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AGAMEMNON'S CHANGE OF MIND
IN EURIPIDES' *IPHIGENEIA AT AULIS**



Στη μνήμη του αδελφού μου Νίκου

At the beginning of *Iphigeneia at Aulis* Agamemnon seems to have changed his mind and to have decided not to proceed with the sacrifice of Iphigeneia to Artemis, even if this means that the Greeks could not finally sail against Troy. In the iambic prologue¹ Agamemnon expounds the prehistory of the drama by referring to a series of events which have preceded his celebrated volte-face in regard to the sacrifice. He cites Helen's wedding, Tyndareus' oath, Helen's willing abduction, the Greek forces' muster at Aulis, the lack of fair winds, which kept them anchored at Aulis, and Calchas' prophecy that fair winds would only be granted to them if they sacrificed Iphigeneia. His immediate reaction, or so he maintains, was to order Talthybius to dismiss the army, since he would never dare kill his own daughter. But Menelaus induced him, employing every sort of argument, to favour the appalling act after all (49-98). Accordingly he sent a deceptive message to his wife Clytemnestra to fetch their daughter to Aulis on the pretext of marriage to Achilles. And as though this were not enough, he took pains to ex-

* I should thank Professor Stavros Tsitsiridis and the 'anonymous referee' of the *Logeion* for their critical reading of the manuscript.

1. The authenticity problems of the play in general and of the prologue in particular are notorious. Suffice it to mention that in his Oxford edition of the play (1994) the closest J. Diggle came to designating genuineness as regards the entire play is *fortasse Euripidei*. For the authenticity problems of the prologue see, for example, Walter Stockert, *Euripides: Iphigenie in Aulis*, I, *Einleitung und Text*, Wien 1992, 66-79, with bibliography; see also David Kovacs, "Toward a Reconstruction of *Iphigenia Aulidensis*", *JHS* 123 (2003) 80-83, 101-02; Katarzyna Pietruczuk, "The Prologue of *Iphigenia Aulidensis* Reconsidered", *Mnemosyne* 65 (2012) 565-83.

aggerate the merits of the prospective bridegroom. To cap it all, he asserted that Achilles refuses to join the army to Troy, unless he will previously lead a wife of their House to Phthia (98-103). Evidently Agamemnon then tried very hard, even employing blackmail, to entice his wife to send their daughter to Aulis, to her death.

But at the beginning of the play, as we have already mentioned, he seems to have changed his mind and he wishes, or so he claims, to cancel her arrival at the military camp. Let us notice that the alleged conversion of Agamemnon has been accepted at face value by most scholars. Indeed it is one of the rare issues of this many faceted-play, not to say the only one, which has drawn their general consensus. Are things, however, really like this? Is Agamemnon sincerely willing to save his child?

At the beginning of the play it is as yet night when the commander-in-chief calls an Old Man, his loyal slave, to speed out of the tent (1-2). And in spite of the immediate response of the old servant to his master's bidding, Agamemnon urges him once more to hurry up (3). At such an inopportune time, the spectator plausibly anticipates that something extraordinary is taking place, something pressing which compels Agamemnon to spend a sleepless night and in addition urgently to summon the Old Man. But instead of some comment on why he stays sleepless and why he has summoned the Old Man, Agamemnon asks him which star it is that travels in the sky (6). Having been informed that the star is Sirius (7-8)², the king continues to bewilder the spectator, as he goes on to describe the absolute calmness and the lack of winds in Euripus (9-11). It has been maintained that Agamemnon dwells on these details so that the audience will be acquainted with the circumstances under which the play begins.³ But these particulars could be communicated in some other context, without seeming to underline, as it were, the strange conduct of Agamemnon. At any rate, the time of the dramatic action — night — has been already disclosed by the Old Man (4-5). Furthermore, Agamemnon's question about the star hardly seems to provide any sort of pretext for the commander-in-chief to start talking casually before coming to the heart of the matter, since such bright stars as Sirius were well-known to everybody and to him as well.⁴ Such a question could indeed be considered a pretext, but, as we will see, for quite different reasons.

2. The ms L, followed by Stockert, assigns vv. 7-8 to the Old Man, whereas Diggle assigns them to Agamemnon. For a discussion about the ἀστὴρ σείλιος ('malicious star') or Σείλιος see Stockert, II, *Detailkommentar*, 161-63.

