

There are compelling reasons for rethinking the long-accepted interpretation of *Historiae* 8.144 as Herodotus' definition of Greek ethnicity or identity—to *Hellenikon* (cf. among many others, J. Myres: “A reasoned scheme of ethnological criteria” [*Anthropology and the Classics* (1908), 134]; J. Hall, [*Ethnic Identity*, 1997, 44]: “...a list of criteria of Hellenic identity”, also [*Hellenicity*, 2000, 190]: “...there are few statements that define Hellenic identity quite so explicitly”; S. Said [in I. Malkin, *Greek Ethnicity*, 2001, 275]: “The first systematic definition of Greek identity”). **First**, most of those who hold this opinion, paradoxically, continue to fault the passage as an adequate definition: e.g., P. Cartledge [*The Greeks*, 20002, 3], because Herodotus ignores political structures; Said, because he neglects to mention shared history and territory and F.W. Walbank [*Phoenix* 5, 1951, 47f.], because it does not square with the number and diversity of Greek states. **Second**, scholars, since the beginning of the twentieth century, have tended to read the passage in terms of modern anthropological discourse, rather than in the context of the narrative and contemporary intellectual climate. Neither ancient writers, nor the major nineteenth-century scholars, such as G. Grote, H. Stein, G. Busolt and A. Holm, read the passage in this way; in fact R.W. Macan [*Comm.* 1908, *ad loc.*], questions the idea that “the four great tests, or factors, of Hellenism [are] here propounded”. **Third**, Jonathan Hall’s fundamentalist belief in “a universal working definition of ethnicity” [2000, 18] as a valid heuristic tool for examining ancient institutions [12f.] is anachronistic (cf. C. Renfrew, R. Just [(*CAJ* 8.2 (1998) 265-83] and E. Dench [*CR* 50 (2000), 210f.]), and over-simplistic, since (a) “ethnicity” unlike class or gender, with which he compares it, is not itself a constant but a protean term which, according to context, can be made to mean cultural, or political, or territorial, or racial identity and (b) Hall tends to overlook the historical, political and ideological contexts of his source-material (e.g. his literal reading of Hdt. 1.143 [*Hellenicity*, 191] and his interpretation (ibid., 130) of the Olympia (the “hellanozikas”) inscription (*IvO*, 2).

When read within its narrative, historical and ideological context and with regard for grammar and syntax, 8.144 shows that Herodotus is not making a patriotic assertion or defining *to Hellenikon*. Rather, he is referring to the term as a single factor (comprising specifically language and kinship) in a list of arguments that the Athenians use (unsuccessfully at that) for persuading the Spartans, the acknowledged leaders of "the Hellenes", to fight the Persians in central Greece. The point at issue here is political rather than ideological—Athens' eligibility and rights as Sparta’s “lapsed” ally. Of the two main debates that inform the *Historiae*—the articulation of a Hellenic identity *vis-à-vis* the barbarian world and the interrelationship between Greek and Greek—8.144 clearly belongs to the latter.