Crito

PLATO

c. 428–348 BC

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Κρίτων

Translated from the Greek with AI (Claude) and edited



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Crito · Plato (c. 428–348 BC)

Translated from the Greek with AI (Claude) and edited. Reading edition, Forage, September 2026. forage.com/plato/crito

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INTRODUCTION

Socrates has been sentenced to death and is waiting in prison. Before dawn his old friend Crito arrives: everything is arranged, the guards are bribed, and Socrates can escape.

Socrates refuses, and the *Crito* is his argument why. It ends with one of the great scenes in philosophy: the Laws of Athens themselves appear and make their case against running away.

Crito

Socrates' prison cell, before dawn.
Crito urges Socrates to escape, and Socrates argues that he must stay.

SOCRATES [43a] Why have you come at this hour, Crito? Isn't it still early?

CRITO Yes, very early.

SOCRATES What time is it, roughly?

CRITO Just before dawn.

SOCRATES I'm surprised the prison guard was willing to let you in.

CRITO He's used to me by now, Socrates, since I come here so often. And besides, I've done him a favor or two.

SOCRATES Did you just get here, or have you been here a while?

CRITO A fair while.

SOCRATES [43b] Then why didn't you wake me right away, instead of sitting beside me in silence?

CRITO No, by Zeus, Socrates, I wouldn't want to be so sleepless and so miserable myself. I've been marveling at you for a long time now, seeing how sweetly you sleep, and I deliberately didn't wake you so that you could pass the time as pleasantly as possible. All through your life I've often thought you fortunate in your temperament, but never more than in this present misfortune, seeing how easily and calmly you bear it.

SOCRATES Well, Crito, it would strike a false note for a man of my age to be upset that he has to die now.

CRITO 43c Other men just as old, Socrates, get caught in misfortunes like this, but their age does nothing to keep them from being upset at the fate that's upon them.

SOCRATES That's true. But why have you come so early?

CRITO I bring news, Socrates, hard news. Not for you, as it seems to me, but for me and all your friends it's hard and heavy news, and I think I'll find it the heaviest of all to bear.

SOCRATES What news? Has the ship arrived from Delos, the ship on whose 43d arrival I must die?[1]

CRITO No, it hasn't arrived yet, but I think it will come today, judging by what some people report who have come from Sunium, where they left it. So it's clear from these messengers that it will come today, and then tomorrow, Socrates, you will have to end your life.[2]

SOCRATES Well, Crito, may it turn out for the best. If this is what pleases the gods, so be it. All the same, I don't think it will come today.

CRITO 44a What makes you think so?

SOCRATES I'll tell you. I'm to die, I believe, on the day after the ship arrives.

CRITO That's what the authorities say, anyway.

SOCRATES Well then, I don't think it will come on the day that's now dawning, but on the next. I infer this from a dream I had a little while ago tonight. It looks as if you picked a good moment not to wake me.

CRITO And what was the dream?

1 Each year Athens sent a sacred ship to the festival of Apollo on the island of Delos; no executions could be carried out until it returned.
2 Sunium: the headland at the southern tip of Attica.

SOCRATES A beautiful, graceful woman seemed to come up to me, 44b dressed in white, and she called me and said: "Socrates, on the third day you would reach fertile Phthia."[3]

CRITO A strange dream, Socrates.

SOCRATES No, a clear one, Crito—or so it seems to me.

CRITO'S CASE FOR ESCAPE

Crito urges Socrates to escape from prison, citing his reputation, his friends' money and Socrates' sons.

CRITO All too clear, it seems. But my dear Socrates, even now, listen to me and save yourself. If you die, it won't be just one misfortune for me. Apart from losing a friend such as I'll never find again, many people who don't know you and me well will think 44c that I could have saved you if I'd been willing to spend the money, but didn't care to. And what reputation could be more shameful than being thought to value money more than friends? Most people will never believe that it was you who refused to leave this place, though we were eager for you to go.

SOCRATES But my dear Crito, why should we care so much about what the many think? The most reasonable people, who are more worth considering, will believe things were done just as they actually were.

CRITO 44d But you can see, Socrates, that one has to care about the opinion of the many too. The present situation itself makes it plain that the many can bring about not the least of evils but nearly the greatest, if someone has been slandered among them.

