

**COLLEGE SERIES OF  
GREEK AUTHORS;  
EURIPIDES IPHIGENIA  
AMONG THE TAURIANS**

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College Series of Greek Authors; Euripides Iphigenia Among the Taurians by Isaac Flagg

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**ISAAC FLAGG**

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IPHIGENIA,  
From a wall-painting at Pompeii.

Edin T 1237.396.871

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TO  
MY FRIEND  
AND FORMER COLLEAGUE

**Tracy Peck**

YALE UNIVERSITY

## SYNOPSIS OF THE INTRODUCTION.

### Age and Celebrity of the Play.

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## INTRODUCTION.

### AGE AND CELEBRITY OF THE PLAY.

EURIPIDES' *Iphigenia among the Taurians* is certainly one of the poet's later works, although the year of its representation is unknown. A quotation in the *Frogs* of Aristophanes<sup>1</sup> shows that it preceded the *Iphigenia at Aulis*, which was first brought out after the author's death by his son, the younger Euripides. The earlier play is thus the dramatization of a passage in the legendary history subsequent to that which forms the theme of the later play. This order of composition might be inferred from the treatment of the subject in the two dramas severally considered. To make the heroine resign herself as a voluntary sacrifice for Hellas, as is done in the scene at Aulis, was an afterthought of Euripides. Had this idea been already presented to the public, the poet would hardly have reverted to the traditional conception of the event, which is preserved in the Tauric play — where the daughter of Agamemnon, ministering in a savage land to the goddess who has spirited her away out of the hands of her slayers, deplores, with grave reproach upon her father's name, the cruel destiny that reared her as a victim to the sacrificial knife.

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<sup>1</sup> Euripides.

1232 Πέλοψ δ' Ἀγαμέμνων εἰς Πύαν μολὼν  
θαῖσιν ἱπποῖς

Aeschylus.

ληκθίον ἀπέλεσεν.

The *Frogs* was represented 406 B.C., the year after the death of Euripides, but the quotation implies an acquaintance with the tragedy on the part of the Athenian public, and shows that it must have been brought out during the life of the poet. Some conjectures that have been made as to the year of representation are mentioned in foot-note 31.

It was a moment of the happiest inspiration, when Euripides was led so to combine the offshoots of the legend as to bring Orestes and Pylades into the presence of Iphigenia, to be sacrificed under her auspices at the altar of the Taurian Artemis. The world could not be slow to applaud the singular felicity of the dramatic situation thus produced and the masterly skill with which it was portrayed. The subject became a favorite in literature and in graphic art, and maintained a lasting popularity. The *Pyladea amicitia* was an ineffaceable type. One Polyidus, 'the sophist,' is named by Aristotle as the author of an *Iphigenia* in which the recognition between brother and sister was cleverly brought about. Even the aged Sophocles, it would appear, deigned to be a follower with a tragedy entitled *Chryses*—a sort of sequel to the adventures of the three friends fleeing from the Taurian land; depicting once more the generous rivalry of the two cousins in the face of impending death at the hands of King Thoos, who had overtaken them in Chryses' realm. The Sophoclean work furnished a model to Pacuvius, whose version (as Cicero relates) won vociferous applause in the theatre at Rome.<sup>2</sup>

Numerous antique pictorial designs taken from this theme are still in existence, the most of them in accord with the drama of Euripides. The subject appears to have been esteemed for the decoration of sarcophagi, whose extended reliefs could depict the successive stages of the

<sup>2</sup> *Laelius*, qui clamores tota cavea nuper in hospitibus et amici mei M. Pacuvii nova fabula! cum ignorante rege uter esset Orestes, Pylades Orestem se esse diceret, ut pro illo necaretur, Orestes autem, ita ut erat, Orestem se esse perseveraret Cic. *De amicitia* vii. 24.

qui clamores vulgi atque imperitorum excitantur in theatris, quum illa dicuntur:

*Ego sum Orestes,*

contraque ab altero:

*Inmo enim vero ego sum, inquam, Orestes!*

cum autem etiam exitus ab utroque datur conturbato errantique regi: *Ambo ergo una necarier precamur*, quotiens hoc agitur, ecquandone nisi admirationibus maximis? *id. De finibus* V. xxii. 63.—See also *ib.* II. xxiv. 79.

event, from the frenzy of Orestes at the shore to the embarkation with the priestess and the idol. Vase-paintings show selected moments, notably that when Iphigenia delivers her letter into the hands of Pylades. Upon a cameo preserved at Florence, the three are seen in an attitude of repose near the altar. A Pompeian wall-painting of exquisite grace and dignity represents them at the close of their undertaking — Orestes and Pylades armed with sword and spear on either side of Iphigenia, who bears the effigy of the goddess.<sup>3</sup>

Negatively considered, the *Tauric Iphigenia* is the most faultless of Euripides' extant tragedies. There remains not another one that is marred by so few of those grave lapses from dramatic propriety and universal good taste to which the poet's mind was subject. It has the rare merit of a complete and effective harmony of the parts, and the portraiture is remarkable for a wholesome consistency and balance, together with a pervading suggestion of reserved power. In truth the play is by all means one of the most charming of dramas, and especially well fitted, with its spirited adventure, thrilling suspense, and delightful happy ending, to captivate the minds of young and ingenuous readers. The clever Iphigenia is not soon forgotten, nor the noble friendship of the youthful pair — *qui duo corporibus, mentibus unus erant*.<sup>4</sup> And not only are the persons

The most  
faultless  
Euripidean  
tragedy.

<sup>3</sup> Convenient references for investigating this interesting branch of the subject may be found in Kinkel *Euripides und die bildende Kunst*, and Vogel *Scenen Euripideischer Tragödien in griechischen Vasengemälden*.

<sup>4</sup> The site of the Taurian temple is the modern Balaclava of warlike renown in the Crimea. Thence westward, also on the coast of the Euxine, was Tomi, the modern Kustendji, where the Roman poet Ovid ended his days in melancholy exile. Twice in the poems there written he relates the story of Orestes, with his usual felicity of expression, and for the most part closely following Euripides.

nec procul a nobis locus est, ubi Taurica dira  
caede pharetratae spargitur ara deae.  
65 haec prius, ut memorant, non invidiosa nefandis  
nec cupienda bonis regna Thoantis erant.  
hic pro supposita virgo Pelopeia cerva  
sacra deae coluit qualiacumque suae.  
70 quo postquam, dubium, plus an sceleratus, Orestes  
exactus furilis venerat ipse suis,