

In his *Lives of the Sophists* Philostratus recounts the lives of many sophists belonging to what he calls the Second Sophistic. The most prominent of these is Herodes Atticus, who not only receives the longest treatment in the work but also appears often throughout the *VS* in the lives of other sophists, whom he taught, studied under, or otherwise encountered. Herodes can in a sense be considered the center of Philostratus' extended genealogy of sophists. But halfway through his life of Herodes, Philostratus relates the sophist's encounter with an unusual figure called Herodes' Heracles or Agathion, a strange mountain man who lives in the wilds of Attica, consumes only milk and barley, and spends his time wrestling beasts. Known from Plutarch and Lucian as Sostratus, this quasi-divine being seems to exist outside the bounds of Greek civilization and spurns its impurity, but, as Herodes notices in wonder, he possesses perfect Attic diction and claims to be a student of Attica herself.

Scholars have recognized the historicity of Sostratus in general, but they have differed widely in their interpretation of him. Kindstrand (1979-1980), recognizing in Sostratus the characteristics of the *yeow éñÆr*, contends that Philostratus engages in a "heroification" of Sostratus, much in the same way as he treated Apollonius of Tyana. Avotins (1969) considers him a Cynic like his contemporary Demonax. Ameling (1983) emphasizes the literary features of a tall tale in Philostratus' account. Swain (1996) calls Sostratus an "Attic superman," whose Atticism complements Herodes' own learning and whom he places in a subsidiary position to the great sophist. I believe, however, that all of their approaches have neglected what I regard as the salient characteristic of Sostratus' learning: Sostratus has achieved by nature what Herodes, Polemo, Aelian, and the rest of the sophists of the *VS* have achieved only through hard work and lifelong dedication to the Classical canon. Sostratus is, in effect, a natural sophist, and far from being a pet of Herodes or a freak of nature, he is rather a foil for the other sophists and a survival or reminder of the Classical age, which sophists of the Second Sophistic always strove to revive through their declamations with their finely honed and learned Attic eloquence. Through his aloofness Sostratus represents the ancient purity of Attic speech before the conquests of Alexander the Great opened up the rest of the world to Greek civilization, closed the door on the Classical Age, and introduced a linguistic malaise in the Greek language that learned Greeks of the Second Sophistic sought in vain to cure.