). Even more distant from the Neoplatonic interpretation of the *Topics* are those modern scholars who think that Aristotle assigned to dialectic a role in the discovery of the first principles of apodictic arguments.

Although it is not about the general usefulness of the work, a remark by Simplicius and David (Elias) may be cited here. The two commentators state that when there are students who question the obvious, one can apply the advice that Aristotle gives in the *Topics*: these students need “either a reproach or a sensation”.³⁶ This passage from the *Topics* is therefore useful for the training of students. Simplicius states that if students contradict what should not be contradicted because they have not paid attention, then they need a sensation (αἰσθήσεως),³⁷ to do so; but if they have indeed paid attention, then this means that they want to show their dialectical skill, and in this case they need a reproach.³⁸ David (Elias) explains that the student who denies what is evident needs a reproach if he does it knowing the truth, or a sensation if he does it because of ignorance.³⁹ The fact that Simplicius and David (Elias) cite the same passage has been highlighted by I. Hadot (1990b: 135; 171).

3. Authenticity (τὸ γνήσιον)

Although, in the passages considered, there are no direct references to the problem of the authenticity of the *Topics*, it can be noted, for example, that David (Elias) states that Aristotle was capable of giving titles to his own works, and cites the example of the *Topics*. The commentator is therefore assuming that the *Topics* are a genuine work of Aristotle.⁴⁰

4. Place in the reading order (ἡ τάξις τῆς ἀναγνώσεως)

The Neoplatonic commentators’ opinion about the place of the *Topics* in the reading order of Aristotle’s works is revealed by their discussion of two issues.⁴¹ The first one is whether the right title of the *Categories* is *Pre-Topics*, since this title presupposes that the *Topics*

³⁶ Kalbfleisch (1907) and Busse (1900) refer to Arist. *Top.* I 11, 105 a 4.

³⁷ Hoffmann (1990: 15) translates this word as “au sens commun”, and I. Hadot (1990b: 15) thinks that, when mentioning this passage, both Simplicius and David (Elias) interpret αἰσθησις as common sense.

³⁸ Simp. *In Cat.* 7, 33–8, 8.

³⁹ David (Elias) *In Cat.* 122, 22–24. Simplicius’ and David (Elias)’s passages are parts of their *prolegomena* to Aristotle’s philosophy, and more specifically of the one about the features that make a good student.

⁴⁰ David (Elias) *In Cat.* 132, 24–133, 8 (preliminary question on the title of the *Categories*).

⁴¹ On the history of the place of the *Topics* within the *Organon* cf. *inter alia* Brunschwig (1994: 486–488).

are to be read immediately after the *Categories*. The second issue is the classification of Aristotle's works: one can analyse the order in which the commentators mention the writings that form the *Organon*.

Starting from the first issue, as Brunschwig (1994: 486) has highlighted, Porphyry, Ammonius, Simplicius, Olympiodorus and David (Elias) point out that some earlier authors have given the title Πρὸ τῶν τοπικῶν or Πρὸ τῶν τόπων to the *Categories*:⁴² in both cases this title can be translated as *Pre-Topics*.⁴³ Porphyry, Ammonius and Simplicius specify that those who gave this title to the *Categories* did it because they considered the *Categories* an introduction to the *Topics*. More specifically, the title *Pre-Topics* implies that the *Topics* should be read immediately after the *Categories*. That this was the opinion of the authors who opted for the title *Pre-Topics* is evident from what Ammonius and Simplicius say. The former states that the opinion of those who see the *Categories* as an introduction to the *Topics* is wrong, because the subject of the *Categories* is naturally followed by *On Interpretation*; it is likely that Olympiodorus means it, too, when he states that the *Categories* “precede *On Interpretation* and the other works”. Therefore, the authors cited by Ammonius and perhaps Olympiodorus assumed that the *Categories* immediately preceded the *Topics*. Indeed, Simplicius explicitly states that the title *Pre-Topics* has been given by those who set the *Categories* immediately before the *Topics*.

Olympiodorus says that “most people” (οἱ πολλοὶ) titled the *Categories* *Pre-Topics*. Simplicius specifies that it was Adrastus of Aphrodisias, in his book *On the Order of Aristotle's Philosophy*, who considered the *Categories* an introduction to the *Topics*. Since it was an eminent Peripatetic, not an ordinary man, who thought so, Simplicius is motivated to try to understand the reasons of this opinion. According to Simplicius, Adrastus' train of thought was perhaps something like this:⁴⁴ first of all, one has to study the individual words (*Categories*). Then comes syllogistic reasoning, which starts from premises that are either unconditionally true (in sequence: *On Interpretation* – *Prior Analytics* – *Posterior Analytics*) or likely and accepted by popular opinion (*Topics*). This is the reason why Aristotle explains what syllogism is in two works, that is, both in the *Prior Analytics* and in the *Topics*.⁴⁵ In order to decide whether the works to be read first are those about scientific syllogisms or the *Topics*, one has to consider that the right method is to start from what is merely likely and to reach what is always true. Therefore, the *Topics* should be

⁴² Πρὸ τῶν τοπικῶν : Porphyry, Simplicius at p. 15. Πρὸ τῶν τόπων : Ammonius, Simplicius at p. 379, Olympiodorus, David (Elias).

⁴³ Hoffmann (1987–1988: 280) states that *Pre-Topics* is actually the oldest title among the ones known nowadays, since it is earlier than the title *Categories* itself.

⁴⁴ According to I. Hadot (1990b: 83–84) Simplicius here could refer to Ammonius' reason to make his pupils study the *Topics* before the *Posterior Analytics*.

⁴⁵ Kalbfleisch [1907] refers to Arist. *Top.* I 1, 100 a 25.

read first, and they must therefore immediately follow the *Categories*. Although Simplicius does not accept this argument, he thinks that it is “sensible”.⁴⁶

In the text of David (Elias)’s commentary that has been handed down in the manuscripts and published by Busse (1900), it is said that, “someone [titled the *Categories*] Πρὸ τῶν τόπων, for example, Archytas of Tarentum, others Περὶ τῶν καθόλου λόγων, for example, Adrastus of Aphrodisias.”⁴⁷ However, it is most likely a mistake and a switch of names made by the student who took the class notes⁴⁸ or a scribe. In fact, Simplicius attributes to Adrastus the idea that the *Categories* introduce the *Topics*. On the other hand, the Neoplatonists ascribed to Archytas the treatise Περὶ τοῦ καθόλου λόγου ἧτοι δέκα κατηγοριῶν, which had actually been written in the first or second century AD.⁴⁹ It can therefore be assumed that David (Elias) attributed the preference for the title *Pre-Topics* to Adrastus, and mentioned Archytas’ treatise *On the Universal Logos* or *On the Universal Logoi*, that had inspired Aristotle.