SOCRATES If only the many could bring about the greatest evils, Crito, so that they could also bring about the greatest goods—that would be fine. But as it is they can do neither. They can't make a person wise or foolish; they just do whatever chance brings their way.

3 Adapted from Homer, *Iliad* 9.363, where Achilles threatens to sail home to Phthia. Counting inclusively, the third day is the day after tomorrow.

CRITO [44e] Well, let that be as it may. But tell me this, Socrates. You're not worried, are you, about me and your other friends—that if you get out of here, the informers will make trouble for us for having smuggled you out, and we'll be forced to lose all our property, or a lot of money, or suffer something else besides?[4]

If you're afraid of anything [45a] like that, forget it. Surely it's right for us to run this risk to save you, and a greater one than this if need be. So do as I say, and don't refuse.

SOCRATES I am worried about these things, Crito, and many others too.

CRITO Then don't be afraid of them. In fact, the sum some people are willing to take for rescuing you and getting you out of here isn't large. And then, don't you see how cheap these informers are, and that it wouldn't take much money to deal with them? [45b] My money is at your disposal, and I think it's enough. And if, out of concern for me, you think you shouldn't spend mine, there are these visitors from abroad here ready to spend theirs. One of them, Simmias of Thebes, has even brought enough money for this very purpose, and Cebes is ready too, and a great many others. So, as I say, don't let fear of these things make you give up on saving yourself, and don't let it trouble you, as you said in court, that if you left you wouldn't know what to do with yourself. There are many [45c] other places you might go where people will welcome you. And if you want to go to Thessaly, I have friends there who will value you highly and keep you safe, so that no one in Thessaly will give you any trouble.

Besides, Socrates, I don't think what you're undertaking is even just: to betray yourself when you could be saved. You're hurrying to bring on yourself exactly what your enemies would hurry to bring on you—and did, wanting to destroy you. On top of this, I think you're betraying your own sons too. You could [45d] raise them and educate them, yet you'll go off and abandon them, and as far as you're concerned they'll fare however

4 Informers (*sykophantai*): men who brought prosecutions for profit or to extort money, a notorious nuisance in Athens.

chance has it. And they'll probably meet the sort of fate that orphans usually meet when they're left without parents. Either one shouldn't have children at all, or one should share in the hard work of raising and educating them. But you seem to me to be choosing the laziest course. You should choose what a good and brave man would choose—especially when you claim to have cared about excellence all your life. For my part, I'm ashamed [45e] both for you and for us, your friends, that this whole affair of yours will seem to have come about through some cowardice on our part: the way the case came to court when it needn't have, the way the trial itself was conducted, and now this final act, the absurd climax of the whole business—it will seem that we let the chance slip [46a] through some badness and cowardice of ours, since we didn't save you, and you didn't save yourself, though it was possible and could have been done if we'd been of even the slightest use.

So see to it, Socrates, that all this isn't shameful as well as bad, both for you and for us. Come, decide—or rather, it's no longer time for deciding but for having decided. And there's only one plan: all this has to be done this coming night. If we wait any longer, it will be impossible, out of the question. Please, Socrates, by all means do as I say, and don't refuse.

WHOSE OPINION COUNTS

Socrates argues that only the expert's opinion counts, and that one must never do wrong in return.

SOCRATES [46b] My dear Crito, your eagerness would be worth a great deal if it had some rightness to it; if not, the greater it is, the harder it is to deal with. So we have to examine whether we should do this or not. For I am, not only now but always, the kind of person who listens to nothing in me except the argument that seems best to me when I reason it out. I can't throw out the arguments I used to make now that this has happened to me; they seem to me much the same as before, [46c] and I revere and honor the same ones as I did before. Unless we can find bet-

ter ones to offer in the present situation, you can be sure I won't give in to you—not even if the power of the many tries to frighten us like children with even more bogeymen than we face now, sending imprisonments and deaths and confiscations of property our way. So how might we examine this most reasonably? Suppose we first take up this argument you're making about opinions. Were we right or not, each time we said [46d] that we should pay attention to some opinions but not to others? Or was it right before I had to die, while now it's become obvious that it was said just for the sake of talking, and was really play and nonsense? I'd like to look into it together with you, Crito, and see whether the argument will look any different to me now that I'm in this situation, or the same, and whether we'll dismiss it or be persuaded by it. As I recall, people who thought they were talking sense always used to say something like what I was saying just now: that of the opinions people [46e] hold, some should be taken very seriously and others not. In heaven's name, Crito, don't you think that's rightly said?

