**The Trial of Socrates**

**399 BCE**

**2**

**WHY?**

**The trial and execution of Socrates in Athens in 399 B.C.E. puzzles historians**

**What did Socrates say or do that prompted a jury to send a seventy-year-old philosopher to his death?**

**Finding an answer is complicated by the two surviving accounts of the defense**

**They were written by Socrates disciples, Plato and Xenophon**

**Their accounts probably were trying to show their master in a favorable light**

**They failed to present the most damning evidence against Socrates**

**3**

**The decisions to prosecute and ultimately convict Socrates had a lot to do with the turbulent history of Athens in the several years preceding his trial**

**An examination of that history may not provide final answers, but it does provide important clues**

**4**

**As a young man, Socrates saw the rise to power of Pericles**

**He brought on the dawning of the "Golden Age of Greece."**

**Pericles--perhaps history's first liberal politician-- acted on his belief that the masses deserved liberty**

**Pericles used the public treasury to promote the arts**

**He pushed a building program designed to demonstrate the glory that was Greece**

**It also ensured full employment and opportunities for the lower classes**

**Pericles rebuilt the Acropolis and constructed the Parthenon**

**5**

**Parthenon**

**6**

**SOCRATES’ BELIEFS**

**Meanwhile, Socrates developed a set of values and beliefs that would put him at odds with most Athenians**

**7**

**Socrates was not a democrat**

**To him, the people should not be self-governing**

**They were like a herd of sheep that needed a wise shepherd**

**He denied that citizens had basic virtue necessary to nurture a good society**

**He criticized the right of every citizen to speak in the Athenian assembly**

**His unpopular views provoked his listeners to anger**

**8**

**The playwright Aristophanes presents Socrates in his play, *Clouds***

**Socrates is presented as an eccentric and comic headmaster of a "thinkery"**

**He is portrayed "rolling his eyes" at remarks he found unintelligent, and "gazing up" at the clouds**

**"Men set upon him with their fists or tore his hair out," but Socrates "bore all this ill-usage patiently."**

**At the time of *Clouds* Socrates was perceived as a harmless town character**

**Socrates himself, apparently, took no offense at his portrayal in *Clouds***

**Socrates is quoted as saying, "When they break a jest upon me in the theatre, I feel as if I were at a big party of good friends."**

***9***

***Birds*, another play of Aristophanes, labels pro-Sparta aristocratic youths as "Socratified"**

**Sparta and Athens were enemies and the remark suggests Socrates’ teaching may have been subversive**

**10**

**Aristophanes is quoted as saying:**

**“I loathe that poverty-stricken windbag Socrates who contemplates everything in the world but does not know where his meal is coming from."**

**11**

**The standing of Socrates suffered during two periods in which Athenian democracy was temporarily overthrown**

For a four-month period in 411-410 BCE

A slightly longer period in 404-403 BCE

**The prime movers in both of the anti-democratic movements were former pupils of Socrates**

**12**

**Alcibiades, perhaps Socrates' favorite Athenian politician and his student, masterminded the first overthrow**

**Critias, another student of Socrates led the second bloody revolt against the restored Athenian democracy in 404**

**Critias led an oligarchy known as the "Thirty Tyrants”**

**The Thirty Tyrants revolt sent many of Athen's leading democratic citizens into exile**

**This group included Anytus, later the driving force behind the prosecution of Socrates**

**While in exile, they organized a resistance movement**

13

**One incident involving Socrates and the Thirty Tyrants would later become an issue at his trial**

**The Thirty Tyrants asked Socrates to arrest Leon of Salamis so that he might be executed and his assets appropriated**

**Socrates refused to do so**

**Socrates neither protested the decision nor took steps to warn Leon of Salamis**

**While citizens of Athens were being liquidated, Socrates did or said nothing to stop the violence**

**The final straw may well have been another short-lived anti-democratic uprising**

**14**

**After the last revolt was put down, a general amnesty was issued**

**Socrates could not be prosecuted for his actions during the Thirty Tyrants’ reign**

**By now, Athens had enough of Socratified" youth**

**15**

**Athenians undoubtedly considered the teachings of Socrates partially responsible for the resulting death and suffering**