In a different passage, David (Elias) states that the title *Pre-Topics* was regarded by Herminius as being correct. The Peripatetic philosopher argued that Aristotle, after discussing the categories themselves, first addressed the issue of opposites in the so-called *postpraedicamenta* because this issue is particularly relevant within dialectic; indeed, in dialectic the two parties take two opposing positions.⁵⁰

Porphury, Ammonius, Simplicius, Olympiodorus and David (Elias) reject the title *Pre-Topics* and the interpretation of the *Categories* as introductory to the *Topics*, from which the title possibly stems. Olympiodorus and David (Elias) argue that the *Categories* are not only before the *Topics* but also before the other works (Olympiodorus cites *On Interpretation* as an example).⁵¹ Ammonius argues that the discussion of simple words, which can be found in the *Categories*, can only be followed by the study of nouns and verbs, that is, by *On Interpretation*.⁵² Porphyry and Simplicius argue that the *Categories* are propaedeutic to the doctrines of all Aristotle’s logical works, not only to those of the *Topics*. Simplicius adds that the *Categories* also prepare to all the ontological doctrines, because studying the simple things is a prerequisite for the understanding of the most complex ones.⁵³ Porphyry adds instead that, since each of the subjects of the *Categories* is

⁴⁶ As noted by Strange (1992: 31), Simplicius’ testimony, in a different passage, about the fact that Andronicus already knew the title *Pre-Topics* is a sign that this title had already been proposed before the Common Era.

⁴⁷ David (Elias) *In Cat.* 132, 24–133, 8.

⁴⁸ On the presence of erroneous attributions in the doxographical sections of the *prolegomena* to the *Categories* cf. Hoffmann (1987–1988: 280).

⁴⁹ Cf. I. Hadot (1990a: 6).

⁵⁰ David (Elias) *In Cat.* 241, 20–34 (introduction to *postpraedicamenta*).

⁵¹ Olymp. *Proll.* 22, 34–36. David (Elias) *In Cat.* 132, 24–133, 8.

⁵² According to Strange (1992: 32) this argument is also implicit in Porphyry’s statements.

⁵³ Simp. *In Cat.* 15, 26–16, 16. Simplicius, Olympiodorus and David (Elias) deal with the issue of the title *Pre-Topics* in a *prolegomenon* to the *Categories*: the one about the title of the work. Simplicius cites that someone

“a product of nature” (φύσεως [...] ἔργον), this work should be considered an introduction to the *Physics* rather than to the *Topics*.⁵⁴

Before moving on to the place that is assigned to the *Topics* when dealing with the classification of Aristotle's works, it should be pointed out that Ammonius differs from the other commentators in one aspect: he does not directly refer to the authors who have opted for the title *Pre-Topics*; rather, he begins by citing the opinion of some commentators, who have argued that the *postpraedicamenta* are a spurious addition written by the authors that wanted to read the *Categories* as an introduction to the *Topics*.⁵⁵

As for the *prolegomenon* regarding the classification of Aristotle's writings (see section 6), different commentaries offer slightly different statements. In Simplicius' and Philoponus' commentaries the *Topics* are mentioned first among the works belonging to the third group of the logical writings, while at the second place there are the *Sophistical Refutations*. So the *Topics* are placed between the *Posterior Analytics* (which is, according to all the commentators, the only work in the second section of the *Organon*) and the *Sophistical Refutations*.⁵⁶ In David (Elias)'s commentary, too, the *Topics* are placed at the start of the list of the logical works belonging to the third group, but here they are followed by the *Rhetoric*. The order is, therefore, *Posterior Analytics* – *Topics* – *Rhetoric*.⁵⁷ In Olympiodorus' commentary the *Topics* are mentioned in the second place among the works that complement the method, after the *Sophistical Refutations* and before the *Rhetoric*.⁵⁸

However, as I. Hadot (1990b: 82) pointed out,⁵⁹ the *Topics* were probably regarded by all Neoplatonic commentators on the *Categories* as the first work of the third group of

has wrongly given the title *Pre-Topics* in Simp. *In Cat.* 379, 1–12, that is, in his introduction to chapter 10, and generally to all the *postpraedicamenta*.

⁵⁴ Porph. *In Cat.* 56, 18–31; 57, 13–15 (in the part of the preface that is devoted to the *Categories* title). On the significance of this passage in order to understand Porphyry's approach to the *Categories* cf. Hoffmann (1986–1987: 303) and Evangelou (1988: 20).

⁵⁵ Ammon. *In Cat.* 14, 3–15, 2. This passage is part of the *prolegomena* to the *Categories*, namely of the one on the division of the work into chapters. It is a different *prolegomenon* from the one in which Simplicius, Olympiodorus and David (Elias) talk about the title *Pre-Topics*. However, I. Hadot (1990b: 158) reminds that it is not unusual that the same argument is reported by two or more post-Proclean commentators on the *Categories* in different places. According to Brunschwig (1994: 486), Ammonius' doxography on the *postpraedicamenta* comes from the mingling of two different exegetical traditions, which were two different solutions to the problem of explaining the similarities between the subject of the *postpraedicamenta* and the subject of the *Topics*: commentators such as Andronicus explained this similarity by arguing that the final chapters of the *Categories* had been written by an author posterior to Aristotle, while commentators such as Adrastus deduced that the *Categories*, ending with a sort of introduction to the *Topics*, were immediately followed by the work on dialectic. On Ammonius' commentary also cf. Pelletier (1983).

⁵⁶ Simp. *In Cat.* 4, 10–5, 2. Phlp. *In Cat.* 3, 8–5, 14.

⁵⁷ David (Elias) *In Cat.* 113, 17–117, 14.

⁵⁸ Olymp. *Proll.* 6, 6–8, 28.

