

SEEKING SOCRATES

CHORUS 7: THE VERDICT IS IN



The trial would last just one day—dawn to dusk—in February, 399 BC. For three hours, the jury was to hear from his accusers. The water clock was refilled, and Socrates would have three hours to present his defense before the jury ruled on innocence and guilt.

Refusing to accept the gods of Athens was a most serious charge. To an Athenian, religion was more than a matter of ritual or prayer. It was a crucial act of patriotism. An obligation. If one did not worship at the temple of Athena, he did not support Athens, and was betraying his city--the polis--the common good.

As usual, Socrates had not taken the easy road. Although he believed that the gods alone knew Truth and spoke to men through that inner voice in their souls, he had not made a habit of attending religious festivals or making his worship public. Rather than beg his fellow citizens for mercy, or appeal to their sympathies, Socrates took his trial as yet another opportunity to speak against hypocrisy. To criticize falsehood, and hold a mirror up to his “pious” jurors.

Even as the jury considered possible punishment, Socrates showed no regard for his own fate. Refusing to pay a fine or accept exile, he left them little choice but to vote for the maximum penalty...death.