—For you, humanly speaking, are in no danger of dying [47a] tomorrow, and the present misfortune won't lead your judgment astray. So consider—don't you think it's rightly said that we shouldn't respect all the opinions people hold, but only some and not others, and not the opinions of everyone, but of some people and not others? What do you say? Isn't that rightly said?

CRITO It is.

SOCRATES So we should respect the good ones, and not the bad ones?

CRITO Yes.

SOCRATES And the good ones are those of people with understanding, and the bad ones those of people without it?

CRITO Of course.

SOCRATES Come then, how did we put things like this? When a man is in training [47b] and takes it seriously, does he pay attention to the praise and blame and opinion of every man, or only of the one man who happens to be a doctor or a trainer?

CRITO Only of that one.

SOCRATES So he should fear the blame and welcome the praise of that one man, and not those of the many.

CRITO Clearly.

SOCRATES So he should act and exercise, and eat and drink too, in whatever way seems right to the one man who supervises him and knows the subject, rather than as seems right to all the others put together.

CRITO That's so.

SOCRATES [47c] Very well. And if he disobeys that one man and disregards his opinion and his praise, and instead respects what the many say, who know nothing about it, won't he suffer some harm?

CRITO Of course he will.

SOCRATES And what is this harm? What does it aim at, and what part of the disobedient man does it affect?

CRITO His body, obviously. That's what it ruins.

SOCRATES Well said. And isn't it the same with everything else, Crito—not to go through them all—and in particular with things just and unjust, shameful and fine, good and bad, which are what we're deliberating about now? Should we follow the opinion of the many [47d] and fear it, or the opinion of the one, if there is someone who knows about them, whom we should feel shame before and fear more than all the others put together? If we don't follow him, we'll corrupt and maim that part of us which, as we used to say, is made better by what is just and destroyed by what is unjust. Or is there nothing to this?

CRITO I think there is, Socrates.

SOCRATES Come then: if, by not following the opinion of those who know, we ruin the part of us that is made better by what's healthy and corrupted by what's diseased, is life worth living for us once [47e] it's been corrupted? And that part, I take it, is the body, isn't it?

CRITO Yes.

SOCRATES So is life worth living with a wretched, corrupted body?

CRITO Not at all.

SOCRATES But is life worth living for us when that part of us is corrupted which injustice maims and justice benefits? Or do we think that part of 48a us, whatever it is, that justice and injustice concern, is of less worth than the body?

CRITO Not at all.

SOCRATES Of more worth, rather?

CRITO Much more.

SOCRATES Then, my good friend, we shouldn't care so very much what the many will say about us, but what the one who knows about just and unjust things will say—the one man, and the truth itself. So in the first place you're wrong to propose that we should care about the opinion of the many regarding what is just and fine and good, and their opposites. "But still," someone might say, "the many are able to put us to death."

CRITO 48b That's clear too. Someone might well say that, Socrates. You're right.

SOCRATES But my remarkable friend, the argument we've just been through still seems to me the same as before. And now consider this one in turn, whether it still holds for us or not: that what we should value most is not living, but living well.

CRITO It holds.

SOCRATES And that living well is the same as living finely and justly—does that hold, or not?

CRITO It holds.

SOCRATES Then on the basis of what we've agreed, we must consider whether it's just for me to try to get out of here without the Athenians' 48c permission, or not just. If it appears just, let's try; if not, let's let it go. As for the considerations you raise about

spending money, and reputation, and raising children, I suspect, Crito, that they're really the considerations of people who put others to death lightly, and would bring them back to life just as lightly if they could, without a thought—the many. But for us, since the argument compels it, I suspect there's nothing else to consider except what we were saying just now: whether we'll be acting justly in paying money and doing favors to those [48d] who will get me out of here, and in getting out and being got out ourselves, or whether in truth we'll be doing wrong in doing all this. And if it turns out that we'd be acting unjustly, I suspect we shouldn't weigh against doing wrong either the fact that we must die if we stay here and keep quiet, or anything else we might suffer.