⁵⁹ On the order of the works that are part of the *Organon* generally cf. I. Hadot (1990b: 81–84), who also highlights how by reading Ammonius' commentary on the *Prior Analytics* and Philoponus' on the *Posterior Analytics* one sees that since Ammonius the *Topics* were studied immediately after the *Prior Analytics*.

the logical works, a group which followed the *Posterior Analytics*; after the *Topics* there were the *Sophistical Refutations* (followed, in turn, by the *Rhetoric* and the *Poetics*). The reason why these works are cited in a different order in different commentaries is possibly that the students who took the notes from which some commentaries stemmed were careless.⁶⁰ Brunschwig (1994: 485–487), too, says that according to all the fifth- and sixth century Greek commentators on the *Categories*, the *Topics* are between the *Posterior Analytics* and the *Sophistical Refutations*, in such a way that one goes from the best kind of syllogism to the worst.

5. Reason for the title (ή αίτία τής έπιγραφής)

Before talking about the reason for the title, it should be recalled that the Neoplatonic commentators cite two slightly different titles: Porphyry and Dexippus refer to the work as Τολικά, Ammonius, Philoponus and Olympiodorus as Τόποι. Simplicius and David (Elias) use both titles.⁶¹

Olympiodorus says that the title *Topics* seems to disagree with the content of the work. According to the commentator the fact that there appears to be a disagreement between the title and the content makes it necessary to investigate the reason for the former: while in the case of other works this point can be discussed along with the purpose, when it comes to the *Topics* it deserves to be dealt with separately.⁶²

Philoponus and David (Elias) argue that the reason for the title *Topics* is not clear;⁶³ this is also the opinion of modern scholars. David (Elias) states that the title is obscure because Aristotle refers to a sense of the word τόποι that differs from its common meaning: the τόποι Aristotle discusses are not limits that contain something, like a barrel containing wine.

David (Elias) explains that the τόποι that Aristotle mentions in the title of the work are rules that contain other rules. Therefore, the meaning attributed to the word, while being different from the common one, similarly refers to the idea of containing.⁶⁴ Perhaps in relation to this explanation of the title, David (Elias) says elsewhere – when he deals

⁶⁰ On the commentaries “from the teacher’s voice”, cf. Cardullo (2002).

⁶¹ Τολικά in Simp. *In Cat.* 7, 17; 12, 8; 15, 28–16, 14; 113, 27 and David (Elias) *In Cat.* 116, 34; Τόποι in Simp. *In Cat.* 4, 31; 164, 12; 379, 10 and David (Elias) *In Cat.* 107, 22; 124, 30; 127, 16–18; 127, 30; 132, 26–133, 7; 241, 30. Simplicius also speaks of τοπική πραγματεία at 16, 12; 379, 11.

⁶² Olymp. *Proll.* 12, 37–13, 2.

⁶³ Phlp. *In Cat.* 8, 7–19.

⁶⁴ David (Elias) *In Cat.* 127, 24–33. Olympiodorus’, Philoponus’ and David (Elias)’s statements about the title *Topics* are part of the *prolegomena* to Aristotle’s philosophy, and more specifically of the one about the issues to be dealt with before reading an Aristotelian work. I. Hadot (1990b: 158), comparing Philoponus and David (Elias), points out that they both speak of the usefulness of the *Topics* and that they do it in similar terms, but that only the latter explains the reason for the title of the treatise.

with the issue of the title *Categories* – that Aristotle aptly named the *Topics*.⁶⁵ It could be noted that today there is a different hypothesis to explain why Aristotle used the word τόποι to mean the rules of dialectical arguments: it is thought to refer to the mnemonic practice of mentally associating each statement that one wants to remember with a physical place.

6. Part of philosophy to which the work belongs

As it has been pointed out by I. Hadot (1990b: 65), Simplicius, Olympiodorus, Philoponus and David (Elias) state that the *Topics* belong to Aristotle's instrumental works (that is, the logical ones, since logic is according to Neoplatonists also an instrument for philosophy), and more specifically to the third group of them.⁶⁶ The instrumental works are in turn a subset of the syntagmatic writings (that is, the ones that discuss their subject in a systematic way), and particularly of the ones in which Aristotle speaks in the first person (that is, his treatises). The syntagmatic writings are part of the general works of Aristotle, which are, together with the particular and the intermediate ones, the “most general kinds” in the Neoplatonic division of Aristotle's writings.

Simplicius and David (Elias) state that the third group of instrumental works is about “the reasonings that wear the mask of demonstration” (τὰ [...] περὶ τῶν τῆν ἀπόδειξιν ὑποδυομένων),⁶⁷ that is, they have only the appearance of the method.⁶⁸ The fact that the two commentators are using the same wording to indicate the nature of the works belonging to this group has been pointed out by I. Hadot (1990b: 78; 173). David (Elias) explains that the reasonings discussed in the third group are non-apodictic syllogisms, that is, those syllogisms whose premises are not always true. According to the commentator, in each of the four works that belong to this group (*Topics*, *Rhetoric*, *Sophistical Refutations* and *Poetics*) Aristotle deals with a different kind of non-apodictic syllogism. These kinds can be placed on a scale, depending on the degree of truth of their premises, and the dialectical syllogisms discussed in the *Topics* will then be on top, because their premises are true more often than not, while the premises of rhetorical syllogisms contain truth and falsity to the same extent, those of sophistical syllogisms are false more often than not, and those of poetical syllogisms are mythical, that is totally false.⁶⁹ Philoponus,

⁶⁵ David (Elias) *In Cat.* 132, 24–133, 8.

⁶⁶ I. Hadot (1990b: 81–82) has shown that Ammonius thought that the *Topics* fell within the third group of works on logic, too.

⁶⁷ About the origin of this expression cf. I. Hadot (1990b: 78).

⁶⁸ Simp. *In Cat.* 4, 10–5, 2.

