Commentaries on Aristotle's Categories are a rich, and hardly explored, source of information about twelfth-century logic. The evidence they offer about nominalism supports the traditional view of its origins against those historians who have argued that the nominales were so called, not because they were said to describe genera and species as nomina, but because they adhered to a theory of the 'unity of the noun.' This paper will explore three main aspects of this evidence: the use of the word nomen in logic; the controversy between Abelard and Alberic over universals; and the origins of the thesis quod semel est uerum, semper est uerum.

1. Nomina, nomina nominum and the Categories

Those who argue against the traditional account of the origins of nominalism point out that, whilst a number of thinkers in the early twelfth century held that genera and species are uoces, and whilst Abelard subsequently modified this view, and described universals as sermones, there is much less evidence that Abelard or anyone else described their position as being that genera and species are nomina. And so the nominales can hardly have acquired their name because of their views about universals. But the linguistic usage of Abelard and his contemporaries was less fixed than this argument allows. Even William Courtenay, the most eloquent proponent of the view, admits that in both of his long Porphyry commentaries Abelard did refer to universals from time to time as nomina. The background to this usage is provided by Boethius' commentary on the Categories.

1 See Marenbon, Medieval Latin commentaries for a catalogue and general discussion of the material. References to this catalogue are made in brackets in bold print—eg. (C 8).

2 First suggested in Chenu 1934 and 1935-36 (1957), the view is presented in detail in Courtenay 1991a; cf. also Normore 1987.

3 Courtenay 1991a, p. 15.

4 Courtenay 1991a, n. 23.
Boethius explains that, in discussing the ten categories (which are the most general genera), Aristotle was concerned with words, rather than directly with things: words, however, considered not as the subjects of grammatical investigation, but in that they signify (160A). In his introduction he describes the ten categories interchangeably as voces and as nomina. and he begins by making a distinction between nomina of the first imposition (which signify things, such as the words for the categories) and nomina of the second imposition (terms of grammatical description, which signify just other words) (159 A-C). Nomen was thus established as a useful alternative to vox when a term is needed which means 'word' not in the sense of a physical sound, but as that which signifies. The early twelfth-century Categories commentaries show clearly how this usage was absorbed. In C 8, probably from c.1110-1120, nomen is used often in passages taken directly from Boethius; otherwise it occurs in phrases where the commentator is contrasting the use of a word in the first or second imposition—a nomen rerum, as he puts it, or a nomen vocum. But once it is used as a direct alternative to vox; and this tendency becomes marked in the interpolations to C 8 probably dating from the 1120s and in Abelard’s long commentary on the Categories.

5 References to Boethius’s Categories commentary are to the columns of Patrologia Latina 64
6 For example: ‘In hoc igitur opere haec intentio est, de primis rerum nominibus, et de vocibus res significantibus disputare …’ (159C); ‘Haec … num unum substantiae nomen includit … uno quantitatis nomine continentur … num tamen nomen concludens omnia qualitatis …’ (160C-161A); ‘… de primis vocibus, prima rerum genera significantibus …’ (161A); ‘… ad multitudinem generum nomina ipsa dispertit; nam quoniam decem rerum genera sunt non secundum orationem, sed secundum rerum significatum in decem praedicamenta voces divitid …’ (163AB); ‘Quoniam hic de nominibus tractatus habetur …’ (184A).

7 This commentary is found in Paris BN lat. 13368, ff. 195r-214v; Munich clm 14458, ff. 95r-102r (incomplete); London BL Royal 7.D.XXX, ff. 55r-63r (incomplete); interpolated version: Vatican Reg. lat. 230, ff. 41r-71r. (See Marenbon, Glosses and commentaries, 6 6 for this dating, where (6 7) a fuller treatment of the introduction to this commentary will be found.) Eg. ‘Accipitur enim substantia nominem rerum … Item accipitur substantia nomen vocum …’ (Vatican Reg. lat. 230, f. 44v). (This passage, and that quoted in the following note, are found also in the other, uninterpolated manuscripts).

8 ‘Quando autem substantia nomen vocum … tunc habet hanc descriptionem. Substantia est vox illa que aliarum vocum fundamentum est …’ (ibid.)

9 ‘Sed quia Aristoteles de rebus substantialibus per hoc nomen quod est substantia est tractaturus, et in diuersis preceptis hec vox que est substantia diuersis modis accipitur, huius vocis significatio aperienda uidetur’ (ibid.); ‘… substantia per fundamentum significat voces, silicet nomina earum, ponens in eis sustentationem … Vnde fundamentum est equiucum ad res et ad voces. (ibid., ff. 44v-45r)

10 All references to Abelard’s logical commentaries are to Geyer’s editions (1919-