

## Project Description

Some periods are turning points, both in terms of political and intellectual history. The ninth century is one such turning point. The philosophical richness of this time is seriously underestimated. The most fascinating feature of this century, which makes it unique, is the fact that it was a time of philosophical renewal in the three main cultures around the Mediterranean Sea, namely the Latin Carolingian, the Greek Byzantine and the Abbasid Arab cultural spheres. A considerable part of this philosophical revival was achieved in the field of logic, which encompassed ontological, semantic, physical and theological issues.

The groundbreaking aspect of this project is to consider the renewal of philosophical studies in the ninth century as a global and transcultural phenomenon. Until now, research has traditionally been limited to the study of texts and problems within the borders of one particular cultural tradition. But this limitation obscures some significant facts: for example, the fact that at the **same** time, the Carolingian master John Scottus Eriugena, the patriarch of Constantinople Photius, and the Baghdad scholar Al-Kindi were all teaching and theorizing on the **same** philosophical concepts based on Aristotle's categories.

The project aims to launch an extensive enquiry into the ninth-century understanding of language and reality. *What kinds of entities are understood as the ontological components of the world? How is reality structured? How can language and logic express sensible reality?* Questions of this kind were central at the time and still rank among the main philosophical issues today. In order to reconstruct the various ninth-century answers to these questions, a careful doctrinal and philological analysis of the extant textual material related to logic produced during the extended ninth century, i.e. from 750 to 950, is required. Many texts, in particular previously unpublished but philosophically rich sets of glosses, will be edited for the first time, providing the project with a larger and up-to-date set of data as well as making new texts available to the scholarly community.

The striking fact that Aristotelian logic was central to the Latin, Greek, Syriac and Arabic traditions allows us to experiment with a new methodology. We call this new methodology *the synchronic approach*. It is guided by the conviction that studying *together* in parallel the four main philosophical traditions of the century will bring results that the conventional method of enquiry, limited to the study of one tradition at a time, cannot reach.

The synchronic approach will bring new results, on several levels, both from an historical and a theoretical perspective. It will show the proper context of philosophical and logical inquiry, which is often determined by theological debates specific to one tradition; it will give a more central place to cultural exchanges, the mobility of texts and ideas, translation and acculturation processes; but the main goal will be to better understand the philosophical positions developed by ninth-century figures themselves. We can mention here two ways in which the synchronic approach can provide us with a deeper insight into ninth-century thought.

First, this new approach will highlight the peculiarity of each philosophical vocabulary. For example, when Greek speakers speak about *hypostasis*, they do not have the same thing in mind as Latin speakers who say *persona*, for *hypostasis* describes an individual of any given species, whereas a *persona* is necessarily a rational individual. In philosophy, the way one formulates a question has already partially determined the answer. This project will demonstrate how a certain philosophical terminology implies and reflects a certain position. As the concept of substance or essence, *ousia* in Greek, is central to the set of logical texts under consideration, we move here quickly from logic to ontology, from the subject of predication to the subject of properties in sensible reality. Thus, we can compare the proper conception and vocabulary of being itself. Philosophical terms are often polysemic and subject to various interpretations. The way in which authors, usually influenced by the tradition they belong to, understand key Aristotelian concepts reveals many of their metaphysical commitments. Let us take the case of substance, for example. Depending on how substantiality is understood, the resulting ontology will be different. The ontology will be materialist, if substances are conceived of as corporeal entities. It will be universalist, if the true substance is the universal essence common to many particulars. Or it will be particularist, if substance is defined as being necessarily independent of any other entity. The more instances we can collect in which a given understanding of a term is linked to a given metaphysical claim, the better we can describe the implications of the various vocabularies of being. Thus, the meaning which was attributed to Aristotle's texts in various contexts becomes clearer.

The second way constitutes one of the main advances we expect to be able to make by applying this new methodology to the philosophical texts written during the long ninth century: the opportunity to *discover or make explicit what is unstated*; that is, we will be able to understand more precisely the implicit postulates and the *a priori* statements which lie behind doctrinal positions. It is indeed difficult to shed light on the unexpressed convictions of a

thinker, but here we have a chance to achieve this. If you consider a thinker in isolation, or a single tradition of writers working in the same line of thought, the only point of contrast you may have is your own position. This is too subjective and, most likely, anachronistic. However, if you are able to have points of comparison dating from the same period but arising from different cultural perspectives, then you will be able to underline the undeclared philosophical convictions of the thinkers under consideration.

There is an important prerequisite for applying this new methodology properly. The texts under consideration have to be measurable by the same standard. This criterion of commensurability is exceptionally well-satisfied in the case of ninth-century logical inquiry. In Greek, Latin, Syriac, and Arabic, the points of reference were the same; that is, all four traditions were based upon the logical treatises of Aristotle – mainly the *Categories* – and the introduction to logic written by Porphyry. There are indeed variations in the sources resulting from translation, but the theoretical background and the problems discussed are common; and more fundamentally, the conceptual tools at the disposal of the traditions in question are mainly the same.