⁶⁹ David (Elias) *In Cat.* 113, 17–117, 14. On the differences between David (Elias)'s classification of syllogisms and Ammonius' statements in his commentary on the *Prior Analytics* cf. I. Hadot (1990b: 81).

for his part, says that the third group of logical works deals with the reasonings that are typical of paralogsms.⁷⁰

Olympiodorus states instead that the writings belonging to the third group are about “what purifies the method” (<τὰ> καθάροντα τὴν μέθοδον). The meaning of this expression can be reasonably deduced from what the commentator immediately adds, that is, that these writings allow us to avoid sophistical reasonings.⁷¹ It can be assumed that Olympiodorus meant that, by removing the incorrect syllogisms from the method, these works purify the method itself.⁷²

Having discussed the place that the *Topics* occupy within Aristotelian philosophy, some statements are considered about the relationship between the *Topics* themselves and the other works of Aristotle. Specifically, the following three theses are highlighted: some doctrines are common to the *Topics* and other works; what Aristotle says in his other writings also applies to the *Topics*; if you have doubts about a statement in an Aristotelian work, you can look for confirmation of the correct interpretation in the *Topics*.

The first of these theses can be found in Simplicius, who says that the same division into the 10 highest genera proposed in the *Categories* is also seen in the *Topics*.⁷³ One can find the second thesis in Dexippus, who states that the definition of genus given in the *Topics* – according to which it is the answer to the question “what is it?” asked about several things belonging to different species⁷⁴ – is said in 10 different ways. These are the 10 categories.⁷⁵ Similarly, according to Dexippus each of the three senses of “same” mentioned in the *Topics*⁷⁶ is predicated according to the 10 categories.⁷⁷ That is, Dexippus states that the 10 ways in which something can be said, which Aristotle explains in the *Categories*, apply to the definitions of genus and same given in the *Topics*.⁷⁸

References to the *Topics* as an aid in the interpretation of the *Categories* can be found in Porphyry, Dexippus and Simplicius. In order to justify the interpretation of the expres-

⁷⁰ Phlp. *In Cat.* 3, 8–5, 14.

⁷¹ Olymp. *Proll.* 6, 6–8, 28. All the passages mentioned so far in this section belong to the preliminary question of the classification of Aristotle’s works.

⁷² Ammonius says something similar: according to him, the third group of instrumental works includes those writings that, while not directly concerned with the scientific method or its principles, deals with related subjects, so that the discussion of the method would not be complete without including these writings. More specifically, they are about erroneous sophistical reasonings, which must be avoided (Ammon. *In Cat.* 5, 6–29).

⁷³ Simp. *In Cat.* 9, 31–13, 18 (discussion of the purpose of the *Categories* in the *prolegomena* to this work). As of Aristotle’s passage, Kalbfleisch (1907) refers to Arist. *Top.* I 9, 103 b 22 sq.; Chase (2003: 107) adds a reference to Arist. *Top.* I 15, 107 a 3–12.

⁷⁴ Busse (1888) refers to Arist. *Top.* I 5, 102 a 31.

⁷⁵ Dexipp. *In Cat.* 14, 32–15, 2.

⁷⁶ Busse (1888) refers to Arist. *Top.* VII 1, 151 b 28; 152 b 31.

⁷⁷ Dexipp. *In Cat.* 15, 3–13. These statements are found in the first part of Dexippus’ commentary, concerning general questions about the *Categories* and coming before the exegesis of the first line of the text.

⁷⁸ Of course, a list of the 10 categories can be found in the *Topics*, too.

sion “[differentiae] that differ in species”⁷⁹ (τῶ εἶδει) used by Aristotle in the *Categories*⁸⁰ with reference to those differences not sharing the same definition, Porphyry and Dexippus argue that in the *Topics* Aristotle uses εἶδος as a synonym for λόγος, too. The parallels between Porphyry’s and Dexippus’ texts were pointed out by Chiaradonna, Rashed and Sedley (2013: 165). Porphyry finds the equivalence between εἶδος and λόγος in the first book of the *Topics*, where Aristotle says that sometimes it is both in name and in fact that two things are contrary “in species, that is, in definition”.⁸¹ Chiaradonna, Rashed and Sedley note that it is unclear whether Porphyry intends “that is, in definition” as part of the quotation, which does not have an exact match in the text of the *Topics* that has passed to us; however, it should be a reference to Arist. *Top.* I 15, 106 a 9–13. Dexippus – according to which the referenced interpretation of the *Categories* passage is not the only possible one – states that exchanging εἶδος and λόγος is “habitual to him” (that is, to Aristotle, σύννητες αὐτῶ) in the *Topics*.⁸² It is not clear what passages of the *Topics* Dexippus is thinking of: Busse (1888) refers to Arist. *Top.* I 7, 103 a 8 sq.; Dillon (1990: 161) does not find this reference apt, but is unable to point out an alternative passage.

One should cite two passages from Simplicius’ commentary here. In the first one, in order to confirm that Aristotle, when he says that a *property* (ἴδιον) of substance is being able to welcome contraries while remaining one,⁸³ means that this feature does not apply to the genus *substance* but rather to each of its individuals, Simplicius reminds that this is the definition of property given in the *Topics*.⁸⁴ In the second passage, Simplicius assesses the various interpretations of the Aristotelian thesis that state (ἕξις) and condition (διάθεσις) are to be counted among the relatives;⁸⁵ in order to decide between the different interpretations, the commentator uses the agreement with the statements in the *Topics* as a criterion. Specifically, he says that in the *Topics* state and condition are said in relation to those who possess them.⁸⁶

⁷⁹ Like in Dillon (1990: 61), εἶδος is translated with “species” to make it easier to understand the problem that Porphyry and Dexippus face.

⁸⁰ Arist. *Cat.* 3, 1 b 16–17.

⁸¹ Porph. *In Cat. ad Gedalium* ed. Chiaradonna, Rashed, Sedley 13, 3–20.

⁸² Dexipp. *In Cat.* 29, 29–30, 9.

⁸³ Arist. *Cat.* 5, 4 a 10–22.

⁸⁴ Simp. *In Cat.* 113, 17–114, 4. Kalbfleisch (1907) refers to Arist. *Top.* V 1, 128 b 34.

⁸⁵ Arist. *Cat.* 7, 6 b 2–3.

⁸⁶ Simp. *In Cat.* 163, 30–164, 27. On this passage from Simplicius’ commentary – a passage which as Fleet (2002: 161) says is quite complex – cf. Cardullo (1995: 291–297). As of the *Topics* passage mentioned, Kalbfleisch (1907) refers to Arist. *Top.* IV 4, 124 b 33; 125 a 33. If the *Μεθοδικά*, which Simplicius refers to in another passage of his commentary, are the *Topics*, this would be a further case in which the reference to the content of the *Topics* is used by the commentator in his exegesis of the *Categories*: indeed, Simplicius states that in the *Μεθοδικά* Aristotle talks about categories along with negations, privations, inflexions and indeterminate forms (Simp. *In Cat.* 65, 2–13). On the question whether the *Μεθοδικά* are to be identified with the *Topics* cf. Luna (2001: 669–673).

