

Introduction

This volume contains the papers presented at the international symposium *Socratica III. A Conference on Socrates, the Socratics, and Ancient Socratic Literature*, held in Trento, February 23-25, 2012. This conference was the third of a series (the editions of 2005 and 2008 were organized by Livio Rossetti and Alessandro Stavru, joined by Fulvia de Luise in 2012), whose aim is to promote emerging Socratic studies, ever more characterized by a new understanding of the complexity of the cultural and literary phenomenon linked to the figure of the Athenian philosopher.

The name of Socrates evokes an elusive intellectual identity, since many different ‘Socrateses’ speak to us, as in a labyrinth of mirrors, in the testimonies of Plato and Xenophon as well as in the fragments of lost writings by other first-generation Socratics. Even more issues arise around Socrates beyond the circle of his disciples, as we can glean through the writings of the comic poets and the sophists. Hence the difficulty in defining the intellectual features of the philosopher who gave birth to the great collective experience of the Socratic movement. This difficulty reflected itself in an increasing methodological caution of scholarship, which ultimately resulted in suspending the quest for the historical Socrates.

Socratica III hosted several prominent voices in the recent debate (together with those of a new generation of young scholars), which are fueling what might be called a ‘Socratic revival’. A distinctive feature of this new trend of studies is to focus on Socrates and his intellectual movement, i.e. not on the sole Platonic testimony (which still plays a prominent role in the transmission of the image of the philosopher), but also on everything which is *around* Plato. In contrast with the assumptions that led to the suspension of the ‘Socratic question’, this trend builds upon the efforts made at different times to reconstruct the debate that originated from Socrates’ teaching.

All those who experienced the three intense days of the conference had the impression to be witnessing a real turning point in Socratic scholarship: a complete reversal, in comparison with the methodological skepticism of Olof Gigon, which not only allows to shed some light on the numerous dark areas of the context in which the Socratic literature was born, but also helps to grasp the novelty of Socrates’ personality as recorded by contemporary observers.

In such a perspective, reopening the Socratic problem and posing again the question of ‘what Socrates really said (or did)’ seemed a fruitful endeavour. And this is probably the most important scientific achievement of the wide range of studies presented at the Conference in Trento. We are therefore very pleased to offer the testimony of methodological creativity represented by these essays, which invite scholars to dare emerging from the *vexata quaestio* of the conflictual literary representations of Socrates.

The papers presented at *Socratica III* deal with (1) the ‘intellectual movement’ around Socrates, (2) the literary context in which the texts of the Socratics are framed, (3) the major topics discussed within this movement, their development within and outside the Socratic circle and their reception in Late Antiquity, (4) the state of the art of the ‘Socratic question’. A qualifying feature of most of the papers consists in a shift from the

‘doctrines’ of the Socratic schools to the dynamic context in which ideas were presented, discussed, and eventually fixed within the philosophical and non-philosophical Greek literature of the 5th and 4th centuries B.C.

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We would also like to thank Paolo Vanini, still a student at the time of the conference, whose intense collaboration in the organization and conduct of *Socratica III* has been crucial, in particular for having organised and managed of a book display which included the most significant recent studies devoted to the Socratic literature, as well as for assisting scholars participating in the conference and for translating some conferences; in addition many thanks go to Manuela Valle, who made a substantial contribution in editing the essays contained in this volume, as well as in the creation of the general bibliography and the *index locorum*, dedicating herself with careful attention to apply uniform editorial criteria to a large number of texts.

Last but not least, we would like to express our gratitude and affection to Livio Rossetti, the creator of the *Socratica* conferences, whose help has been invaluable.

Fulvia de Luise & Alessandro Stavru