3. For this point of view see E.B. England, *The Iphigeneia at Aulis of Euripides*, London 1891, 10 ad v. 9.

4. Stockert, II, 164.

Having already lost his patience, the Old Man asks Agamemnon directly about his pacing anxiously outside his tent at this time of the night, and he exhorts him to go inside (12-16). But the king keeps on behaving in the same strange way. Paradoxical as it sounds, he reacts to the Old Man's suggestion — which would bring the scene to a close — by contending that he envies the humble Old Man and in general all the ordinary people who spend their life out of danger, while he does not at all envy the high-ranking officials (16-19). The repudiation of his descent and position, even though it does not illuminate his awkward attitude, does allow us to assume that whatever troubles him has something to do with his high office. Indeed, when the Old Man retorts that the “good life” is in noble descent and high office (20), Agamemnon replies by laying stress on the peril which could come from gods and men alike, the sweetness of these situations notwithstanding (21-27). Shocked by Agamemnon's unheroic stance, the Old Man reproves him for not living up to his status, reminding him at the same time that being a mortal he has to accept joy as well as sorrow (28-33). But Agamemnon has been acting strangely the entire night, even while he was still inside his tent. Thus, we learn from the Old Man that Agamemnon has been writing, in tears, the letter which he still holds in his hands, erasing it, sealing it, unsealing it, throwing it to the ground, and in general acting like a madman (34-41). Perplexed, the Old Man once more asks Agamemnon about the cause of his trouble (42). Apparently, then, the predicament of Agamemnon is related not only to his descent and office, as we saw above, but also to this letter. Unmistakably he shows signs of indecisiveness over its content and over what he wants to do with it.⁵

Yielding to the pressing questions of the Old Man, Agamemnon states his problem at last in the iambic prologue, recalling at the same time retrospectively, as we saw above, a series of both remote and recent events which have to a greater or lesser extent affected the present situation (49-107). He discloses then the reason why he stays sleepless and why he has hurried the Old Man out of the tent in the dead of night: having reconsidered his former decision for the sacrifice, he is eager now to send a second letter to rescind the first one. And he has called the Old Man to charge him with carrying the letter to Argos, to Clytemnestra (107-12). Before his departure, however, Agamemnon considers it expedient to make known to him the content of the letter (112-14). Predictably enough, such an intimation on Agamemnon's part triggers a long dialogue (of 46 verses) between him and the Old

5. According to Stockert, I, 9, in Agamemnon's indecision one could recognize that his plan to save Iphigeneia comes too late.

Man, as the servant keeps interrupting the king and commenting on his briefing (117-63). All in all, the entire prologue of the play is quite elongated (the transmitted text comprises some 163 verses⁶), a length which is at odds, to say the least, with the pressing situation that demands action, not words. Let us not forget that Iphigeneia is expected any moment now. Even more suggestively, Agamemnon draws attention — unconsciously? — to the passing of time by pointing out that the day is already breaking (156-58).

In addition to such exasperating slowness, there is something more pointed which puts into question the sincerity of Agamemnon's conversion, namely the courier whom the king has appointed to carry the crucial second letter to Argos. The Old Man is one of the loyal slaves who serve their masters from generation to generation. This slave, in his effort to persuade Agamemnon to confide in him, reminds him that he came from Tyndareus' house, as part of Clytemnestra's dowry (45-48). His credentials testify to his old age. How is it conceivable that this aged man, no matter how willing he is, could successfully bring to completion his arduous task, and as fast as possible at that?⁷ Agamemnon had presumably employed a faster courier than the old slave to dispatch the first letter to his wife.⁸

Agamemnon's further instructions to the Old Man cannot help but accentuate our doubts about his notorious conversion. Preposterous as it sounds, he urges him to speed his footsteps, without yielding to his old age (139-40), as though something like that depended on his will. Furthermore he warns him neither to sit under some shadowy spring nor to fall asleep (141-42). But this is precisely what the Old Man is bound to do, not because he is unreliable, but because of his old age; to make things worse, it is high summer (7). So Agamemnon's directives to the Old Man do not seem to underline so much the importance of the letter for him⁹, as the disproportion