7. Division into chapters (ἡ εἰς τὰ κεφάλαια διαίρεσις)

Although, technically, the question as to whether it is true that the last chapters of the *Categories* were originally introductory to the *Topics* – thus being either the first chapters of the work or the last ones of the writing that preceded it⁸⁷ – does not fit the issue of the division of the *Topics* into chapters, it can be addressed here.⁸⁸ Olympiodorus, introducing the 10th chapter of the *Categories*, says that according to some commentators the *postpraedicamenta* had not been placed by Aristotle at the end of the *Categories*, but rather in another location. The same commentators argued that the *postpraedicamenta* should be given the title *Pre-Topics*, because the study of opposites contributes to the construction and destruction of arguments, which is the object of dialectic, that is, of the *Topics*. Olympiodorus implies that the commentators who claim that the *postpraedicamenta* had not been intended by Aristotle as the last part of the *Categories* thought that these pages were originally an introduction to the *Topics*. Olympiodorus, who disagrees with this theory, replies to it by pointing out the links between the *postpraedicamenta* and the previous chapters of the *Categories*.⁸⁹

This passage can be compared with Ammonius' discussion of the problem whether or not the correct title for the *Categories* is *Pre-Topics*, since both Olympiodorus and Ammonius cite earlier commentators who posit that the *postpraedicamenta* are about a subject similar to the one discussed in the *Topics* and that they were not part of the original text of the *Categories*. In addition, both Ammonius and Olympiodorus refer to the title *Pre-Topics*.

However, there are some fundamental differences between Ammonius' and Olympiodorus' discussions. First, in Ammonius' doxography earlier exegetes hold that the *postpraedicamenta* are spurious: Ammonius says that according to them, "these chapters have been added as spurious" (ταῦτα προσγεγράφηι νόθα) to the *Categories*. On the other hand Olympiodorus clearly states that these commentators thought that the *postpraedicamenta* had been written by Aristotle. Indeed, this is the second opinion on the *postpraedicamenta* that Olympiodorus mentions, and while the first one is that these chapters are spurious, the commentators supporting the second opinion are "those who say that the part before us is not spurious" (οἱ δὲ λέγοντες νόθον μὴ εἶναι αὐτό [stands for τὸ τμήμα τὸ προκείμενον]).

Second, in Ammonius' commentary it is stated that the title *Pre-Topics* has been given (a) to the whole work (b) by the authors who (according to the commentators who thought that Aristotle was not the author of the *postpraedicamenta*) wrote the *postprae-*

⁸⁷ As will be seen, it is not clear to which of these two possibilities Olympiodorus and possibly Simplicius refer.

⁸⁸ On the *postpraedicamenta* also see the aforementioned passage from David (Elias)'s commentary, which shares some themes with the passages to be described in this section.

⁸⁹ Olymp. *In Cat.* 133, 8–134, 32.

dicamenta and placed them at the end of the *Categories*. In Olympiodorus' commentary it is stated instead that the title *Pre-Topics* has been given (a) only to the *postpraedicamenta* (b) by commentators who rejected the idea that the *postpraedicamenta* were part of the original text of the *Categories*.

Moreover, Ammonius, while not agreeing with those who thought that the *postpraedicamenta* were not part of the *Categories* (he gives a different explanation of the position and role of the *postpraedicamenta* within the work), does not reply to them: instead, he focuses on the title *Pre-Topics* being given to the *Categories*. Olympiodorus, for his part, does reply to those who deny that the *postpraedicamenta* belong to the *Categories*. That is, Ammonius refutes the idea that the *Categories* introduce the *Topics*, Olympiodorus refutes the idea that the *postpraedicamenta* do so.⁹⁰ Another difference between the two passages lies in their position because, while Ammonius' is placed in the *prolegomena*, Olympiodorus' is placed in his introduction to chapter 10.

Several hypotheses can be formulated in order to explain the differences between Ammonius' and Olympiodorus' doxographies. Of course it is possible that the two commentators refer to two different traditions: according to one (cited by Ammonius) the *postpraedicamenta* were written by the same authors who gave the title *Pre-Topics* to the *Categories*, while according to the other one (mentioned by Olympiodorus) the *postpraedicamenta* were written by Aristotle as an introduction to the *Topics* and they were later moved by someone else. The similarities between the two passages, however, could make us think that they refer to the same tradition. Moreover, since neither Ammonius nor Olympiodorus mention the names of the commentators whose opinion they are reporting, it is not possible to be sure that they are different exegetes. It is then possible that Ammonius and Olympiodorus, who according to I. Hadot (1990b: 176–177) elaborated extemporaneously what they remembered of the exegetical tradition, had different memories about the thesis of the same commentators of the *Categories*. Basically, either Ammonius or Olympiodorus would wrongly recollect the thesis of the commentators who thought that the *postpraedicamenta* were not part of the original text of the *Categories*. Moreover, the confusion could be attributed to the student from whose notes the commentary derives,⁹¹ rather than to the teacher explaining the *Categories*.

The matter is made even more complex by the presence of a passage in Simplicius' commentary that is reminiscent both of Ammonius' and Olympiodorus' doxographies. In fact, when Simplicius introduces the subjects of the last six chapters of the *Categories*, he wonders why Aristotle puts these issues at the end of the work. Simplicius reports the opinion of some commentators, including Andronicus, who claim that this discussion has been added by the person who mistakenly gave the title *Pre-Topics* to the work. It is

⁹⁰ Of course this does not mean that Olympiodorus ignores or agrees with the opinion of those who gave the title *Pre-Topics* to the *Categories* as a whole: as section 4 discussed, he mentions and refutes this opinion elsewhere.

