

A CONTEXT FOR SOCRATICA 2008

1). Recent development of research on Socrates

a) *The “Socratic Question” from Giannantoni’s Reliquiae (1990) to the Symposium in Senigallia (2005)*

Since Gabriele Giannantoni published his *Socratis et Socraticorum Reliquiae* in 1990, a true *renaissance* of Socratic Literature has happened. Several scholars recognized the importance of reconstructing the thought of Socrates starting from the literary context of the so-called *Sokratikoi logoi*, which depict him conversing with his companions on various occasions. This literature was produced in the first half of the fourth century, giving birth to a cultural milieu which was so lively as to occupy the whole scenario of philosophy. For about fifty years, the reputation of the Socratics was so predominant as to obscure every other philosophical genre. Hence the difficulties of the Sophists, the Anaxagoreans, the Eleatics, and the Democriteans in competing with the Socratics.

This picture led scholars to consider the *Sokratikoi logoi* as a whole¹. Such has been i.e. the approach of Paul Van der Waerdt in his volume *The Socratic Movement* of 1994, or of Klaus Döring in his *Sokrates, die Sokratiker und die von ihnen begründeten Traditionen* of 1998. In these works not only the so-called “minor” Socratics such as Aeschines, Antisthenes, Aristippus and Phaedo were carefully analyzed, but also other sources which had been underestimated before. Such is the case of Xenophon, an author studied carefully by Donald Morrison since 1987. In 1998 Vivienne Gray published *The Framing of Socrates. The Literary Interpretation of Xenophon’s Memorabilia*, and two years later Louis-André Dorion provided a commented edition of the first book of the *Memorabilia*. Yet more important proved to be the symposium held in Aix-en-Provence in 2003, entirely devoted to *Xénophon et Socrate* (the Proceedings of which appeared in 2008).

All of these efforts led to the meeting which took place in 2005 in Senigallia, where different aspects concerning the *Sokratikoi logoi* were analyzed in depth. The Proceedings have been published in 2008, and contain the contributions of Alexander Alderman, Leonidas Bargeliotis, Giovanni Casertano, Francesca Dinapoli, Elsa Grasso, Annie Hourcade, Michel Narcy, Hugues-Olivier Ney, Noburu Notomi, Livio Rossetti, Stefan Schorn, Kendall Sharp, Emidio Spinelli, Alessandro Stavru, Franco Trabattoni, Mauro Tulli, and Mario Vegetti.

b) *Relation between the most recent approaches to the “Socratic Question” and Platonic studies*

A seminal topic tackled in the symposium in Senigallia is the relationship between Plato and the other Socratics. In the nineteenth century the latter were largely considered as “the

¹ Such a “holistic” approach to Socrates has been at the centre of my interests since 1977 (*Aspetti della letteratura socratica antica*). Recently, I published the following articles on this topic: *Le dialogue socratique in statu nascendi*, in: «Philosophie Antique» I (2001): *Figures de Socrate*, pp. 11-35; *The Sokratikoi Logoi as a Literary Barrier. Toward the Identification of a Standard Socrates*, in *Socrates 2400 Years Since His Death*, Athens 2004, 81-94; *Le contexte littéraire dans le quel Platon a écrit*, in *La philosophie de Platon 2*, Paris 2005, 51-80; *Il dialogo socratico come unità comunicazionale ‘aperta’*, in: *Il Socrate dei dialoghi*, Bari 2007, 33-52; *I Socratici della prima generazione: fare filosofas con i dialoghi anziché con trattati i testi paradossali*, in: *Socratica 2005*, Bari 2008, 39-75.

imperfect followers of Socrates” (Zeller 1889), as incapable of understanding, and even less reporting, the real thought of Socrates. As a consequence of this assumption, based on the observations of Schleiermacher (1838), most of the scholars of the twentieth century (i. a. Burnet and Taylor) saw in Plato the only reliable source on Socrates – an approach which has been followed until recent times (e.g. by Vlastos and his followers). This prejudice led Plato to be the sole Socratic author to be taken seriously, thus putting him apart from the other Socratics.

Therefore, the question arising from a critical approach to the scientific literature is: *how to free Plato from this isolation?* The book provides more than one answer. First of all, the picture should be broadened to the Socratics and their huge literary production. Second, the temptation to consider the companions of Plato as his imperfect “minor brothers” should be avoided. Third, their philosophical experience should be analyzed in depth, possibly being taken as a reflection of Socratic thinking. This could shed light not only on Socrates and the Socratics, but foremost on Plato, as his genius can fully show up only if compared with philosophers at his height.