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6. The authenticity problems of the prologue are not involved in this argument. Even though the authenticity of certain sections of the prologue is debated (see, for example, Stockert, I, 78, who disputes the authenticity of the iambs [49-114] of the prologue, whereas Kovacs, "Reconstruction", 80-83, disputes the authenticity of both sets of the anapaests [1-48, 117-63]), the delay of Agamemnon in sending the letter is undisputed. Let us notice though that Diggle marks out the entire prologue as *vix Euripidei*. Pietruczuk, "The Prologue", 565, and *passim*, deletes lines 105-10 of the prologue.
 7. In Pietruczuk's opinion, "Prologue", 574, it can be assumed that Agamemnon considers his servant trustworthy and able to carry out his difficult mission since he decides to disclose the content of the first letter and the motives behind it to him.
 8. See C.A.E. Luschnig, *Tragic Aporia: A Study of Euripides' Iphigenia at Aulis*, Victoria, Australia, 1988, 119.
 9. Stockert, II, 220, ad v. 139 ff.

between the urgent mission on the one hand and the old age of the “messenger” on the other.

The last instructions of Agamemnon to the feeble Old Man verge on parody. At least something like that is suggested by his bidding the Old Man to watch lest a chariot, at the crossroads, escape his attention and go by carrying his daughter to the Danaan camp (144-48). Were he to come upon Iphigeneia's escort train, he should seize the horses' reins, and turn them back to the Cyclopiian citadel (149-52). After the belated exit of the Old Man, Agamemnon expresses his pessimism about mortals' happiness (160-63), thus echoing his previous views for the precarious life of the noblemen (16-19). Such a fatalistic attitude does not seem compatible with Agamemnon's alleged conversion; rather it anticipates the failure of his plan to save Iphigeneia, as it will happen at the beginning of the first episode¹⁰.

So, ironically, some questions cannot help but be raised concerning Agamemnon's change of mind. Such questions are based on the one hand on the incompetence of the Old Man as a “courier”, and on the other on his late departure to carry out his pressing mission. Not surprisingly then, before he even manages to get out of the camp, he is arrested by Menelaus who has been looking out for Iphigeneia's arrival any moment (328). Needless to say, in spite of the Old Man's strong protestations and brave resistance, Menelaus snatches the crucial letter out of his hands by force (303-13). Apparently, Agamemnon had waited until the last moment, before sending the second letter, when Iphigeneia's arrival was imminent¹¹. Under these circumstances, the old slave could by no means thwart her coming to the camp. Indeed, she turned up on schedule.

Agamemnon's ambivalent attitude in the prologue foreshadows his reaction upon learning his daughter's arrival. As soon as the messenger announces the girl's coming, Agamemnon, unexpectedly, gives up any effort to avert her death. He is so preoccupied with himself that Iphigeneia's plight does not even cross his mind. At this crucial moment for her life, he does nothing but grumble vociferously at having fallen into *ἀνάγκης ζεύματα* (the “bonds of necessity”, 443). Without elucidating what such a necessity¹² consists of,

10. *Ibid.*, 225, ad v. 161-63. In Kovacs' opinion, “Reconstruction”, 83, the oddity “that Agamemnon should stress his misery at the point when he thinks he can save his daughter's life” indicates that the passage is not genuine.

11. G.M.A. Grube, *The Drama of Euripides*, London/New York 1941, 424; Philip Vellacott, *Ironic Drama: A Study of Euripides' Method and Meaning*, Cambridge 1975, 174, 220.

12. John Gibert, *Change of Mind in Greek Tragedy*, Göttingen, 1995, 219. — Several times Agamemnon's words have been interpreted on the basis of evidence provided by the

he further protests that some divinity has proven too cunning for all his stratagems (444-45). In this way he tries to justify his inactivity, casting himself once again in the role of a victim¹³, due to his high office: citing commonplaces in regard to the conduct of the noble and the commoners respectively, Agamemnon complains that the common people can cry easily and tell all their grief, whereas such an expression of feeling is disreputable for the high-born. Even worse, the nobles' life is controlled by grandeur, although they are slaves to the masses (446-50). This is the reason why Agamemnon, as he affirms, is ashamed to weep and yet ashamed not to weep, since he has fallen into direst calamity (451-53). Significantly, it is Agamemnon, not Iphigeneia, who has once again fallen into calamity.

