

10.5. Andocides / A Charge of Sacrilege

During the later years of the Peloponnesian War when Athens was increasingly under attack from within by opponents of the democracy, sacrilegious acts, the desecration of shrines and of rituals, became familiar and frightening tokens of subversion. A famous incident was the profanation of the cult of the Eleusinian Mysteries in 415 BCE. It produced a major scandal. One of the men convicted of the crime, Andocides, after imprisonment and exile, was finally restored to citizenship under the amnesty of 403.

In 399 he was again indicted for impiety on a charge of having taken part in the Mysteries although now legally disqualified on account of his previous guilt. His defense, which was successful, has come down to us under the title *On the Mysteries*. In it he once again went into detail about the events of 415. The following selection is from *On the Mysteries* 10-30 (abridged).

Andoc. Myst. Source: Andocides. *The Oration De Mysteriis of Andocides*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Philomathean Society, 1896.

As I have said before, I shall make my defence from the beginning of the affair, first explaining the charge itself, whence the information came on account of which I am brought to trial; secondly, showing that I have neither committed any impiety in regard to the Mysteries, nor given information, nor made a confession; and I do not know whether those who preferred the charges made false revelations or not. These assertions I shall clearly prove.

There was held a meeting of the generals, Nicias, Lamachus and Alcibiades, previous to their departure for Sicily, and the trireme of Lamachus rode at anchor outside the port. When the assembly came to order, Pythonicus, the Athenian, rose and said: "Athenians, you are about to dispatch a large force and to incur great danger at a moment when I am prepared to show you that your general, Alcibiades and others have profaned the Sacred Mysteries in a private house. If you will pass a vote of immunity from punishment for the person whom I shall call, I shall produce before you a slave belonging to a man present at the time, who, although he is not initiated into the Mysteries himself, will tell you what happened. You may deal with me in any manner you please, shall my statements prove false."

Although Alcibiades strenuously denied the charge, the council thought it best to order the uninitiated to withdraw!¹ and to go in person for the slave mentioned by Pythonicus. So they went out and returned with a slave of Polemarchus, named Andromachus. When they had promised him free pardon, he said that the Mysteries were performed in the house of Pultion, that Alcibiades, Nicias and Meletus witnessed the profanation and even took part themselves, and that there were some slaves present, himself, his brother, Icesius, the flute player and a slave of Meletus. This slave was the first to testify about the affair and to denounce the criminals, some of whom were captured by

Polystratus and put to death, while others took refuge in flight and were condemned by you....

But another source of information has arisen. A foreigner, Teucer, who was living here, fled to Megara and from there made the following offer to the Senate²—if they would promise him pardon, he would give an account of the Profanation of the Mysteries, since he himself had been a participant; he would reveal the names of the others who had assisted him, and would tell all he knew about the Mutilation of the Hermae. When the Senate had promised him immunity, for it had full power to do so, a number of the members visited him at Megara. Teucer, having returned in safety, informed against his companions, and they fled as soon as he had made his statement....

Remember, gentlemen, that the charges against all these men have been proved true by their own confession.

There is a third source of information. The wife of Almaeonides, who had formerly been the wife of Damon—Agariste was her name—testified that Alcibiades, Axiochus and Adimantus had celebrated the Mysteries at the house of Charmides, near the Temple of Zeus. At this charge all of them fled.

And yet there has been other information given. Lydus, a slave of Pherecles of Themacus, swore that the Mysteries had been profaned at the house of his master, Pherecles, in Themacus. He gave the names of many and said that my father was there, but that during the performance he was asleep, wrapped in his cloak. Speusippus, a member of the Senate, handed the accused over to the court. Then my father, having obtained bail, brought action against Speusippus before the Six Thousand on the ground that he had violated the law, and when the verdict was delivered Speusippus received scarcely two hundred votes from so large a number of jurymen. On this account my father's relations and I urged him to remain in the city....

You have heard, gentlemen of the jury, what took place, and the witnesses have testified before you; now consider what my accusers have dared to say, for justice demands that I should make my defence by calling to your minds the statements of my foes and by confuting them. They said that I made disclosures about the profanation of the Mysteries, and, in addition, that I informed against my own father, a charge which I consider the most unnatural and wicked that could possibly be devised. The man who indicted him was Lydus, the slave of Pherecles; I implored him to stay here and not to seek refuge in flight, going even so far as to embrace his knees. For why should I, if I had betrayed my father, as these men assert, beseech him to remain, that he might die at my hands? And would my father likely have been persuaded to face a trial in which he would surely be confronted with one of two calamities: either to be put to death through my agency, or, if he himself were saved, to be the cause of my death? For the law is as follows:

If anyone bring forward a true accusation, he need fear nothing; if the charge be false, he shall die....

¹ Membership in the cult of the Mysteries was not simply by virtue of citizenship, but by individual rites of initiation. It was forbidden to the uninitiated to know anything of the ritual.

² The Council (boule) is meant.

In this way the four accusations concerning the Profanation of the Mysteries were made. I have read you the names of those who fled at each indictment and witnesses have given testimony regarding the facts of the case. But in order to convince you more thoroughly, gentlemen of the jury, I shall in addition do as follows. (For of those who took to flight in consequence of the violation of the Mysteries some have died in exile, while others are present in this court, summoned by me.) I shall grant permission to anyone (occupying part of the time allotted to me for my speech) to prove, if he wishes, that any of these men fled through fear of me, or that I brought forward a charge against anyone, or that they all did not take to flight on account of the accusations made by others which I have described to you. If anyone is able to prove that I have lied, you, gentlemen, may treat me as you think I deserve. I am willing to stand aside and to keep silent, if anyone wishes to speak against me from the rostrum.

And now let us see what happened after these revelations about which I have spoken. At the time when they were made there were two rewards open to the informers—one of a thousand drachmae, by the Decree of Cleonymus, and one of ten thousand, by the Decree of Pisander. The informers and Pythonicus quarreled over these rewards, he (Pythonicus) claiming that he had been the first to give information concerning the affair, while Androcles asserted that the rewards should be conferred upon the Senate. To settle this dispute, it

was resolved at a public meeting that those of the Senate who had been initiated into the Mysteries, after hearing the information which each claimant had given, should pass judgment upon the case. The Senators awarded the larger sum to Andromachus and the other to Teucer; so Andromachus received ten thousand drachmae and Teucer one thousand at the All-Athenians' Festival. Please call the witnesses to testify to these facts.

[Examination of Witnesses]

I have proved, gentlemen of the jury, that concerning the profanation of the Mysteries, on account of which this investigation has arisen and you who are initiated have come into court, I have proved, I say, that I have neither acted in a sacrilegious manner, given information about anyone, made any confession in regard to the Mysteries nor incurred the anger of the two Goddesses to the very slightest degree. And it is of the greatest importance to me that I should have proved it to you. For the speeches of my accusers, who have painted in vivid colors these awful deeds, have plainly shown you what terrible sufferings and punishments were undergone by others who committed offences and acts of impiety toward the Goddesses; but why should their words or actions concern me? I should much rather accuse them and say that they ought to be put to death on account of their impiety and I myself set free, since I have committed no crime....