INTRODUCTION

It is true that every time we return to the Socratic problem we find it more difficult. Indeed, it was not without reason that when Karl Joël, who had already produced three weighty volumes on Socrates, returned after twenty years to the subject of the Athenian Master, he began by saying that we know only that we know nothing about Socrates. It is a matter of fact that, whenever we return to the Socratic problem, the lack of writings by Socrates appears more hopeless, the testimony of his contemporaries on the man and his message more contradictory, and the reasons for his fate more incomprehensible; and, finally, the multiplicity of images emerging from the literary tradition in the course of centuries also appears more disconcerting. These difficulties are made even more serious by the increasingly well founded awareness that what have long been considered to be the historical sources of Socratism are not really historical sources at all, but interpretations or literary transpositions, literature, in short, and poetry.

Consequently, the Socratic problem, seen as the problem of the traditional sources of Socratism, was eventually declared to be a vast misunderstanding which was the culmination of more than two centuries of study and research on the "case of Socrates", in which the legend had been confused with reality and myth with history.

It should come as no surprise, therefore, that, at the beginning of the 1920's, Eugene Dupréel took the sceptical tendency, which had been developing for some time, to the point of denying the historical existence of Socrates, removing his name from the history of ancient thought and from that of human civilization in general. Scarcely twenty-five years later, Olof Gigon, taking a firm stance on the problem of the Socratic sources in a work destined to become an essential turning point in the course of Socratic studies, did not deny that a Socrates had lived in Athens and that this Socrates had been condemned to death, but held that, with the exception of some other minor biographical information, it was impossible to know more about him.

Faced with such a drastic intensification of the scepticism that had developed concerning the nature and reliability of the literary sources, which threatened to remove permanently the very grounds for the presentation and continued existence of the Socratic problem, some scholars reacted by repeating more forcefully the old arguments in favour of the traditional solution of the problem as the problem of integration and agreement between the sources; others considered that Gigon's objections could be overcome by transferring the problem of the historical Socrates to the field of the history of Socratism; others evaded the problem by distinguishing the problem of the sources from that of the reconstruction of a Socratic philosophy, shelving the former in order to solve the latter; and finally, others, of whom there were many, were content to make Socrates into a symbol, a myth, an ideal which
could be expressed in various ways because defined in various ways.

And yet, on closer examination, this widespread scepticism, taken to its extreme by Dupréel and coherently developed by Gigon, was really nothing more than a salutary lesson in method to those who could understand it; in other words, it was an invitation to break with tradition and thus to find another possible solution to the problem. It was precisely in this way that the clarion call of Gigon was understood by a number of students of ancient thought, all devoted to the search for a δεύτερος πλοῦς, which, while requiring a start from the sceptical position of Gigon, would make it possible to go beyond Gigon, and thus to reclaim the problem of the historical Socrates for history, while simultaneously opening up the way to a possible solution. In this way a new spirit of research, or, in Socratic terms, a new "desire for research", was born out of the very thoroughness of the denial of any possible solution to the problem. It became clear, above all, that there must be a radical questioning of all the information that had been accepted as certain in the problem; an extension of the investigation to cover all the sources of Socratism, and primarily the testimony of contemporaries; and a consequent examination of the historicity and reliability of each source.

And it is precisely this intense new upsurge of studies and research extending to all the historical, philological and philosophical aspects of the problem which is the most characteristic feature of the present state of the problem. A problem which today can be presented in only one way, as a radical questioning of itself: in other words, as a reopening of the discussion on the whole of its accepted knowledge, not susceptible of solution in any way except by means of the adoption of a new historical method; as a new criterion for investigation, in short, arising out of the critical requirements according to which the problem is currently debated, in the light of the results of the partial research which has been undertaken in this spirit.

These same premises form the origin and justification of the present work. Its purpose, in short, is to offer to anyone still intending to devote himself to the Socratic problem, a reliable means of approach to the problem, by providing, first of all, a complete history of the problem itself, from its first appearance during Socrates' lifetime up to the present day; a history traced, as never before, within the history of western culture of which the Socratic problem forms part and in which it participates, which in its development in the course of centuries makes evident the reasons for the demands of the problem which support and uniquely characterize the present state of the problem, the essential point of departure for any subsequent research on Socrates the man and the nature of his dialogue.

This work is intended to provide not only the history of the problem, but also the essential documents of this history, in the form of documents accompanied by brief explanatory and bibliographical contextual notes, to be read in counterpoint with the chapters of the History, to provide the necessary supplementary material and complementary documentation for it.

These documents consist of 61 extracts from 54 authors, from Fréret onwards, in other words from the beginning of the history of the problem of the Socratic sources which arose in the Age of Enlightenment, down to the present day. These extracts are not intended to form a collection of the various representations, inter-
interpretations or images of Socrates which succeeded each other in the history of Socratic historiography; instead, the aim was to present, in a logically and chronologically consistent order, the various ways in which the problem of the sources of Socratism was presented and resolved in the course of two hundred years of study and research on the "case" of Socrates.

Emphasis has therefore been placed on those assertions which articulate the historical stages of the problem most clearly and more effectively than others, and those which are less representative or are simply repetitious have been excluded, following a line of development which is outlined coherently by the brief introduction to each chapter, is fully developed by the HISTORY in Section A, and is clearly supported by the arrangement of the extracts in the Chapters of this book.

It is scarcely necessary to add that each selection is in itself an exclusion, and the exclusion of any particularly book on Socrates should not invalidate the logical and chronological completeness of the material arranged in this book.

The 61 extracts, some of which are reproduced only in the programmatic statement of the problem, while others are reproduced in a more diffuse, expository form and others, when it appears suitable or necessary, in extended contexts which may fill an entire chapter, are all transcribed in their original languages. Nothing has been added to or removed from them.

The titles of the extracts were adapted by me to the text and language of the extracts reproduced, and the responsibility for these is therefore mine alone.

Since each extract is usually accompanied by citations of ancient and modern works and authors, which are often incomplete and sometimes approximate, it was considered appropriate to repeat the citation in the correct and complete form in the classified bibliography at the end of the volume. This bibliography is not, therefore, intended to be a Socratic bibliography, even if it is one, but simply an improved bibliographical citation of authors and works mentioned in the book. The fact that a book has been written on Socrates, therefore, does not necessarily mean that it will be present in this bibliography.

About the reproduction of the original text I must point out that: the reproductions try to capture as much as possible the typographical style of the originals, which, having been produced in different historical periods, have different styles. I have taken the liberty of reproducing in Latin characters the text by Hegel and Pöhlmann which were originally in Gothic characters. This has been done for the convenience of the reader. I have not interfered with punctuation or spelling except very occasionally to correct a misprint.

In sending this book to the press, I am pleased to express my sincere gratitude to friends who have supplied the photocopies of certain extracts or chapters of books reproduced here. I am particularly pleased to be able to record my sincere gratitude to Dr Flaminia Martinelli and Dr Daniela Fannini, who were patient enough to compile the very extensive bibliography, checking each title against the original text, which was not always easy to obtain, except in a very few cases in which it was not possible to find the text and in which, therefore, the quotation has been reproduced exactly as found in the original. A very heartfelt thanks is due to Mr Roderick Riesco for translating my Introductions and Notes to each chapter.
am equally grateful to the authors and publishers who have kindly permitted the reproduction of extracts from their books.

M.M.
Christmas 1989