WHAT COUNTED AS LOGIC IN THE
THIRTEENTH CENTURY?*

Sten Ebbesen

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this article is to see what thirteenth-century academics themselves thought about the delimitation of the discipline of logic. Though some of the elements of my account will also be valid for the twelfth or the fourteenth century, many will not. Major institutional and intellectual changes took place in the decades around 1200, and intellectually, at least, major changes again occurred in the early fourteenth century, when some great logicians began to show a less reverent attitude towards Aristotle than had been traditional.

DELIMITATION BY GENRE

It is not possible to delimit thirteenth-century logic from other university disciplines by means of the oral and written genres employed. Knowledge was transmitted by much the same means in all disciplines – handbooks (summae), literal commentaries, questions, and super-questions. By super-questions I mean such things as the grand sophismata among the artists and the theologians’ quodlibets. Though exceeding the ordinary quaestio, these exercises are all built on the simple quaestio, which they amplify by means of certain recursive devices.

Certain oral exercises and their written reflections have names peculiar to either the faculty of arts or that of theology. Sophismata and treatises on obligations both belong in the faculty of arts, and as far

* Notice that when I quote Latin texts, whether edited or unedited, I do not always respect the orthography or the punctuation found in the edition or in the manuscript. I am grateful to Dr Alexander André and Mr Heine Hansen for having let me use unpublished editions of theirs. Dr David Bloch kindly proof-read my manuscript and discussed the contents with me.
as contents are concerned, sophismata are originally and for the most part logical, though grammatical ones also occur, while obligations are purely logical. Quodlibets reflect events in the faculty of theology, but are not always theological when it comes to contents. The products of the two also exhibit some differences of format, but these are superficial and offer no interesting criterion for distinguishing logic from other disciplines, whether in our eyes or, I submit, in the eyes of the medievals. At least, I have never seen any medieval author appeal to such a criterion.

**De Subiecto Logicae**

In the thirteenth century there were several competing views about how to define the subject-matter of logic. Discussing the question was a must at the beginning of every course on the *Ars Vetus*, and might also be taken up in the introduction to a course on one of the later books of the *Organon*. In the second half of the century the answer would be likely to include a distinction between what is common to all parts of logic predication-wise and what is common to them attribution-wise. All parts deal with matters that have attribution to, i.e. aim at the syllogism, but they are not all directly about syllogisms. By contrast, every single item dealt with in a non-incidental way in logic falls under some such high-level predicate as ‘being of reason’, ‘second intention’, or ‘mode of knowing’. This was the view of Radulphus Brito in the 1290s, but he was far from being the only one to think so.¹

Unfortunately, the *quaestiones de subiecto logicae* do not help much in delimiting what the field of logic was thought to encompass at the time, nor do the many *divisiones scientiae* with their subdivisions of logic into its parts, because no matter what theoretical stand an author

---

¹ Radulphus Brito, *Porph. Int. qu. 4 = id., APo. qu. I.4*, here quoted from Ebbesen and Pinborg 1981: xv–xvi: ‘Aliqui dicunt quod ens rationis est subiectum in logica, alii quod syllogismus, alii quod modus sciendi. Sed non est vis quocumque modo dicas, quia omnes modi sciendi sunt entia rationis, et inter istos modos sciendi syllogismus est principalior modus sciendi. Et ego dico duo ad quaestionem: primo quod subiectum in logica est ens rationis sive secundae intentionis, subiectum dico commune per praedicationem. Sed subiectum commune per attributionem est syllogismus.’ In the first decade of the 14th c. this view was rejected by Bartholomew of Bruges in his *Sophisma de subiecto logicae*, (Ebbesen and Pinborg 1981, 39).