

Abstract

The thesis discusses the definition and prosecution of impiety in democratic Athens during the Classical period, i.e. in 5th–4th centuries BCE. The question of “impiety” in the narrower sense, i.e. of what was denoted by the Greek word ἀσέβεια (literally, “the absence/negation of respect”), is set into larger context of other crimes of religious character, covered by special laws: “sacrilege” (ἱεροσυλία), digging out sacred olive-trees, offences against festivals and other delicts which were not subsumed under any more general term in the laws, pragmatically formulated as they were. The dissertation builds on the work of the researchers who show considerable scepticism towards the reliability of later sources, for example Plutarch or Diogenes Laertius – this is connected with doubts concerning processes against philosophers before Socrates. At the same time, the thesis follows the scholars who doubt the authenticity of the documents inserted in the speeches of the Attic Orators. For these reasons, a considerable part of the thesis is devoted to the rebuttal of late reports and inserted documents. A particular attention is given to the Decree of Diopieithes, which is mentioned in Plutarch’s *Life of Pericles* and is usually interpreted as criminalising atheism and meteorological and astronomical research. It is shown that Plutarch’s report is overall unreliable and in conflict with much more relevant sources. Furthermore, Plato’s presentation of the charge against Socrates, which obviously exerted influence on Plutarch, is also rejected as misleading.

Keywords

Classical Athens – Ancient Greek Law – Impiety – Sacrilege – Sacred olive-trees – Ritual Norms – Atheism – Prosecution of Philosophers – the Decree of Diopieithes