**Socrates was no longer a lovable town eccentric**

**He came to be seen as a dangerous and corrupting influence, a breeder of tyrants and enemies of the common man**

**PROCEEDINGS BEGIN AGAINST SOCRATES**

**17**

**In Athens, criminal proceedings could be initiated by any citizen**

**The proceedings against Socrates was begun by Meletus, a poet**

**He delivered an oral summons to Socrates in the presence of witnesses**

**18**

**The summons required Socrates to appear before the legal magistrate**

**He was required to answer charges of impiety and corrupting the youth**

**The magistrate determined that the lawsuit had merit and was permissible under Athenian law**

**19**

**A preliminary hearing was held, begun with the reading of the charges by Meletus**

**Socrates answered the charges**

**Then the magistrate questioned both Meletus and Socrates**

**Having found merit in the accusation against Socrates, the magistrate drew up formal charges**

**20**

**THE CHARGES**

**Socrates is guilty of:**

Refusing to recognize the gods recognized by the state

Introducing new divinities

Corrupting the youth

**The penalty demanded is death**

**It was the political, not the philosophical or theological, views of Socrates which finally got him into trouble**

**21**

**The trial of Socrates took place over a ten-hour period in the civic center of Athens**

**The jury consisted of 500 male citizens, mostly farmers, over the age of thirty, chosen by lot**

**The spectators included a twenty-seven-year-old pupil of Socrates named Plato**

**22**

**GUILT PHASE OF THE TRIAL**

**The trial began in the morning with the reading of the formal charges against Socrates by a herald**

**The prosecution presented its case first**

**No record of the prosecution's argument against Socrates survives**

**23**

**The accusers had  three hours to present their arguments**

**Easily the best known and most influential of the accusers was Anytus**

**Anytus had a personal gripe with Socrates which was believed to be the driving force behind the prosecution**

**Plato offers a possible clues as to the animosity between Anytus and Socrates**

**24**

**Socrates' argument that the great statesmen of Athenian history have nothing to offer in terms of an understanding of virtue enrages Anytus**

**Plato quotes Anytus as warning Socrates:**

"Socrates, I think that you are too ready to speak evil of men: and, if you will take my advice, I would recommend you to be careful."

**Anytus had an additional personal gripe concerning the relationship Socrates had with his son**

**Plato quotes Socrates as saying, "I had a brief association with the son of Anytus, and I found him not lacking in spirit.”**

**It is not known whether the relationship included sex, but Socrates was bisexual and slept with some of his younger students**

**Anytus almost certainly disapproved of his son's relationship with Socrates**

**Socrates urged Anytus's son not to "continue in the servile occupation that his father has provided for him."**

**Without a "worthy adviser," Socrates predicted, he would “ surely go far in the career of vice.”**

**This did not sit well with Anytus**

**SOCRATES’ DEFENSE**

**26**

**Dozens of accounts of the three-hour speech (apologia) by Socrates in his defense existed at one time**

**Only Plato's and Xenophon's accounts survive**

**The two accounts agree on a key point - Socrates gave a defiant--decidedly *un*apologetic--speech**

**He seemed to invite condemnation and death**

**Socrates tells his jury that he is a hero**

**He reminds them of his exemplary service as a volunteer citizen soldier in three battles**

**More importantly, he contends, he battled for decades to save the souls of Athenians**

**According to Plato, he tells the jury, he would rather be put to death than give up his soul-saving**

**27**

**Plato reports Socrates saying to his jurors:**

“Men of Athens, I honor and love you; but I shall obey God rather than you, and while I have life and strength I shall never cease from the practice and teaching of philosophy."

