

Was Alcibiades a Socratic?
Alexander S. Alderman (Pacific Lutheran University)

Plato, Xenophon, and Aeschines of Sphettos all depict Socrates as an associate of Alcibiades, and the sophist Polycrates portrayed their association as one of the primary grounds for Socrates' trial and execution. Recent scholars of the life of Socrates have helped mitigate the idealizing and demonizing tendencies of earlier biographers and interpreters (Nails 2002, Brickhouse and Smith 1990), but I propose a more radical reassessment of the sources: Socrates may not have known Alcibiades at all.

Both figures became emblems of drastic cultural changes in fifth-century Athens, and each became a popular subject for comedy and epideictic rhetoric both before his death and after. Drawing on a more skeptical tradition of biographical criticism (Chroust 1957, Montuori 1974), I argue that the relationship between the two men is a fiction inspired by the success of two independent corpora of philosophical literature. In our likely earliest extant source on the subject of their association, Isocrates even claims that no one had been aware that Alcibiades was Socrates' student before Polycrates wrote about it (11.5).

I offer alternate reconstructions for the *Accusation of Socrates* based on the remarks of Polycrates' critics, and I argue that both he and Socrates' apologists embraced the fictitious relationship because of the questions it raised and creative opportunities it furnished in a few examples from Plato, Xenophon, and Aeschines.