And while the girl's life hangs by a thread and some sort of action is required, for her life to be saved, her father dwells once more on his own predicament: a predicament which is not related, as one might expect, to the imminent death of Iphigeneia, but to the presence of Clytemnestra, who has come uninvited, as a stumbling block to his plans. He is at a loss, how to receive her, or what to tell her (454-59)¹⁴. His daughter's impending death does not enter his frame of mind, as though he is not the same person who was (or pretended to be) in agony for her life a little while ago; who sent the letter; who defended his decision to save her life in a debate with his brother, in which he exposed the latter's selfish motives with regard to the expedition and even challenged the validity of Tyndareus' oath (381-411).

Be that as it may, what is more revealing, in my opinion, with regard to Agamemnon's intentions, and thus qualifies his alleged change of mind, is that he is resigned to the idea of his daughter dying. Here is what he says, while contemplating his forthcoming meeting with his daughter:

τὴν δ' αὖ τάλαιναν παρθένον — τί παρθένον;
 Αἰδῆς νιν, ὡς ἔοικε, νυμφεύσει τάχα —
 ὡς ᾄκτιστ'· οἶμαι γάρ νιν ἰκετεύσειν τάδε·
 ὦ πάτερ, ἀποκτενεῖς με; τοιούτους γάμονος

later advancement of the plot; see, e.g., Stockert, I, 10, in whose opinion the phrase *ἀνάγκης ζεύγματα* anticipates somewhat Agamemnon's fear of the army later in the play, when the army shows aggressiveness towards Iphigeneia.

13. S.E. Lawrence, "Iphigeneia at Aulis: Characterization and Psychology in Euripides", *Ramus* 17 (1988) 93.

14. Kovacs, "Reconstruction", 87, excises this passage (454-59), since, in his opinion, it would have been odd that Agamemnon should say that what "destroyed" him was having to confront his wife. "Surely", he asserts, "what destroys him is the loss of his daughter". But such an assertion seems to beg the question.

γήμειας αὐτὸς χῶστις ἐστὶ σοι φίλος (460-64).¹⁵

The poor maiden — yet why do I call her that when Hades, it seems will soon make her his bride? —how I pity her! I think that she will supplicate me with these words: “Father, do you mean to kill me? May you make a marriage like this, you and whoever is friend to you!” (transl. D. Kovacs)

In these verses Agamemnon concedes that Hades will soon marry his daughter and at the same time he expresses his grief, caused by her death: ὡς ᾄκτισα, he affirms. The sentimental aorist¹⁶ here is used literally, since Agamemnon has already resigned himself to her death, which seems inevitable to him; it is only a matter of time for it to take place. It seems then that Agamemnon has psychologically dealt with and got over Iphigeneia's death.¹⁷ Moreover, the fact that he goes so far as to verbalize her alleged plea to him constitutes an additional clue of his acquiescence to the imminent death of his daughter. Even more illuminating is the content of her alleged entreaty, which has nothing to do with the actual plea of Iphigeneia later in the play. There, she pleads with her father for her life, reminding him of her childhood, of their mutual love and their prospective expectations of one another — her future wedding and her future care of him in his old age. In case her plea fails to dissuade Agamemnon from her sacrifice, she implores him to look at her and to kiss her so that she might retain this memory of him in her death (1211-52). Contrary to all such human and moving supplication of the young girl, in her simulated entreaty, Agamemnon expresses nothing but his fear that she will curse him¹⁸; it is precisely to repel such a fear that he refers to the curse he assumes Iphigeneia will hurl against him.¹⁹ His fear of a curse

15. I quote from James Diggle's Oxford edition (1994) of Euripides.

16. See R. Kühner – B. Gerth, *Ausführliche Grammatik der griechischen Sprache*, I, Hannover 1898, 164, for the use of aorist, instead of present, to express emotion aroused in the recent past. According to Michael Lloyd, “The Tragic Aorist”, *CQ* 49 (1999) 43, these aorists are descriptive rather than performative and they are to be distinguished from the so-called tragic aorist which, in his view, is invariably performative.