⁹¹ See section 4 about possible explanation for the mistakes.

implied that the author who performed this displacement wanted to strengthen the link between the *Categories* and the work that according to him they introduced, that is, the *Topics*. Simplicius disagrees with Andronicus, because the *postpraedicamenta* are helpful to understand what is said not only in the *Topics*, but also in the *Categories*.⁹²

As can be seen, Simplicius, like Ammonius and Olympiodorus, reports the opinion of some commentators that the *postpraedicamenta* were not intended to be part of the *Categories* as Aristotle wrote them, because they deal with issues that are similar to those of the *Topics*. Moreover, Simplicius, like the other two commentators, cites the title *Pre-Topics*. So all the elements that are common to Ammonius' and Olympiodorus' doxographies can be found in Simplicius, too.⁹³

As to the points on which Ammonius and Olympiodorus differ, Simplicius is close sometimes to the former, sometimes to the latter. Like Ammonius and unlike Olympiodorus, Simplicius says that according to some, the title *Pre-Topics* has been given to the *Categories* as a whole by the same person who has also placed the *postpraedicamenta* at the end of the work. A minor difference between Simplicius and Ammonius is that the former speaks of *one* author who has added the *postpraedicamenta* to the *Categories*, using the singular form, not the plural, as does Ammonius. Above all, however, Simplicius differs from Ammonius because, like Olympiodorus, he chooses to reply to those who linked the *postpraedicamenta* to the *Topics*, and not to those who gave the title *Pre-Topics* to the *Categories*. Another similarity between Simplicius' and Olympiodorus' doxographies is that they are both part of the introduction to the commentary to chapter 10 of the *Categories* – while, as has been seen, Ammonius' doxography is in the *prolegomena*.

On the other hand, the words used by Simplicius does not allow us to be sure whether according to him the cited commentators regarded the *postpraedicamenta* as spurious or not (as Ammonius and Olympiodorus say, respectively). Indeed, Simplicius states that according to these commentators, the *postpraedicamenta* “are added” (προσκειῖσθαι)⁹⁴ by someone else. So the evidence is unable to determine whether the exegetical tradition mentioned in Simplicius' commentary is the same as the one discussed in Ammonius' commentary or the one reported in that of Olympiodorus.

Simplicius' testimony does not confirm or discard any of the hypotheses formulated above in order to explain the similarities and differences between the doxographies of Ammonius and Olympiodorus. All that can be asserted is that Simplicius' words, being similar to those of Ammonius but also to those of Olympiodorus, reinforces the case for

⁹² Simp. *In Cat.* 379, 1–12.

⁹³ A note that can be found only in Simplicius' doxography is the specification that one of the commentators who thought that the *postpraedicamenta* were not part of the original text of the *Categories* is Andronicus.

⁹⁴ This verb, however, suggests an author who writes something and adds it to Aristotle's *Categories* (for example, section 92 of Hippocrates' *De mulierum affectibus* is introduced by the following words: Νόθα τῆ τελευταίῃ τοῦ πρώτου περὶ γυναικείων βιβλίου προσκειμένα); Brunschwig (1994: 486) and Gaskin (2000: 9) interpret the passage this way.

the source of all these doxographies being a common tradition. It would follow that the hypothesis that Ammonius and Olympiodorus mean different commentators becomes less plausible.

8. Manner of the teaching (ὁ τρόπος τῆς διδασκαλίας)

Olympiodorus, Philoponus and David (Elias) state that in the *Topics* Aristotle expresses himself clearly.⁹⁵ Simplicius, for his part, states that in this work the philosopher's wording is *clearer* than in most of his other writings. That the commentators of the *Categories* after Proclus, with the only exception of Ammonius, refer to the clarity of the *Topics* has been highlighted by I. Hadot (1990b: 113). The reason for this clarity is explained by David (Elias) at p. 124 and by Simplicius: the former states that it is Aristotle's natural style,⁹⁶ the latter that it is due "to the fact that the theories [that are presented in this work] are more common" (διὰ τὸ κοινότερον τῶν θεωρημάτων).⁹⁷

Conclusions

Through examination and analysis of the statements identified in the Greek Neoplatonic commentaries on the *Categories*, this study has offered a deeper understanding of the Neoplatonic approach to Aristotle's *Topics*. Using a method that compared and contrasted selected commentators' statements, there is now a good basis from which conclusions may be drawn.

First, the cited passages demonstrate, although not conclusively,⁹⁸ that the fifth- and sixth century⁹⁹ Greek Neoplatonic commentators on the *Categories* shared a common view of the *Topics*. All the cited passages from their commentaries agree; whenever one of the cited authors discusses an issue relating to the *Topics*, his solution is also consistent

⁹⁵ Olymp. *Proll.* 11, 21–24. Phlp. *In Cat.* 6, 17–22.

⁹⁶ David (Elias) *In Cat.* 107, 20–22; 124, 25–31.

⁹⁷ Simp. *In Cat.* 7, 1–22. All the commentators talk about the clarity of expression of the *Topics* when, in the *prolegomena* to Aristotle's philosophy, they address the issue of the philosopher's usually obscure style. Actually, David (Elias) already says something about the clarity of the *Topics* when he lists the ten questions about Aristotle's philosophy to be dealt with.

⁹⁸ The reason why the evidence is not definitive is that only the explicit citations of the *Topics* have been studied. Moreover, it is theoretically possible that some of the commentators parted from this common view on issues on which they stayed silent.

⁹⁹ This view can be specifically attributed to the fifth- and sixth century Neoplatonists because it is mostly found in the commentators writing after Proclus. Chase (2003: 11) opines that the stylistic differences between (a) Porphyry's and Dexippus' commentaries by question and answer, and (b) the five post-Proclean commentaries are due to the fact that the former two texts are meant for absolute beginners.

with this view.¹⁰⁰ One can therefore conclude that their perspectives of the *Topics* show no significant differences between the school of Athens (represented by Simplicius) and the school of Alexandria (represented by the other post-Proclean commentators¹⁰¹). The view shared by the commentators¹⁰² is: that the *Topics* are an authentic writing of Aristotle,¹⁰³ although they differ from most Aristotelian works because of their clearer style;¹⁰⁴ specifically, they are one of the logical works where Aristotle discusses non-scientific syllogisms;¹⁰⁵ more specifically, the *Topics* discuss dialectical syllogisms; since such syllogisms are characterised by being allowed to have false premises, as well as true ones, they do not always lead to the truth,¹⁰⁶ although formally correct. However, this is exactly the reason why studying such syllogisms allows us to detect scientific reasoning¹⁰⁷ by contrast. Aristotelian dialectic is also useful because it is an important exercise for those who practice it.¹⁰⁸ Another observation shared by the commentators is that Aristotle did