CRITO I think you're right, Socrates. But consider what we should do.

SOCRATES Let's consider it together, my good friend, and if you can object to anything [48e] I say, object, and I'll be persuaded by you. If not, then stop, my dear friend, telling me the same thing over and over, that I must leave here against the Athenians' will. I think it very important to persuade you before I act, and not to act against your will. So look at the starting point of the inquiry and see whether it's [49a] stated to your satisfaction, and try to answer my questions as you really think best.

CRITO I'll try.

SOCRATES Do we say that one must never willingly do wrong in any way, or that one may do wrong in some ways and not in others? Or is doing wrong never good or fine in any way, as we've often agreed in the past? That's what we were saying just now too. Or have all those earlier agreements of ours been poured away in these few days, and have we, Crito, old men that we are, been discussing things seriously with each other all this time [49b] without noticing that we're no different from children? Or is it, more than anything, just as we used to say: whether the many agree or not, and whether we must suffer still harsher things than these or gentler ones, doing wrong is nevertheless bad and

shameful for the one who does it, in every way? Do we say so or not?

CRITO We do.

SOCRATES So one must never do wrong.

CRITO Certainly not.

SOCRATES Then one mustn't do wrong in return when wronged either, as the many think, since one must never do wrong.

CRITO [49c] Apparently not.

SOCRATES And what about this? Should one do injury, Crito, or not?

CRITO Surely not, Socrates.

SOCRATES And what about doing injury in return when one has been badly treated, as the many say? Is that just or not just?

CRITO Not at all.

SOCRATES For doing people harm, I take it, is no different from doing them wrong.

CRITO That's true.

SOCRATES So one must neither do wrong in return nor do harm to any human being, whatever one may suffer at their hands. And watch out, [49d] Crito, in agreeing to this, that you're not agreeing against what you really believe. For I know that only a few people believe this, or ever will. Those who hold this view and those who don't have no common ground for deliberation; they can't help despising each other when they see each other's decisions. So consider very carefully whether you share this view and agree with it, and whether we can begin our deliberation from here: that it's never right to do wrong, or to do wrong in return, or, when one suffers harm, to defend oneself by doing harm back. Or do you part ways with me and not share this starting point? [49e] I've thought this way for a long time and still do now. But if you've come to think otherwise, tell me and explain. But if you stand by what we said before, hear what comes next.

CRITO I do stand by it, and I agree with you. Go on.

SOCRATES Then I'll say what comes next—or rather, ask it. When someone has made an agreement with another, and it's a just one, should he keep it, or cheat?

CRITO He should keep it.

SOCRATES Then look at what follows. If we leave here without 50a persuading the city, are we doing harm to some people, and to those we should least harm, or not? And are we standing by what we agreed was just, or not?

CRITO I can't answer your question, Socrates. I don't understand it.

THE LAWS SPEAK

Socrates imagines the Laws of Athens arguing that escape would break his agreement with the city.

SOCRATES Look at it this way, then. Suppose we were about to run away from here—or whatever we should call it—and the Laws and the city as a whole came and stood before us and asked: "Tell me, Socrates, what do you have in mind to do? By this deed 50b you're attempting, what else are you planning than to destroy us, the Laws, and the whole city, as far as it lies with you? Or do you think a city can go on existing and not be overturned, in which the verdicts that are reached have no force, but are made void and undone by private individuals?" What shall we say, Crito, to this and other things like it? A great deal could be said, especially by an orator, on behalf of this law we'd be destroying, the one that requires verdicts once reached to be binding. 50c Or shall we say to them, "Yes, because the city wronged us and didn't judge the case correctly"? Is that what we'll say, or what?

CRITO Yes, by Zeus, Socrates, that's what we'll say!

