

The series of episodes in Herodotus' *Histories* in which the exiled Spartan king Demaratus converses with the Persian king Xerxes has usually been viewed by scholars through the lens of the "wise adviser" motif (Bischoff 1932, Lattimore 1939). Scholars have tended simply to identify this pattern and to end their investigation there (e.g., Wood 1972, 162). Even more extensive studies of Demaratus' role in Herodotus' work (e.g., Boedeker 1987) have overlooked the *content* of the advice Demaratus offers Xerxes: it is ethnographic, dealing specifically with Greek and Spartan customs. Indeed, just as the key word in the adviser Solon's dialogue with Croesus (1.30-33) is *olbios*, the word *nomos* ("custom/law") is key in Demaratus' dialogues with Xerxes.

In this paper, I argue that Herodotus uses Demaratus' interactions with Xerxes (7.3, 7.101-105, 7.209, 7.234-237, 8.65) for two purposes. First, through these episodes he explores the challenge a historian faces in bringing an audience to believe seemingly incredible ethnographic details. Second, this exploration serves Herodotus' authorial self-presentation. Demaratus' very failure to persuade Xerxes of the ethnography at his disposal contrasts with Herodotus' own success at persuading his readers as an ethnographer. Demaratus is thus one of several figures in the *Histories* who become "self-referential" to Herodotus himself (Munson 2001, *Telling Wonders*, 255-57; cf. esp. Christ 1994).

According to Herodotus' portrayal, Demaratus is largely a failed ethnographer, who becomes increasingly disillusioned with his task. 7.3, however, provides Herodotus with a dilemma: Demaratus voluntarily informs the king-to-be Xerxes about the customs behind Spartan royal succession, and Xerxes actually accepts his advice. Herodotus undermines Demaratus' success here by dismissing the episode as a *phatis* and by suggesting that the advice had little effect on Xerxes' ascension to the throne. The next episode (7.101-105) not only features Demaratus' lengthiest comments on Greek customs but also Xerxes' most emphatic rejection of his advice, as he twice laughs at Demaratus for promising Greek resistance to the Persian invasion. Demaratus' frustration with Xerxes is evident in 7.209, when he prefaces his remarks on the Spartans' preparations at Thermopylae by claiming it is a "struggle" (*agōn*) to tell Xerxes the truth. Xerxes, however, remains incredulous toward what Demaratus tells him about the Spartans. Demaratus has no better luck convincing Xerxes in 7.234-237 with his advice concerning the strategic position of the island of Cythera. Finally, Demaratus is so disgusted with Xerxes that he dissuades the Athenian exile Dicaeus—another would-be ethnographer—from reporting to the King a portent relating to the Eleusinian mysteries (8.65). Playing the ethnographer, Demaratus concludes, is both pointless and dangerous.

Herodotus, especially if he gave public readings from the *Histories* (Thomas 2000, 257-69), could sympathize with Demaratus' plight in trying to convey to an audience bizarre-sounding foreign customs. And yet Herodotus chose to make ethnography a fundamental part of his new historiographic enterprise. In an effort to justify this decision, he needed to impress on readers just how trustworthy they would find his own ethnographic accounts. Demaratus' unsuccessful career as an ethnographer was tailor-made to highlight the inherent difficulty of Herodotus' own achievements in ethnography.