¹⁰⁰ Of course there are some points on which the statements of the commentators on the same subject differ, but they are not inconsistent. The only exception is the place of the *Topics* in the reading order, but I. Hadot has shown that actually the commentators agreed on this point too. As to the difference between Ammonius' and Olympiodorus' doxographies mentioned in section 7, it is limited to the earlier commentators' opinion on the *postpraedicamenta*; Ammonius, Olympiodorus and Simplicius agree about the *postpraedicamenta* not being an introduction to the *Topics*. That each part of this common view is expressed by some commentators, but not by all of them, can be explained by two hypotheses by I. Hadot, which have already been mentioned: on one hand, the teachers used to comment ad-lib, so to speak, that is, mentioning the traditional explanations that occurred to them at that time; on the other hand, the students who took notes missed some parts of the teacher's explanation. Since the focus is on the features being *virtually* common to all the post-Proclean commentators, statements that are *actually* common to each subset of commentators are not listed; such a survey has already been conducted on the theses stated in the *prolegomena* to Aristotle by I. Hadot (1990b: 171–177).

¹⁰¹ The thesis of a sharp theoretical difference between the two schools has been put forward by Praechter (1910, 1912) and criticised by I. Hadot (1978, 1990c); Verrycken (1990) and Cardullo (2012). On the relationship between adhering to Platonism and studying Aristotle in the post-Proclean Neoplatonic commentaries on the *Categories* also cf. I. Hadot (1991).

¹⁰² In order to confirm that these points are accepted by more than one commentator, those who subscribe to each statement will be noted; and in order to confirm that these statements are mainly found in the *prolegomena*, in each case it will be indicated whether the commentators deal with the *Topics* in the *prolegomena* to Aristotle, in those to the *Categories* or in the commentary proper.

¹⁰³ Implicit in all commentators.

¹⁰⁴ Simplicius, Olympiodorus, Philoponus, David (Elias); *prolegomena* to Aristotle. The argument of the commentators is as follows. If an author is obscure by nature, he will never write clearly. Therefore, Aristotle writing clearly in the *Topics* and in some other works shows that an obscure style is not natural to him. The reason why the arguments in most of his works are hard to follow is that he wanted to keep superficial readers away. The idea that the expressive style of the *Topics* is particularly clear is interesting, because it took away from the commentators the opportunity to interpret the meaning of the text in a creative way – or even to distort it – in order to match their own ideas, a practice that is often seen, for example, in Simplicius' commentaries. As a justification for his interpretation, which from a modern point of view, often seems liberal, Simplicius stresses that the text is obscure. On the obscurity of the texts written by Aristotle (as well as by other authors) as a justification for a creative interpretation cf. Mansfeld (1994: 23–26, 148–161).

¹⁰⁵ Simplicius, Olympiodorus, Philoponus, David (Elias); *prolegomena* to Aristotle.

¹⁰⁶ Philoponus, David (Elias); *prolegomena* to Aristotle.

¹⁰⁷ Philoponus, Olympiodorus, David (Elias); *prolegomena* to Aristotle.

¹⁰⁸ Philoponus, David (Elias); *prolegomena* to Aristotle.

not consider that the *Topics* immediately followed the *Categories*, because the latter introduce all the logical works.¹⁰⁹

The harmony between the statements of different authors is significant, since the Neoplatonic commentators themselves remind us that there were different answers to the question about the place of the *Topics* in the reading order of the Aristotelian corpus. The commentators also state that the answers about the purpose, the usefulness, and the reason for the title of the *Topics* are not obvious. These are meaningful statements, since the Neoplatonic commentators thought that the answers to general questions about other Aristotelian works were obvious. It has also been highlighted how Neoplatonic theses about the *Topics* differ from those of some modern interpreters in some cases.

That all the post-Proclean Neoplatonic commentaries on the *Categories* (and particularly the *prolegomena* to Aristotle) present the same view of the *Topics*, is consistent with I. Hadot's (1990b: 169–182) conclusions: she has shown that the introductory sections about Aristotle's philosophy in the five commentaries belong to the same tradition. Chase (2003: 8) too has said that from a theoretical point of view Simplicius' commentary does not stray from the others. It is also commonly accepted that part of the content of David (Elias)'s commentary originates from Olympiodorus, who in turn, like Philoponus, draws much material from Ammonius,¹¹⁰ and, generally, that the theses of these authors, as well as those of Simplicius, fall within an established tradition.¹¹¹ Detecting the harmony between the different post-Proclean commentators on a particular issue is important, however, because such harmony is never taken for granted by scholars. For example, Simplicius does not adhere to the positions of the other commentators on every issue and not every passage of a commentary from the so-called 'school of Ammonius' has a match in another commentary from the same group.¹¹²

Moving in from the general understanding of the *Topics* to the use of the work within the exegesis of the *Categories*, a different phenomenon from the agreement of the post-Proclean commentators can be observed. Indeed, sometimes Porphyry (in the *Ad Gedalium*), Dexippus and Simplicius reference what Aristotle has written in the *Topics* when confirming a given interpretation of a sentence from the *Categories*,¹¹³ although this is never done by Ammonius, Olympiodorus, Philoponus and David (Elias). Gener-

¹⁰⁹ Ammonius, Simplicius, Olympiodorus, David (Elias), as well as Porphyry; *prolegomena* to *Categories*.

¹¹⁰ Cf. Luna (1990: 145–46, 2001: 379–381, 563, 865–867).

¹¹¹ Moreover, even the division of the πράξις (lesson) on each passage in a general θεωρία and a λήξις of the individual sentences is common to all post-Proclean commentators, both the Alexandrians and Simplicius (even though according to de Haas 2001: 4 the division between the two sections is clearer in the Alexandrian commentaries). On the other hand, since my hypothesis is limited to the commentators' attitude towards the *Topics*, it does not contradict in any way Luna's (1990: 127–146, 2001: 301–381, 525–564, 823–868) conclusion that in the exegesis of the first four chapters of the *Categories* there are two different currents within the Neoplatonic tradition. Indeed, as will be shown soon, another side of the analysis confirms what Luna says.