17. Markland's emendation *ἵκετεύσειν* of the transmitted *ἵκετεῦσαι* has been generally accepted; see Stockert, II, 334. Demetrios N. Vernardakis, *Ἐδοκιμῶν δράματα*, III, *Ἰφιγένεια ἢ ἐν Αὐλίδι, Ἰφιγένεια ἢ ἐν Ταύροις, Ἡλέκτρα, Ἀλκίσις*, Athens 1903, 71, ad 462, defends the transmitted aorist *ἵκετεῦσαι* which, in his opinion, indicates that Agamemnon visualizes for a moment that his daughter is already dead, as he assigns her supplication to the past. Such a suggestion is compatible with Agamemnon's frame of mind.

18. Luschnig, *Aphoria*, 15; Stockert, II, 334, ad v. 463 ff.

19. In Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* the father gagged his daughter to avert her curse (235-38).

points to Agamemnon's guilt on the one hand and to his complete dissociation from his daughter's death on the other. He even takes care to deal with some alleged instinctive reaction to the sacrifice of the infant Orestes and so to overcome it in advance²⁰. Having thus settled the issue of the young girl, he once again assumes the victim's position – this time the victim of Paris who ruined him, as he claims, by marrying Helen (467-68). This is a typical example of the victimizer who assumes the role of the victim.

Agamemnon shows his true colours after Menelaus' change of mind; the latter, under the impact of Iphigeneia's arrival, argues against the sacrifice (473-503). He now realizes that Helen's bed is not worth Iphigeneia's life (485-88). He goes as far as to suggest disbanding the army. He acknowledges that he was unwise and mad until he saw things close-up and realized what killing children means (489-90). Indeed, he has put himself in Agamemnon's position (*εἰμὶ δ' οὔπερ εἶ σὺ νῦν*. 480 ["I stand now where you stand". transl. D. Kovacs]).

Although Menelaus' sincerity in this speech has been called into question by some critics, there is no hint in the text to justify such skepticism.²¹ His conversion is dramatically functional since it is conducive to the elucidation of Agamemnon's motives for the war, and by contrast it underlines the king's inhumanity, as he persists relentlessly on the sacrifice²². Once he has changed his mind, Menelaus recants his former argument for a glorious panhellenic expedition against the barbarians, which he was the first and only one so far in the play to put forward in the debate with his brother (370-72). Equally importantly, as we have seen, he is ready to give Helen up. Thus any external compulsion on Agamemnon for the sacrifice seems to have been re-

20. *παρὸν δ' Ὀρέστης ἐγγυὺς ἀναβοήσεται*
οὐ σννετὰ σννετῶς· ἔτι γὰρ ἔστι νήπιος (465-66).

Orestes will be there and will cry out — words that make no sense
but are all too sensible: he is still a babe. (transl. D. Kovacs)

21. See, for example, England, *Iphigeneia*, xvi; Grube, *Drama*, 426; Vellacott, *Ironic Drama*, 174. Some other critics defend Menelaus' sincerity; see, for example, Luschnig, *Aporia*, 15-16; Jens-Uwe Schmidt, "Iphigenie in Aulis – Spiegel einer zerbrechenden Welt und Grenzpunkt der Dichtung", *Philologus* 143, 2 (1999) 225. See also François Jouan, *Euripide*, tome VII, *Iphigénie à Aulis*, Paris 1983, 32-33, who refers to these two points of view, considers the first one more plausible, but fails to discern in the text any evidence for either.

22 Kovacs, "Reconstruction", 87, excises Menelaus' recantation speech (473-503) partly on the ground that his change of mind is, in his opinion, flimsily motivated.

moved and the road is open for the army to be disbanded.²³ But Agamemnon's response to the life-saving suggestion of Menelaus is anything but typical of a father who is supposed to be in agony for the life of his child. Instead of disbanding the army as soon as possible, he takes his time to thank his brother for his right words, to refer in general to strife that may rise between brothers for a woman's sake or out of greed, and to reject such a kinship that brings bitterness to both (506-10). No mention whatsoever of Iphigeneia or of the sacrifice.

After these general irrelevancies, Agamemnon announces, like a bolt in the blue, that they have reached a point when it is necessary to carry out the bloody murder of his daughter:

ἀλλ' ἤκομεν γὰρ εἰς ἀναγκαίης τύχας,
θνηγατρὸς αἵματηρὸν ἐκπροᾶσαι φόνον (511-12).