The Proceedings of *Socratica 2005* cover all of these aspects, featuring contributions on Xenophon (Alderman, Ney, Schorn, Spinelli, and Stavru), Antisthenes (Trabattoni, Tulli), Aristippus (Hourcade), and the Socratics as a whole (Notomi).² The latter is in fact an abstract of a book appeared in 2005 (*The Birth of the Philosopher: People Around Socrates*), in which the importance of appreciating Plato “in his historical context” is outlined in a special chapter (*The Memories of Socrates*). Very promising proves in fact every attempt to work on the Platonic Socrates in terms of intertextuality³.

2). Aims of the meeting

The next SOCRATICA session will be the continuation of Socratica 2005, thereby inheriting as well the scientific results arising from the meetings held in Aix-en-Provence (2003; Proceedings appeared in 2008) and in Palermo (2006; Proceedings appeared in 2007). The event is sponsored by the Istituto Italiano per gli Studi Filosofici, the Universities of Naples Federico II and Orientale, as well as the University of Salerno. It is put under the auspices of the IPS - Intern. Plato Society, and take place in Naples, at the Istituto Italiano per gli Studi Filosofici, on 11-13 December 2008. It is coordinated by Livio ROSSETTI (Perugia), Franco FERRARI (Salerno), Giovanni CASERTANO, Lidia PALUMBO, and Alessandro STAVRU (Naples).

Speakers include Aldo Brancacci – II Univ. di Roma, Louis-André Dorion – Univ. Montréal, Gabriele Cornelli - Univ. Feder. de Brasilia, Michael Erler – Univ. Wuerzburg, Vivienne Gray – Univ. Auckland, Walter Kohan – Univ. Feder. do Rio de Janeiro, Donald Morrison – Univ. of

² A detailed survey on the meeting in Senigallia as well as on the new developments of the “Socratic Question” has been published by Alessandro Stavru in four languages: *Atene e Roma* (L 2005, 95-100), *Bochumer Philosophisches Jahrbuch für Antike und Mittelalter* (X 2005, 223-228), *Zbornik Matiča Srpska* [Belgrad] (VII 2005, 195-200), and *Hypnos* [São Paulo] (XI 2006, 118-120).

³ As Notomi puts it, “in this historical context, the comparison between Plato’s and Xenophon’s intentions is illuminating. Xenophon in presenting some sixty short dialogues of Socrates (in a non-temporal mode) in the *Memorabilia* claims that recalling Socrates is profitable for those who were around him. Socrates was a beneficent friend and good adviser, so that imitating him makes his friends better. By contrast, Plato’s dialogues even warn against *imitating* Socrates, since his method of refutation is destructive and dangerous without a proper skill.” (*Socratica 2005*, 361).

Texas at Austin, Michel Narcy – CNRS Paris, Noburu Notomi – Keio Univ. Tokyo, Lidia Palumbo – Univ. Napoli “Federico II”, Domingo Placido – Univ. Complutense Madrid, Graziano Ranocchia – Univ. Wuerzburg, Stefan Schorn – Kath. Univ. Leuven, Alessandro Stavru – Napoli “Orientale” (more details at www.socratica.eu).

The major scientific aim of the conference is to provide a broad approach to the Socratic Question. The great challenge consists in learning how to avoid the commonplace of considering the Socratics as obscure intellectuals of their age. The intent is to gain a new picture of the context of the Sokratikoi dialogoi, of their inner dialectics as well as of their impact on Athens and the Greek world as a whole. The contributions will therefore dwell on various images of Socrates: Aristophanes (Carillo), Euripides (Narcy), Plato (Erlor, Notomi, Palumbo), Xenophon (Dorion, Morrison, Stavru), Antisthenes (Brancacci, Schorn), Aeschines (Placido), the context of the Socratics as a whole (Cornelli, Kohan), and the Socratic portrait of Philodemus of Gadara (Ranocchia). A visit to the “Officina dei Papiri” will provide insight into a major source for the later reception of Socrates, as well as for Hellenistic thought as a whole. At the end of the meeting some famous portraits of Socrates at the “Museo Archeologico Nazionale” will be visited as well, thus shedding light on the way Socrates was depicted at different moments of late antiquity.

Perugia, Nov. 25, 2008
Livio Rossetti (with Alessandro Stavru)