SOCRATES Then what if the Laws say: Socrates, was that really what was agreed between us and you, or was it that you would abide by whatever verdicts the city reaches? And if we were sur-

prised at their words, they might say: Socrates, don't be surprised at what we're saying, but answer, since you're in the habit of using question and answer. Come now, what complaint do you have [50d] against us and the city that you're trying to destroy us? In the first place, didn't we give you birth? Wasn't it through us that your father married your mother and begot you? So tell us: do you find fault with those of us that concern marriage, as not being good? "I don't," I'd say. Well then, with those concerning the upbringing and education of a child once born, under which you too were educated? Or did those of us who were assigned to this not give good instructions, when they directed your father to educate you in [50e] the arts and in physical training? "They did," I'd say. Very well. Since you were born, raised, and educated, could you claim, first of all, that you weren't ours, our offspring and our slave, both you and your ancestors? And if that's so, do you think that justice is on an equal footing between you and us, and that it's just for you to do back to us whatever we try to do to you?[5]

Or was justice not on an equal footing between you and your father, or your master if you happened to have one, so that you could do back to them whatever was done to you—talking back when [51a] abused, striking back when struck, and many other things like that—whereas against your country and its laws you'll be allowed to, so that if we try to destroy you, believing it just, you in turn will try, as far as you can, to destroy us, the Laws, and your country, and claim that in doing this you're acting justly—you, the man who truly cares about excellence? Or are you so wise that it has escaped you that your country is more to be honored than your mother and father and all your other ancestors, more revered and more holy, [51b] and held in higher esteem among gods and among men of sense; and that you must revere your country, and yield to it and humor it when it's angry, more than a father; and either persuade it or do what it orders, and suffer quietly whatever it commands you to suffer, whether to be beaten or imprisoned; and if it leads you to war to

5 The arts (*mousikē*): the traditional education in music, poetry, and letters.

be wounded or killed, you must do it, and that is what justice is; and you must not give way or retreat or leave your post, but in war and in court and everywhere you must do what your 51c city and your country order, or else persuade it of where justice naturally lies; and that it's impious to use force against your mother or your father, and far more so against your country? What shall we say to this, Crito? That the Laws are telling the truth, or not?

CRITO I think they are.

SOCRATES Then consider, Socrates—the Laws might say—whether we're telling the truth when we say that what you're now attempting to do to us isn't just. We gave you birth, raised you, educated you, gave you and all the other citizens a share in every good thing we 51d could; and yet we proclaim, by granting permission to any Athenian who wishes, that once he has been admitted as an adult and has seen how the city's affairs are run and seen us, the Laws, if we don't please him he may take his property and go wherever he likes. None of us Laws stands in his way or forbids it: if any of you wants to go to a colony, if we and the city don't please him, or to go and settle somewhere else, he may go wherever 51e he likes, keeping his property.[6] But whoever of you stays, seeing the way we decide cases and manage the city in other respects, we say that he has thereby agreed with us in deed to do whatever we command. And we say that whoever disobeys does wrong in three ways: he disobeys us who gave him birth; he disobeys us who raised him; and having agreed to obey us, he neither obeys us nor persuades us if we're doing something wrong— 52a though we propose our orders and don't harshly insist that he do whatever we command, but offer him a choice of two things, either to persuade us or to do as we say. He does neither.

These are the charges, Socrates, that we say you too will be liable to if you do what you have in mind—and you not least of the Athenians, but more than almost anyone. And if I were to

6 Admitted as an adult: at eighteen a young Athenian underwent a scrutiny (*dokimasia*) before being enrolled as a citizen.

say, "Why is that?" they might justly take me to task, saying that I, more than almost any Athenian, have in fact made this agreement with them. For they'd say: [52b] Socrates, we have strong evidence that we and the city pleased you. You would never have stayed at home in it more than all the other Athenians if it hadn't pleased you more than it did them. You never left the city to attend a festival, except once to the Isthmus, nor went anywhere else except on military service, nor made any other trip abroad as other people do. You never felt a desire to know another city or other laws; we [52c] and our city were enough for you. So strongly did you choose us and agree to live as a citizen under us; and in particular you had children in it, since the city pleased you.[7] What's more, at the trial itself you could have proposed exile as your penalty if you'd wished, and done then, with the city's consent, what you're now attempting against its will. But then you made a fine show of not being upset if you had to die, and you chose, as you said, death before exile. Now you're not ashamed of those words, and you show no respect for us, the Laws, as you try to destroy us. You're doing [52d] what the meanest slave would do, trying to run away in breach of the terms and agreements by which you contracted with us to live as a citizen. So first answer us this very question: are we telling the truth when we say that you agreed, in deed and not just in word, to live as a citizen under us, or not? What shall we say to this, Crito? Can we do anything but agree?[8]

CRITO We must, Socrates.

