

This paper argues that the preoccupation of the Athenian sophist, Herodes Atticus, with his *trophimoi*, or “foster-sons,” – notable in portraiture, inscriptions, and literary accounts – can be located amid emerging political trends of the Principate, whereby leaders increasingly manipulated images of adolescents in attempts to shape their public *personae*. I contend that Herodes’s advertisements of his *trophimoi*, three of whom – Achilles, Memnon, and Polydeukion – are named by Philostratus, served to enhance his identity as a power-broker both by promoting a batch of worthy quasi-heirs and by imbuing himself with an air of cosmopolitanism.

The project brings together two recent bodies of scholarship. First, several scholars, most notably Tobin, have ventured beyond the well-known literary anecdotes of Herodes’s eccentricities and scandals and have emphasized, instead, the rich archaeological and epigraphic evidence for him and his associates (Tobin 1997; see also Kennell 1997, Perry 2001, and Breitenbach 2003). A consensus has begun to emerge in which Herodes is seen as having exploited both his prodigious wealth and his relationship with the imperial family in order to carve out a sphere of influence in Greece that competed with, or perhaps directly challenged, Roman authority at the local level. Herodes thus comes to be viewed as more than just a wealthy sophist and patron; one could also think of him as a kind of kingpin, or tyrant, in an informal state within a state (cf. Tobin 1997, 3; Kennell 1997, 354-6).

One dimension of Herodes’s character that Tobin and others have addressed but not fully pursued is the prominence of his *trophimoi*, and here is where the consideration of a second strand of recent scholarship bears fruit. Scholars like Kuttner, Severy, and Allen have argued that the language of fosterage and of filial connections, whether visual or literary, was employed in new and strategic ways in the Principate by Roman dynasts, especially emperors, in reference to political and geopolitical networks (see, e.g., Kuttner 1995, 111-123; Severy 2003, 110; and Allen 2006, 129-140). The representation of certain youths as a species of imperial foster-children, as found, for example, on the Ara Pacis or in the pages of Tacitus, articulated a hierarchy that yielded clear benefits for the “father figure” in question.

I argue that fosterage was a political device that Herodes, too, developed with deliberate intent, and that by approaching the *trophimoi* with questions of politics, rather than just with questions of culture and society, we can better understand peculiarities in Herodes’s career. When we find Herodes setting up curse inscriptions to protect images of his *trophimoi*, we witness, by corollary, both the effectiveness of the device of fosterage and the bitterness that it engendered in his opponents. Philostratus says that the Quintilii brothers, who were serving as governors of Greece, considered the proliferation of images of the *trophimoi* to be worrisome; when they leveled accusations against Herodes, then, their principal objective may have been to stem the devolution of imperial power.