¹¹² On the differences among these commentaries also cf. Hoffmann (1987–1988: 280).

¹¹³ Simplicius' exegetical style is indeed characterized by frequent citations of earlier texts in order to support the interpretation. Simplicius' references to the *Topics* are consistent with this attitude.

ally, the relationship between the *Topics* and the other works by Aristotle is highlighted by Porphyry, Dexippus and Simplicius only (see section 6)¹¹⁴. Whether these differences between Simplicius and the other post-Proclean commentators on the *Categories* fall within a more general theoretical difference between Athenian and Alexandrian Neoplatonism is a question that lies outside the scope of this paper.

Of course, the number of passages in which Porphyry, Dexippus and Simplicius emphasise the relationship between the *Topics* and the other works by Aristotle is too small to allow definitive conclusions. One should also take into account that Porphyry's commentary *Ad Gedalium* and that of Simplicius were significantly longer than the other commentaries.¹¹⁵ This may be one of the reasons why references to the *Topics* that justify the exegesis of a given passage are found in them, while they occur more rarely (that is, only in Dexippus' case) in the shorter commentaries.

However, it is significant that, as Dillon (1990: 8; 11) has noted, one of the main sources of Dexippus' commentary was Porphyry's *Ad Gedalium*, both directly and through Iamblichus' commentary, which took up a large part of it. Above all, the phenomenon highlighted in this paper concurs with Luna's (1990: 127–146; 2001: 301–381, 525–564, 823–868) conclusion that Simplicius' exegesis of the first four chapters of the *Categories* is close to Porphyry's and Dexippus' and relatively far from Ammonius', Philoponus', Olympiodorus' and David (Elias)'s, which are conversely all similar.¹¹⁶ De Haas (2001: 3–4) states that Simplicius' commentary, not being directed to beginners, as is the case of the Alexandrian commentaries, addresses more complex issues than they do. Generally, it is widely accepted that the style of Simplicius' commentaries is strongly influenced by Porphyry and Iamblichus, and that the main sources of Simplicius' commentary on the *Categories* are the commentaries written by Porphyry (both the one by question and answer and the *Ad Gedalium*) and Iamblichus, as well as Alexander of Aphrodisias.¹¹⁷ In several cases, however, Simplicius departs from the exegetical tradition to which he refers (notably, he criticises Iamblichus several times), so it was not a given that he would use

¹¹⁴ Hoffmann (1987: 81–84) explains that Simplicius, unlike the other post-Proclean commentators, emphasises the relationships between things, concepts and words when he talks about the purpose of the *Categories*. It is possible that this difference is in some way related to the one already highlighted, that is, the fact that only Simplicius reminds that the 10 categories are mentioned in the *Topics*.

¹¹⁵ Conversely Simplicius' commentary is long because it provides a very thorough exegesis, an important part of which is, as has been said, the reference to other texts. On the original length of Dexippus' commentary cf. Dillon (1990: 15).

¹¹⁶ Luna thinks that the reason for this difference is that Porphyry (the same is true to a lesser extent for Iamblichus) is a direct source of Dexippus and Simplicius but only an indirect source of the Alexandrian commentators. On the differences between Simplicius' commentary and the ones written by the Alexandrians also cf. Luna (1987: 114).

¹¹⁷ According to Dillon (1990: 11), Simplicius, despite being aware of Dexippus' commentary, did not draw material from it. Chase (2003: 7–8) highlights Damascius' influence on Simplicius' commentary. One should also keep in mind that probably Simplicius' commentary was written by the author to be published, unlike the other four post-Proclean commentaries.

the *Topics* within his exegesis of the *Categories* simply because Porphyry and Dexippus had done so.

Research on the Greek Neoplatonic commentaries on the *Categories* has not only allowed a systematic description of the views on the *Topics* expressed therein, to build a fuller account of David (Elias)'s original opinion about who favoured the title *Pre-Topics*, and to analyse the relationship between Ammonius', Simplicius' and Olympiodorus' doxographies on the *postpraedicamenta*. It has also helped identify two important features of the interpretation of the *Topics*: first, it has shown that all the post-Proclean commentators share the same view of the work; second, that only Porphyry, Dexippus and Simplicius cite the *Topics* to explain individual passages from the *Categories*.

Neither of these two general trends seems to depend on the ideal of a harmony between Aristotle and Plato shared by all the authors cited.¹¹⁸ Moreover, this ideal did not inform every aspect of the Neoplatonic interpretation of Aristotle. Similarly, the references to the *Topics* do not touch upon the problem of the commentators' relationship with Christianity. Generally, the statements about the *Topics* in the Greek Neoplatonic commentaries on the *Categories* appear somewhat technical. This is the reason why these statements do not directly involve broader philosophical questions.

Future research could extend the analysis to other works of the Greek Neoplatonists, to explore whether the trends observed in the commentaries on the *Categories* are found elsewhere. Moreover, it could answer the following question: is the difference between Simplicius and the other post-Proclean authors explained by Athenian Neoplatonists having a different attitude from the Alexandrians? Conversely, should the examination of other works reveal different trends from those found here, further study would be required to account for them.

¹¹⁸ On this ideal cf. among others Cardullo (1993) and Militello (2013: 30–36).

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Aristotle's *Topics* in the Greek Neoplatonic Commentaries on the *Categories*

This paper lists and examines the explicit references to Aristotle's *Topics* in the Greek Neoplatonic commentaries on the *Categories*. The references to the *Topics* by Porphyry, Dexippus, Ammonius, Simplicius, Olympiodorus, Philoponus and David (Elias) are listed according the usual *prolegomena* to Aristotle's works. In particular, the paper reconstructs David (Elias)'s original thesis about the proponents of the title *Pre-Topics* for the *Categories* and compares Ammonius', Simplicius' and

Olympiodorus' doxographies about the *postpraedicamenta*. Moreover, the study identifies two general trends. The first one is that all the commentators after Proclus share the same general view about: the authenticity of the *Topics*, Aristotle's writing style in them, the part of philosophy to which they belong, their purpose, their usefulness and their place in the reading order. The second one is that whereas Porphyry, Dexippus and Simplicius use the *Topics* as an aid to understanding the *Categories*, Ammonius, Olympiodorus and David (Elias) do not.

KEY WORDS

Categories, commentaries, dialectic, Neoplatonism, *Topics*