

Does Greekness Matter? Ethnic Consistency in the Athenian Ambassador's Speech

As one of our earliest ethnographic sources, Herodotus has provided ample evidence for understanding how the Greeks perceived ethnic identity. While research on this topic goes as far back as Cartledge (1993), Hall (1989), and Hartog (1988), others have shown that there is still room for further investigation. In *Ethnicity and identity in Herodotus*, Figueira and Soares have assembled an assortment of essays on this topic (2020). Gruen questions how important the four qualities of Greekness mentioned by the Athenian ambassador in 8.144 were (2020).

Furthermore, in *Herodotus and the Question why*, Pelling explores how Herodotus expects his reader to be an active participant in his text (2019). My own research also takes inspiration from Baragwanath's utilization of Reader Response theory on the *Histories* to help me interpret how Herodotus depicts Greek and non-Greek identities (2008).

In this paper, I will present an alternate interpretation of the final scene in Book 8 of the *Histories*. I propose that, even though we can still read 8.144 as promoting Panhellenism, the inconsistencies concerning ethnic origins in the *Histories* undermine this message and highlight the political anxieties of the Athenians and the Spartans. First, I will discuss the significance of the presence of Alexander of Macedon in this meeting. Unlike the Athenian ambassador, Alexander recommends medizing to the Persians due to the futility of resisting their multinational army. Because in 5.22 the Greeks at the Olympic games disputed Alexander's claim of Greekness and eventually yield to his supposed Argive lineage, Alexander's decision to side with the Persians undermines the Athenian ambassador's message in 8.144. Herodotus expanding upon the lineage of the Macedonian monarchs in 8.137-8, just a few chapters before

the Athenian ambassador's famous words, emphasizes this point. If their shared Greekness compels the Athenians to remain true to the Greek cause, why did this not apply to Alexander?

Next, I will turn to the problematic implications of Athenian autochthony. Elsewhere in the *Histories*, Herodotus relays to his audience conflicting origins for the Athenians. In one version, the Pelasgians were the original non-Greek inhabitants of Attica, and the Athenians eventually Hellenized them and taught them their Ionic language. Yet, in 1.56 and 8.44, Herodotus explains that it was the Athenians who were originally Pelasgian and later Hellenized (Hdt. 1.56; 8.44). Herodotus even emphasizes the Athenian non-Greek origin in comparison to the Spartan's Greekness in both these passages. If the Athenians were not originally Greek, how can the Spartans take the Athenian ambassador's words seriously, especially the emphasis on shared kinship and language?

Finally, I will look forward to 9.6-7, where the Athenians threaten to medize when the Spartans were dragging their heels sending troops to Attica and instead were focusing on fortifying the entrance of the Peloponnese. While the Athenians do reiterate their refusal to defect to the Persians, their future threat of medizing calls into question the four qualities of Greekness mentioned in 8.144 and their importance to Greek identity. Therefore, I believe this evidence demonstrates that Herodotus is not presenting a simplistic message of Panhellenism and pro-Athenian propaganda in 8.144. While the function of this passage in the *Histories* narrative does suggest that type of interpretation, an active reader of Herodotus' text will realize that the historian is subtly hinting that the reality of Greek identity is far more complicated than a simple binary.

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