

## The Sociology of Leaders “Befriending” Followers in Late Fifth-Century Athens:

### Euripides’ *Iphigenia in Aulis*

The engagement of Euripides’ *Iphigenia in Aulis* with the politics of Athens at the end of the Peloponnesian War continues to be a topic of scholarly interest (e.g., Stockert 1992; Markantonatos 2011). The role of the mass of Athenian soldiers in the power struggle between Agamemnon and Odysseus has been a more recent focus of scholarship, with Lush (2015) exploring the agency of the mass of soldiers, paralleling that of the Athenian masses, in the direction of the play’s action. While Lush’s emphasis is on the autonomous will of the soldiers, this paper will examine ways in which contemporary sociology explains the power-giving connection the soldiers make first to Agamemnon, then to Odysseus, in terms of individual friendship, extended to the interplay of a leader and subordinates. Gaining the allegiance of followers through implications of friendship was a technique emphasized by Athenian demagogues from shortly after Pericles’ death (e.g., Ar. *Eq.* 732, 773, 791, 821, 852-57, 860-61; Eur. *Hec.* 132, 255-57; [Xen.] *Ath. pol.* 2.19), and the presence of that technique in *IA* as well suggests the continued efficacy of that method of leadership throughout the Peloponnesian War.

Techniques of winning friends with others have been fairly standard across time and cultures. The two main factors that contemporary sociologists recognize as leading to someone to consider another a friend are “homophily,” the tendency of people to become friends with others whom they perceive as being like them (e.g., Amichai-Hamburger et al. 2013), and “propinquity,” one person’s physical proximity to another, by chance or design (e.g., Preciado et al. 2012). Aristotle recognized homophily as well (Arist. *Nic.* 1158b29-1159a12), and the clear Greek sense of the relation of proximity to friendship is evidenced by the synonymous use of οἱ φίλοι (“the friends”) of prominent politicians and “those around” (οἱ περί; οἱ ἀμφί) or “those

with” (οἱ μετὰ) that politician (Calhoun 1913). Certain differences that might seem to make friendship between certain people unlikely can be overcome through a principle called “essentialism,” according to which people can overlook certain differences if they see an essential commonality between themselves (e.g., Hamilton 2007). While friendships based on these principles are identifiable from the earliest Greek literature, portrayals of Athenian leaders appearing to use employ those principles to win over subordinates become common only early in the age of the demagogues, primarily in depictions of Cleon (e.g, Ar. *Vesp.* 1033-34=*Pax* 756-57).

*Iphigenia in Aulis* confirms, though, the continuing effectiveness of using this technique even twenty years after Cleon’s death. Agamemnon was chosen as leader of the Greek campaign, Menelaus tells him, because he used to let common soldiers into his tent and shake their hands (337-42); through doing so, he practiced propinquity, and invited feelings of homophily from the soldiers by his implication that they were his peers, not his subordinates, by letting them into his personal space. Menelaus makes explicit how the soldiers saw their relationship with Agamemnon when he sums up a change in Agamemnon’s behavior toward them as “you were no longer a friend, as before, to those who were previously your friends” (344). Odysseus steps into the void of Agamemnon’s connection to the soldiers, and consequently their loyalty to him as a leader, by employing the techniques of friendship development that Agamemnon neglected. When Agamemnon says that Odysseus’ natural manner aligns him with the rabble (ποικίλος ἀεὶ πέφυκε τοῦ τ’ ὄχλου μέτα, 526), he seems to indicate that Odysseus possesses a facility and identification with that group that falls in line with homophily. And Agamemnon envisions Odysseus not standing in front of the soldiers

when commanding them, but standing in their midst (ἐν Ἀργείοις μέσοις, 528-29), in the manner of propinquity.

Euripides' *Iphigenia in Aulis* suggests the continuing effectiveness of demagogic styles of coalition-building through implications of friendship in Athens throughout the Peloponnesian War.

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