

## **Euripides, Iphigenia at Aulis, 5<sup>th</sup> C. BC**

The messenger describes the scene to Clytemnestra, mother of Iphigenia:

"...we brought your child to the place where the Greek army had gathered, all together and all at once. When King Agamemnon saw his daughter proceeding to the altar to her death, he heaved a deep sigh and turned his head to one side and wept. He covered his eyes with his robe. But the young girl stood beside her father who had given her life and said: 'Fathers, as you bid me, I am here. I give my body, freely on behalf of my country, for all the land of Greece. Lead me to the altar. There, if that is the gods' will, sacrifice me. May this gift from me bring you success. May you win the crown of victory and win thereafter a glorious homecoming. And no, do not let any man lay his hands upon me. In peace and in good heart I offer you my throat.' So she spoke, and all stood by in wonder at the courage, yes, the virtue of her words. Then Talthybius, for so he was commanded, stood before the assembled army and ordered them to watch and keep holy silence. The Calchas, the prophet, took from its sheath a sharp knife and put it in a basket studded with gold. And upon the young girl's head he put a garland. Achilles, son of Peleus, circled the altar of the goddess, basket in hand, and upon her he sprinkled holy water and he said, 'Artemis, daughter of Zeus, slayer of wild beasts, you that spin the silver light at night, receive this sacrifice which we offer to you. We the Greek army and King Agamemnon offer to you the pure blood that flows from a virgin's throat. Grant our ships an untroubled journey. Grant that our spears will sack the towers of Troy.' The priest seized the knife and offered a prayer as he looked for a place to plunge the knife's point. My soul was deeply troubled and in pain. I stood by, head lowered. Suddenly, it was a miracle: everyone had heard the sound of the knife – but no one could see where in the world the young maiden had disappeared to. The priest cried out. The army echoed his cry, and then they saw the miracle, impossible to believe even as it happened before their eyes. There on the ground lay a deer, gasping for breath. She was a full-grown deer, beautiful, and the altar of the goddess was dripping with her blood. Then Calchas spoke – imagine the joy! – 'Leaders of this the Greek army, do you see this victim that the goddess has laid upon her own altar? This mountain deer? She accepts this offering with greater gladness than the child. For her altar will not now be stained with noble blood. She rejoices in the sacrifice. And she grants us fair sailing and success at Troy. Therefore, courage! To arms, to the ships! For on this day we must leave the hallow bay of Aulis and cross the Aegean Sea.' When the carcass had been reduced to ashes in Hephaestus's fire, Calchas offered a prayer for the safe homecoming of the army. Agamemnon sent me to tell you these things, to tell you of the good fortune he has received from the gods, and of the fame that is now his and will not die, I tell you what I saw. For I was there. There is no doubt your child has been taken to live amongst the gods."