



Sankofa Archives

Did You Know? Tidbits #10

“Socrates Describes Himself”

The following was copied from the *Works of Xenophon*:¹

Crit. Well, let that pass. To come to our two noses, which is the more handsome, yours or mine?

Soc. Mine, I imagine, if, that is, the gods presented us with noses for the sake of smelling. Your nostrils point to earth; but **mine are spread out wide and flat**, as if to welcome scents from every quarter.

Crit. But consider, a snubness of the nose, how is that more beautiful than straightness?

Soc. For this good reason, that a snub nose does not discharge the office of a barrier; it allows the orbs of sight free range of vision: whilst your towering nose looks like an insulting wall of partition to shut off the two eyes.

As to the mouth (proceeded **Critobulus**), I give in at once; for, given mouths are made for purposes of biting, you could doubtless bite off a much larger mouthful with your mouth than I with mine.

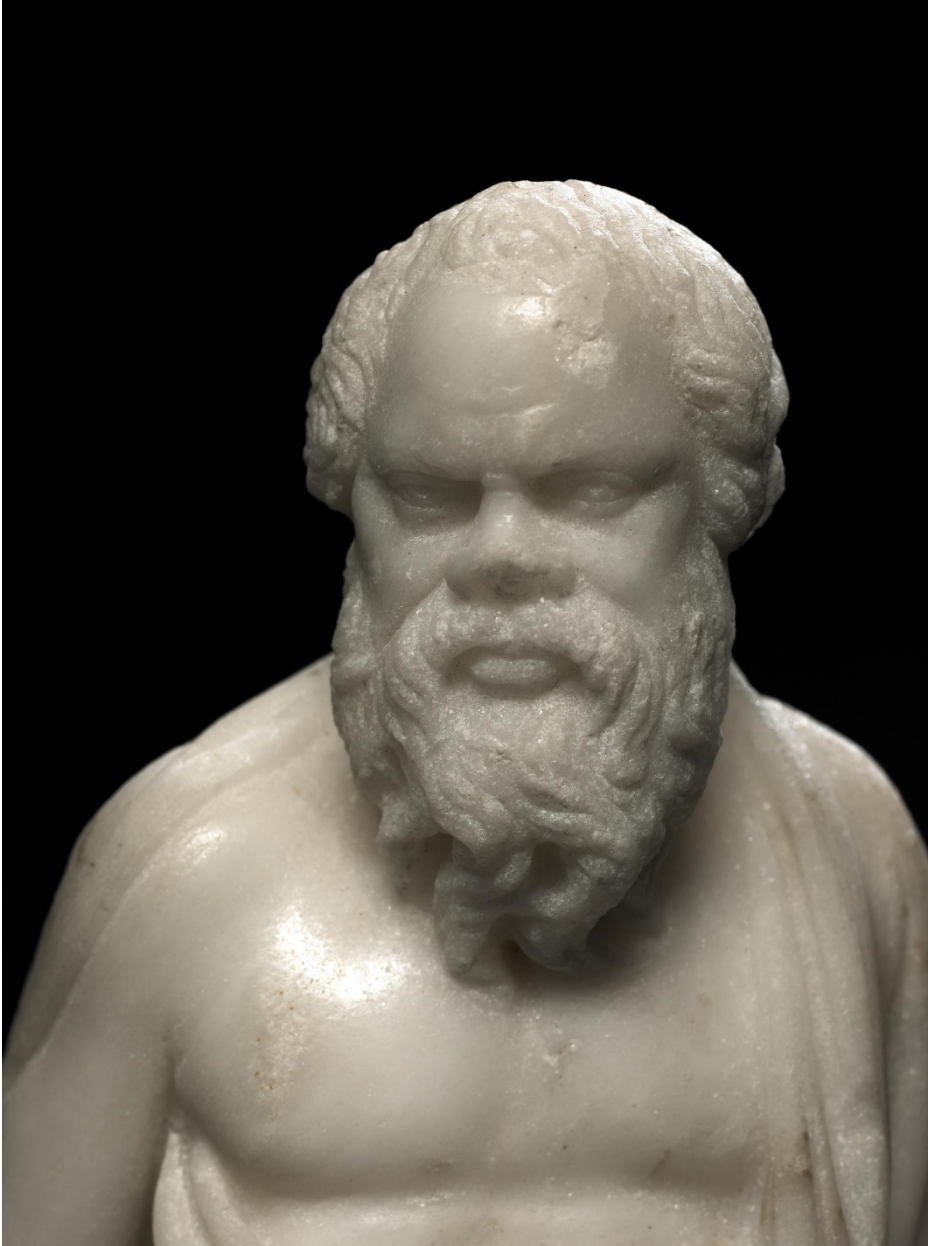
Soc. Yes, and you will admit, perhaps, that I can give a softer kiss than you can, thanks to **my thick lips**.

Crit. It seems I have an uglier mouth than any ass.

Soc. And here is a fact which you will have to reckon with, if further evidence be needed to prove that I am handsomer than you. The naiads, nymphs, divine, have as their progeny Sileni, who are much more like myself, I take it, than like you. Is that conclusive?

In the *New and General Biographical Dictionary*, from 1798, a physical description of Socrates:

“As to his person, he was very homely; was bald, had a dark complexion, a flat nose, eyes flicking out, and a severe down-cast look.”²



What do you think?

Title: Marble statuette of Socrates

Date: 200–100 B.C. (?)

Found at: Said to have come from Alexandria (Egypt)

Note: “Hellenistic original of the 2nd c. B.C., or a Roman copy.”³

Location: British Museum

Notes

¹ Xenophon, *The Works of Xenophon*, ed. Henry Graham Dakyns (London: Macmillan and Co., 1890), 330.

² *A New and General Biographical Dictionary; Containing an Historical and Critical Account of the Lives and Writings of the Most Eminent Persons in Every Nation; Particularly the British and Irish; from the Earliest Accounts of Time to the Present Period, Vol. 14* (London: G. G. and J. Robinson [etc.], 1798), 66.

<https://archive.org/details/newgeneralbiogra14took/page/66/mode/2up?q=dark+complexion>.

³ Marble statuette of Socrates, British Museum (Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0] license). <https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/image/502931001>

Bibliography

A New and General Biographical Dictionary; Containing an Historical and Critical Account of the Lives and Writings of the Most Eminent Persons in Every Nation; Particularly the British and Irish; from the Earliest Accounts of Time to the Present Period, Vol. 14. London: G. G. and J. Robinson (etc.), 1798.

Xenophon. 1890. *The Works of Xenophon*. Edited by Henry Graham Dakyns. London: Macmillan and Co.

Images

Marble statuette of Socrates, British Museum (Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0] license). <https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/image/502931001>.

To know more about this topic see:

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