SOCRATES Then aren't you—they'd say—breaking the terms and agreements [52e] you made with us yourself—agreements you made not under compulsion, nor deceived, nor forced to decide in a short time, but over seventy years, during which you could have left if we didn't please you or the agreements didn't seem just to you?

7 The Isthmus of Corinth, where the Isthmian Games were held.

8 In such trials, after a conviction the prosecution and the defendant each proposed a penalty, and the jury chose between them.

You didn't prefer Sparta or Crete, which you're always saying are well governed, or any other [53a] city, Greek or foreign. You went abroad less often than the lame and the blind and others with disabilities. That's how much more than other Athenians the city pleased you, and we the Laws, obviously—for who would be pleased by a city without laws? And now will you not stand by what you agreed? You will, Socrates, if you listen to us; and then at least you won't make yourself a laughingstock by leaving the city.

Just consider: if you break these agreements and go wrong in this way, what good will you do yourself or your [53b] friends? That your friends will risk being exiled themselves and losing their city, or losing their property, is pretty clear. As for you, first, if you go to one of the nearest cities, Thebes or Megara—both are well governed—you'll arrive as an enemy of their constitution, Socrates, and all who care about their own cities will eye you with suspicion, thinking you a corrupter of laws. You'll confirm the jurors in their opinion, so that they'll seem to have judged the [53c] case correctly. For whoever corrupts laws would surely be thought to corrupt young and foolish people as well. So will you avoid well-governed cities and the most orderly of men? And if you do, will your life be worth living? Or will you go among them and shamelessly converse with them—saying what, Socrates? The same things as here, that excellence and justice are what's most valuable for human beings, along with lawful customs and laws? And don't you think the affair of Socrates will [53d] look disgraceful? You surely must. Or will you get away from these places and go to Thessaly, to Crito's friends? For there, after all, disorder and license are at their worst, and perhaps they'd enjoy hearing from you how comically you ran away from prison, putting on some disguise—a peasant's leather cloak or the other sorts of things runaways usually dress up in—and changing your appearance. But that an old man, with little time left to live, in all [53e] likelihood, dared to cling so greedily to life that he broke the most important laws—will no one say that? Perhaps not, if you don't annoy anyone. Otherwise, Socrates,

you'll hear many things unworthy of you. So you'll live fawning on everyone and at their beck and call—doing what, besides feasting in Thessaly, as if you'd traveled to Thessaly for a dinner?

And those arguments of yours about [54a] justice and the rest of excellence—where will they be for us then? But perhaps you want to live for your children's sake, to raise and educate them? What? Will you take them to Thessaly and raise and educate them there, making them foreigners, so they can enjoy that benefit too? Or not that, but if they're raised here while you're alive, will they be better raised and educated with you not there with them? Your friends will take care of them, you'll say. Will they take care of them if you go away to Thessaly, but not if you go away to Hades? If those who claim to be your friends are [54b] of any use at all, you must believe they will.

No, Socrates, listen to us who raised you, and don't put children or life or anything else ahead of what is just, so that when you reach Hades you'll have all this to say in your defense to those who rule there. For it's plain that doing this won't be better, or more just, or more holy for you here, or for any of your people, nor will it be better for you when you arrive there. As it is, you'll depart, if you depart, [54c] as one wronged not by us, the Laws, but by men. But if you leave so shamefully, returning wrong for wrong and injury for injury, breaking your own agreements and terms with us, and doing harm to those you should least harm—yourself, your friends, your country, and us—then we'll be angry with you while you live, and there our brothers, the Laws in Hades, won't receive you kindly, knowing that you tried to destroy us too, as far as it lay with you. So don't let [54d] Crito persuade you to do what he says rather than what we say.

This, Crito, my dear friend, you can be sure, is what I seem to hear, just as people in a Corybantic frenzy seem to hear the pipes; and the sound of these words booms inside me and makes me unable to hear anything else. So be aware that, as far as my present views go, if you speak against them you'll speak in

vain. All the same, if you think you'll accomplish anything, speak.[9]

CRITO No, Socrates, I have nothing to say.

SOCRATES 54e Then let it be, Crito, and let's act this way, since this is the way the god is leading.

9 In Corybantic rites, worshipers danced in an ecstatic frenzy to the music of pipes and drums.