**If Plato's account is accurate, the jury knew that the only way to stop Socrates from lecturing about the moral weaknesses of Athenians was to kill him**

**28**

**On the charge of impiety, Socrates point out –**

**Athenians were accustomed to hearing the gods treated disrespectfully in both the comic and tragic theatre**

**Aristophanes, in his *Clouds*, had a character speculating that rain was Zeus urinating through a sieve, mistaking it for a chamberpot**

**No one ever bothered to charge Aristophanes with impiety**

**29**

**Piety had, for Athenians, a broad meaning**

**It included respect for the gods, the dead and ancestors**

**The impious individual might bring upon the city the wrath of the gods in the form of plague or sterility**

**The ritualistic religion of Athens required observance of rites, prayers, and the offering of sacrifices**

**30**

**Any number of words and actions of Socrates may have contributed to his impiety charge**

He probably failed to attend important religious festivals

The impiety charge may have stemmed from the contention of Socrates that he received divine communications

A vague charge such as impiety invited jurors to project their many and varied grievances against Socrates

**31**

**The most damaging accusation against Socrates concerned his association with Critias, the leader of the Thirty Tyrants**

**And Socrates decision not to warn Leon of Salamis of the order for his arrest – he just went home**

**32**

**Socrates points to his refusal to comply with the Tyrants' order that he bring in Leon of Salamis for summary execution**

**He argues this act of disobedience--which might have led to his own execution, had not the Tyrants fallen from power--demonstrates his service as a good citizen of Athens**

**33**

**As for the charge that his moral instruction provided intellectual cover for the anti-democratic revolt of Critias and his cohorts, Socrates denies responsibility**

**He argues that he never presumed to be a teacher, just a figure who roamed Athens answering the questions that were put to him**

**He points to his pupils in the crowd and observes that none of them accused him**

**Moreover, Socrates suggests to the jury, if Critias really understood his words, he never would have gone on the bloody rampage that he did in 404-403**

**Socrates’ message that piety cannot be defined, might have led Critias to believe that it was permissible to be impious**

**34**

**After of Socrates’ three-hour defense, the jurors rendered their decision**

**280 jurors had voted to find Socrates guilty, 220 jurors for acquittal**

**After the conviction, the trial entered its penalty phase**

**35**

**PENALTY PHASE**

**Each side was given an opportunity to propose a punishment**

**After listening to arguments, the jurors would choose one of the two proposed punishments**

**The accusers of Socrates proposed the punishment of death**

**36**

**Socrates fail to offer a plea for mercy typically made to Athenian juries**

**Neither his wife nor any of his three sons made a personal appearance**

**Socrates held that pleading for clemency disgraces the justice system of Athens**

**37**

**It was expected that Socrates would counter with a proposal for exile, which would have satisfied the accusers and the jury**

**Instead, Socrates proposes to the jury that he be rewarded, not punished**

**Socrates asks the jury for free meals in the public dining hall in the center of Athens and a pension**

**38**

**THE APOLOGY & SENTENCING OF SOCRATES**

**39**

**Why propose a punishment guaranteed to be rejected?**

**Socrates acts more like a picador trying to enrage a bull than a defendant trying to mollify a jury**

**The only answer is that Socrates was ready to die**

**40**

**The court demanded that Socrates propose a genuine punishment**

**Socrates reluctantly suggested a fine of about one-fifth of his net worth**

**In the final vote, 360 jurors voted for death, 140 for the fine**

**Under Athenian law, execution was accomplished by drinking a cup of poisoned hemlock**

**41**

**As he is being led off to jail, Socrates utters the memorable line:**

"The hour of departure has arrived, and we go our ways--I to die, and you to live.  Which to the better fate is known only to God.”

**42**

**THE DEATH OF SOCRATES**

**Socrates spent his final hours in a cell in the Athens jail**

**The hemlock that ended his life did not do so quickly or painlessly**

**43**

**CONCLCUSION**

**The conviction and execution of Socrates was a deliberate choice made by the famous philosopher himself**

**The trial of Socrates, the most interesting suicide the world has ever seen, produced the first martyr for free speech**

**44**

**SOCRATIC QUOTES**

**The only true wisdom is in knowing you know nothing**

**I cannot teach anybody anything. I can only make them think**

**Death may be the greatest of all human blessings**

**Thou should eat to live; not live to eat**

**Once made equal to man, woman becomes his superior**

**45**

**AND FINALLY -----**

**46**

**My advice to you is get married: if you find a good wife you’ll be happy; if not, you’ll become a philosopher**

**THE END**