But we have reached the point where we are forced to commit
the bloody murder of my daughter. (transl. D. Kovacs)

The question arises as to whether there is any "necessity" whatsoever or whether Agamemnon is merely trying to pass off his own decision about the sacrifice as his child's inevitable fate. The strong reaction of Menelaus who, taken aback by Agamemnon's announcement, inquires who is going to force him to kill his own daughter (513), shows that there is no such "necessity", at least as far as Menelaus is concerned. Ironically, Menelaus refutes every "necessity" which Agamemnon claims is compelling him to the sacrifice: the army (514) — no, if he sends the girl back to Argos (515); Calchas (518) — no, if he is killed (519); Odysseus (524) — he cannot injure Agamemnon and Menelaus (525).²⁴ In his main argument to stress his "necessity", Agamemnon contends that Odysseus will disclose Calchas' oracle to the host and the breach of his promise to offer the victim to Artemis, thus inciting the army to kill both Atreidae and to sacrifice Iphigeneia; even if he escapes to Argos, he argues, the army will pursue them and will eventually an-

23 See Luschig, *Aporia*, 16: "for this moment [...] there is no one, not one of the characters in the play, who favours the sacrifice. Iphigeneia need not be killed [...]. The Trojan War need not take place." See also Susanne Aretz, *Die Opferung der Iphigeneia in Aulis: Die Rezeption des Mythos in antiken und modernen Dramen*, Stuttgart/Leipzig 1999, 136, 217; F. Melian Stawell, *Euripides: Iphigeneia in Aulis Translated into English Verse*, London 1929, 18.

24 D.J. Conacher, *Euripidean Drama: Myth, Theme and Structure*, Toronto, London 1967, 256.

nihilate the country along with the Cyclopiian walls (528-35). Finally, Agamemnon lays the blame on the gods for the impasse in which he is allegedly caught (536-37)²⁵. But business is business, and so he requests Menelaus to take care lest Clytemnestra learn anything before the deed is done (538-40). Needless to say, he does not fail to assume once more the role of the unhappy victim (541). Nor does he fail to command the Chorus to keep their mouth shut (542).

Quite a few critics take Agamemnon's excuses at face value and consequently they attribute his decision to sacrifice Iphigeneia to his fear of the army and in particular of Odysseus.²⁶ Somewhat different is another point of view according to which Agamemnon's fear is caused not so much by the army, or Odysseus, or Calchas as by his innate cowardice and selfishness that compel him to sacrifice his child.²⁷ It has been put forward as well that, even though Agamemnon chose to kill his child, he opted to see that choice as imposed on him by the army.²⁸

Taking into consideration the context of the play, we may maintain that the alleged "necessity" (Agamemnon being compelled by the army and Odysseus) does not seem to be well founded. To say the least, the soldiers up to this stage of the plot (that is the girl's arrival at the camp) do not know why she has come at all to a military camp²⁹. Even less can they conceive of

25. Kovacs, "Reconstruction", 87, excises vv. 504-37, as the work of the Reviser; according to him, in the original performance, it would have been enough for Agamemnon to excuse his decision for the sacrifice by saying that Iphigeneia was at Aulis and the army would force the sacrifice. See also Pietruczuk, "Prologue", 572, 577, for the deletion of vv. 518-35.

26. See, for example, Helmuth Vretska, "Agamemnon in Euripides' Iphigeneia in Aulis", *WS* 74 (1961) 24; Hans-Martin Schreiber, *Iphigenies Opfertod: Ein Beitrag zum Verständnis des Tragikers*, Dissert., Frankfurt am Main 1953, 53; Herbert Siegel, *Euripides' Iphigeneia at Aulis - Analysis and Critique*, PhD Dissert., New York University 1978, 32-38; Idem, "Agamemnon in Euripides' Iphigeneia at Aulis", *Hermes* 109 (1981) 259-64; Nancy Rabinowitz, "The Strategy of Inconsistency in Euripides' Iphigeneia at Aulis", *CB* 59 (1983) 23; Lawrence, "Iphigeneia", 95; J. de Romilly, "Les hésitations d'Agamemnon", in *Tragédies grecques au fil des ans*, Paris 1995, 15-21; Stockert, I, 25; Idem, II, 350; Schmidt, "Iphigeneie", 226. See also George E. Dimock, Jr., "Introduction", in W.S. Merwin and George E. Dimock, Jr. trans. *Euripides' Iphigeneia at Aulis*, New York 1978, 9, who points out that Agamemnon did not try to dissuade Odysseus, Calchas or even the army from the sacrifice, because he was evidently conditioned to yield to whatever he fancied that his soldiers wanted.

