

The Perils of Friendship: *Xenia* in Herodotus  
Megan M. Campbell (University of Toronto)

The earliest references to *xenia*, the Greek institution of ritualized friendship, occur in Homer, and the practice continues to be present in Greek literature throughout the archaic and classical periods. Yet, while the practice of *xenia* remained, for the most part, unchanged throughout these periods, the culture in which it was practiced change drastically. With the development of the democratic *polis*, and the corresponding shift of focus from the individual to the community, the value placed on personal bonds of friendship also changed. The aristocratic institution of *xenia*, which had flourished among the heroes of the Homeric epics, became problematic in the classical *polis*, where one's loyalties were expected to lean not toward personal allegiances like *xenia*, but rather, toward the good of the community. Recent works have discussed the relationship between *xenia* and the *polis*; most notably, Gabriel Herman (1987) has provided a comprehensive study of *xenia*, in which he offers a discussion of changing public attitudes toward the institution over time. Yet, although Herman and other authors writing on the subject of Greek friendship (e.g. Mitchell, 1997; Konstan, 1997) make use of episodes in Herodotus's *Histories* as a source for their respective discussions of *xenia*, little attention has been paid to Herodotus's representation of *xenia* in particular as a source for fifth-century attitudes toward the institution. This is also the case in Herodotean scholarship; while episodes of *xenia* are often brought up to illustrate larger themes in the *Histories*, none pay particular attention to the overall treatment given to *xenia* itself. Yet, of the major episodes in which relationships of *xenia* occur in the *Histories*, nearly all are fraught with negative undertones. An examination of these episodes finds that they can be loosely categorized into three main groups: episodes in which *xenia* leads to personal disaster or misfortune; episodes which link *xenia* with familial abuse or disruption; and episodes in which Herodotus associates *xenia* with tyranny and despotism.

In this paper I propose that, through his problematic depiction of *xenia* in the *Histories*, Herodotus reflects a contemporary clash between the ideology behind the aristocratic practice of *xenia* and the communal mentality of the democratic *polis*. In order to do this, I shall first provide a brief discussion of depictions of *xenia* both before and after Herodotus in order to establish a dialogue of the ideological and practical differences associated with the institution in these periods. Following this, I shall single out a few episodes from the *Histories* that exemplify the negative associations Herodotus makes with *xenia* in order to discuss their relevance to Herodotus's overall representation of the institution. In particular, the interaction between Croesus and Solon in Book One (1.30-33) along with the *xenia* between Polycrates and Amasis in Book Three (3.39-43) provide examples of Herodotus's association of *xenia* with corrupt characters and personal misfortune. Additionally, the relationships between Aristagoras and Scylax (5.33-34) and between Isagoras and Cleomenes (5.70) in Book Five extend the negative consequences of *xenia* beyond the individual *xenoi* to the detriment of a larger community. Through an analysis of Herodotus's negative representation of *xenia*, as well as comparison with evidence for attitudes toward *xenia* from later classical authors, I shall argue that Herodotus provides insight into a growing hostility in the mid-fifth-century *polis* toward an institution that places the benefit of the individual before the greater good of the community.