

Striking Sages: Portraying the Alterity of Philosophers with an Ethnographic Lens

Wonder is an organizing and motivating feature of ethnographic narrative, as, for example, in Herodotus' account of the Egyptians (Jacoby 1913, 331-33; Munson 2001). Herodotus also employs wonder as a response to the special and peculiar wisdom of wise men in his account of Solon's meeting with Croesus (Hdt. 1.30.16-17: Ἀποθωμάσας δὲ Κροῖσος τὸ λεχθὲν εἴρετο ἐπιστρεφέως...). Through comparison with these passages, this paper shows that the little discussed historian, Neanthes of Cyzicus (*FGrHist* 84), combined these two strategies in his pioneering biographies of philosophers.

Attempts to secure Neanthes' dates are aided by a 274 B.C. Delphic inscription which mentions him by name (*FGrHist* 84 T 2 = *Delphische Is. Syll.*³ 377). Stefan Schorn has recently argued that he should be considered a biographer (Schorn 2007, 149). This is not without controversy (Momigliano 1993). Nevertheless, in his F 31, Neanthes portrays the Pythagoreans as an itinerant *ethnos* that excludes others. In this portrayal, Neanthes employs what Jacoby argued were the four essential features of Herodotean ethnography (Jacoby 1913, 331. The features are: 1) a description of the nature of the land, 2) a mention of wonders, 3) a political history of the *ethnos*, and 4) a description of the *ethnos'* *nomoi*). Furthermore, the fragment culminates in an encounter with a king, Dionysius, who questions the philosophers. Their response, like Solon's to Croesus, inspires wonder in the tyrant (e.g. *FGrHist* 84 F 31: καταπλεγέντος δὲ τοῦ Διονυσίου καὶ μεταστῆσαι κελεύσαντος αὐτὸν σὺν βίᾳ... cf. Aristoxenos 31 Wehrli: ἔφη οὖν ὁ Διονύσιος θαυμάσαι...).

By viewing philosophers through an ethnographic lens, Neanthes' sets the precedent for treating philosophers as objects of wonder which, in turn, emphasizes their alterity. This approach to the philosophical character type continues in later authors like Aristoxenus, Lucian,

and Diogenes Laertius. Neanthes, therefore, should be seen as an early and important influence on the characterization of philosophers through his adaption of Herodotean wonder.

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