27. Vellacott, *Ironic Drama*, 220-21.

28. Luschnig, *Aporia*, 119.

29. Let us notice that nowhere in the play is explicitly stated that Calchas' prophecy was public. Passages 95-96, 513-14, 538-41, 817-18, 1259-75, 1345-48, are supposed to

Agamemnon's awful scheme. Within the scope of reasonable human behaviour, they guess that her father has sent for her either because he plans her wedding or because he had a yearning for her (425-34). What is more, even up to Achilles' appearance on stage, the army do not exhibit any zeal whatsoever to sail against Troy. In the prologue, Agamemnon had pondered dismissing the army, upon hearing Calchas' oracle (94-95). Whether he was sincere in his contentions or not, it seems that he could send them back home without consequences. Furthermore, according to Menelaus, when the fair winds failed Agamemnon, the soldiers were demanding to disband so that they would not toil at Aulis all in vain (352-53). Achilles as well, when he appears on stage to protest to Agamemnon about the delay, asserts that the Myrmidons put pressure on him either to expedite the departure or else to lead them back home. They have no idea about the prophecy and they attribute the delay to the Atreidae (814-18)³⁰.

It is true, however, that later in the play the attitude of the army, according to Achilles' account of it, seems to have changed dramatically: when he appears on stage for a second time, just before Iphigeneia's sacrifice, he contends that he risked being stoned by the soldiers, his Myrmidons included, for he has tried to save the girl (1348-53), whom the soldiers under Odysseus' guidance, are about to seize and lead to slaughter (1361-65). Is it possible that such a depiction of the army's conduct justifies Agamemnon's claims in regard to his "compulsion" and to the inevitability of the sacrifice?³¹ Setting apart Achilles' questionable role as Iphigeneia's saviour, it must be pointed out that the army and Odysseus (and indeed Calchas) never appear on stage. They are phantom-characters.³² The fact that they lack voice and

refer implicitly to the public character of Calchas' prophecy, but their evidence does not seem conclusive. On the contrary it is clearly stated that Calchas' oracle and plan to sacrifice Iphigeneia was known only to Calchas, Agamemnon, Menelaus and Odysseus (106-7, 414-39, 518-35). The main assumption of Kovacs, "Reconstruction", 77-103, in his conjectural reconstruction of the text of the First Performance of the play, is that Calchas delivered his prophecy to the entire army, and that the notion of its delivery to Agamemnon's inner circle should be attributed to a 4th-century Reviser (as Kovacs calls him). The same assumption that Calchas' prophecy was communicated to the whole army is adopted by Pietruczuk, "The Prologue", 572; in her opinion, the explicitness of the version of the communication of Calchas' prophecy to only few (Agamemnon, Menelaus, Odysseus) in contrast to the implicit version of the communication to the whole army, points rather to an interpolator than to Euripides.

30. Kovacs' point of view ("Reconstruction", 79), according to which "Since the winds are against them (the Myrmidons) it is clear that they are complaining of Agamemnon's slowness in carrying out Calchas' advice" does not seem well founded in the text.

31. Schmidt, *Iphigenie*, 237.

32. Aretz, *Opferung*, 138, 218.

that they are presented in contradictory terms removes to a great extent any reasonable grounds for Agamemnon's fears.³³ At any rate, were the Achaeans so determined to sail against Troy so that they would capture Mycenae and kill all members of the Atreid family in order to have the sacrifice carried out, it would have been in vain for Agamemnon to attempt (or to pretend that he attempts) to rescind his first letter, in which he invited Iphigeneia to come to Aulis.³⁴ Are Agamemnon's fears resulting from his cowardice then,³⁵ or are they merely serving his decision to kill his child in order to satisfy his military ambitions, as he was charged by Menelaus in their debate (337-62)?³⁶

The scene with the Old Man in the prologue contributes somewhat to the understanding of Agamemnon's true position in regard to the sacrifice. In that scene, as we have seen, some first seeds of doubt were sown concerning the sincerity of Agamemnon's conversion. The ironic gap between the *ᾠνομα* (name) and the *ἔργον* (deed),³⁷ between Agamemnon's words (urgent mission) and reality (old man messenger) undermines his sincerity. Agamemnon's attitude at the outset foreshadows his later conduct, which would appear clumsy and unwarranted without the prologue scene. Taking into consideration this scene, we might maintain that, in spite of all appearances, Agamemnon never changed his mind in regard to the sacrifice, and the "compulsion" he conjures up to justify it, is merely a sham.³⁸ But why, on earth, did Agamemnon appear to have revoked, even momentarily, his decision to carry out the sacrifice? It is a puzzle. From a dramatic point of view, the quarrel of the two brothers over the second letter serves to expose their respective motives for the expedition: in their debate the one shows the oth-

33. This is of course not to say that off-stage characters are to be altogether disregarded. For the importance of off-stage characters see, for example, I.J.F. de Jong, "Three Off-Stage Characters in Euripides", in Judith Mossman (ed.), *Oxford Readings in Classical Studies: Euripides*, Oxford 2003, 369-89.

34. See Jasper Griffin, "Characterization in Euripides: Hippolytus and Iphigeneia in Aulis", in Christopher Pelling (ed.), *Characterization and Individuality in Greek Literature*, Oxford 1990, 144.

35. See, for example, Aretz, *Opferung*, 218.

36. In the opinion of some critics Menelaus' charges are false, since they are uttered in a debate (*ἀγῶνα λόγων*); see, for example, Gudrun Mellert-Hoffmann, *Untersuchungen zur "Iphigenie in Aulis" des Euripides*, Heidelberg 1969, 33; Stockert, I, 8. Suffice it to say that Agamemnon never answers these accusations, thus somewhat justifying Menelaus.

37. The verbal contrast *ᾠνομα-ἔργον* is coming up in vv. 128-29 and 1115-16.

38. See also Conacher, *Euripidean Drama*, 249. Mellert-Hoffmann, *Untersuchungen*, 40, points out that Agamemnon does not make clear why he changed his mind for the sacrifice. Might it be therefore for the sole reason that Agamemnon had never changed his mind for the sacrifice?

er for what he is (335-401), and their motives for the war are demonstrated to be personal: ambition on Agamemnon's part, according to Menelaus, passion for a woman, Helen, on Menelaus' part, according to Agamemnon³⁹. Again from a dramatic point of view, one more advantage of Agamemnon's supposed conversion is that it is necessary for the Old Man to know Agamemnon's intrigue in order to reveal it to Clytemnestra and Achilles so that the dramatic action will gain new impetus.⁴⁰ But such a rationale does not seem sufficient by itself to explain Agamemnon's supposed conversion. One additional reason would perhaps be that his alleged change of mind provides him with a pretext to see himself as the victim of the situation, while at the same time he remains steadfast to his plan to sacrifice his child. There seems to have been a change of mind in Agamemnon the father, although it is Agamemnon, the man of power, who prevails in the end. It is as though Agamemnon, the commander-in-chief, has gone through the motions of fatherhood and its cares without being really committed to them. It might be, as well, that Agamemnon's case exemplifies the well-known axiom that, in war, nothing is as it seems.⁴¹ After all, no matter how many speculations are brought forward, the questions remain open.

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39. Kovacs, "Reconstruction", 84-86, excises the debate and the stichomythia of the two brothers (335-414).

40. Stockert, II, 208.

41. Vellacott, *Ironic Drama*, 174.

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Abstract

This paper argues that, in spite of all appearances, Agamemnon never changed his mind in regard to Iphigeneia's sacrifice. His alleged conversion in the prologue of the play and his wish to save Iphigeneia's life by sending a second letter to rescind his deceptive message to

Clytemnestra to fetch their child to Aulis, is undermined both by the incompetence of the Old Man, whom Agamemnon has appointed as a "courier", and by the servant's belated departure to carry out his pressing mission. The ironic gap between Agamemnon's words (urgent mission) and reality (old man as messenger) calls into question the king's sincerity.

Agamemnon's ambivalent attitude at the outset foreshadows his subsequent giving up of any effort to avert Iphigeneia's death. Such a conduct would appear clumsy and unwarranted without the prologue scene. Taking into consideration this scene and the context of the play, we may assert that the various kinds of "compulsion" Agamemnon conjures up to justify his firm decision to sacrifice his child are shown to be merely sham.