



PROJECT MUSE®

---

## Defining Ancient Greek Ethnicity

David Konstan

Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies, Volume 6, Number 1,  
Spring 1997, pp. 97-110 (Article)

Published by University of Toronto Press  
DOI: 10.1353/dsp.1997.0020



➔ For additional information about this article

<http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/dsp/summary/v006/6.1.konstan.html>

## Defining Ancient Greek Ethnicity

**David Konstan**  
**Brown University**

*Ethnic Identity in Greek Antiquity.* Jonathan M. Hall. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

As the first full-length modern study of ethnicity in the culture that gave us the word, Jonathan Hall's book is an event in classical scholarship. Hall has brought to the task a profound knowledge of the ancient Greek world: he is equally conversant with the literary and archaeological sources, which is rare among classical historians, and thoroughly informed, as well, about the technical specialty of Greek linguistics, which is indispensable to the analysis of the role of language in the construction of ethnic identity. Hall is also up-to-date on modern approaches to ethnicity, and, in a fine introductory chapter, he reviews attitudes toward Greek ethnicity within Classics over the past couple of centuries—since the founding, that is, of the modern discipline of classical philology. Hall writes clearly, and has done what he can to make the argument accessible to non-specialists: he translates all Greek words and passages, provides thumbnail summaries of historical or geographical information, and summarizes the current state of the question in respect to the major topics he addresses. Nevertheless, the detailed investigation of obscure and complex Greek genealogies, involving multiple variants and unfamiliar names, or of the differences among the several dialects of ancient Greek and how they may have evolved, will be hard going for the reader who is not moderately conversant with the materials, or at least interested enough to peruse the book with dictionary and encyclopedia in hand. Accordingly, in this review I shall recapitulate the central themes of Hall's book (without, of course, reproducing the meticulous documentation and careful argumentation that make the book so valuable) while simultaneously calling attention to those aspects of Hall's approach that seem to me to be problematic, or at all events debatable.

As Hall observes in his Introduction, the second World War was a watershed in ethnic studies. The vicious consequences of Nazi racism discouraged essentialist interpretations of race, and ethnic groups came to be defined as social rather than as biological

entities; their coherence was variously attributed to shared myths of descent or kinship, a common territory or at least place of origin, as well as other common traits such as language, religion, customs, and national character. So conceived, ethnic groups are mutable rather than stable, constructed in discursive practices rather than written in the genes.

"If the construction of ethnic identity is considered to be primarily discursive, then it is literary evidence that should represent our first point of departure" (2). Accordingly, Hall devotes two long chapters (the third and fourth) to myths of ethnic origin, which in the Greek tradition took the form of elaborate genealogies. This move is telling for Hall's understanding of ethnicity, which privileges the role of kinship. Genealogies are discursive in the sense that they are articulated in language, while other traits such as common style of burial or pottery are not, or need not be. Archaeology has recovered evidence of material practices, or what is sometimes called material culture, in classical sites; linguists observe dialectal variations in the Greek recorded on inscriptions and in certain manuscripts, and reconstruct the evolution of the spoken language in distinct zones such as northwestern Greece or the Peloponnese. Nevertheless, these differentiae do not constitute, for Hall, markers of ethnic identity on the same level as kinship and descent. Borrowing terminology introduced by D. Horowitz in an article included in Nathan Glazer and Daniel Moynihan's influential collection, *Ethnicity: Theory and Experience* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975), Hall distinguishes between *criteria* of ethnicity, which are "the definitional set of attributes by which membership in an ethnic group is ultimately determined" (20), and *indicia*, which "are the operational set of distinguishing attributes which people tend to associate with particular ethnic groups once the criteria have been established" (21). According to Hall, a genealogical connection qualifies as a criterion, while physical characteristics such as skin color, or cultural attributes, like language and religion, are merely *indicia*, that is, contingent properties which are subject to change and do not enter into the definition of ethnicity.

Hall's view may appear to be paradoxical. As he himself says, "physical characteristics are for the most part genetically derived" (21), and should thus constitute far more reliable and obvious evidence for kinship than mythological family trees. Hall notes, however, that it is not physical traits as such that enter into ethnicity, but rather the *attitude* adopted toward them: variations in complexion or in the color or texture of hair may or may not acquire significance as ethnic markers. It is the discursive appropriation of these features as signs of identity that is, Hall claims, a historical variable and therefore not a reliable index of ethnicity.

It may seem that language is a uniquely discursive medium and should thus serve as a fundamental indicator of ethnic identity. For Hall, however, the relevant question for the construction of ethnicity is not whether a local dialect can be demonstrated by modern linguistic techniques to have more or fewer features in common with that spoken by one or another neighboring population, but rather how such variations are *viewed* (or imagined) in an ethnicizing discourse. Groups sharing a common language may conceive of themselves as ethnically distinct, while polyglot populations may be regarded and regard themselves as part of a single ethnic group. What is more, when it comes to dialectal variations, native speakers may be ignorant of the real phonetic, lexical, or grammatical connections between their idiom and that of their neighbors, and they may base their judgments or prejudices on elements that have no historical significance whatever. "In short," Hall concludes, "language cannot be used as an objective definition of ethnic identity" (22). However much physical traits, speech, and religious or other practices may enter into ethnic consciousness, Hall would limit the range of ethnic criteria, as opposed to the more superficial or transitory markers labeled *indicia*, to a "connection with a specific territory" and, more particularly, to putative relations of kinship: as an analytical instrument, "it must be the myth of shared descent which ranks paramount among the features that distinguish ethnic from other social groups" (25).

Now, it is certainly the case that language, let alone pottery styles, is not universally a factor in ethnic claims: while it figures prominently in Basque and Catalan self-perception in contemporary Spain, for example, it is relatively insignificant in Latin America and the former Yugoslavia as a basis for the assertion of ethnic identity (although the status of Serbo-Croatian as a common language is now deemed arguable by the parties to that Balkan conflict). But the reason for this variability is not the difficulty of determining objective differences in local *patois*. On such reasoning, the even greater problems inherent in determining actual lines of descent and kinship among populations such as the French or Spanish would constitute a like barrier to the construction of ethnicity. The relevant question is whether, and to what extent, groups affirm their ethnic identity on the basis of one or another kind of marker, irrespective of its ostensible truth as decided by modern scientific methods. The idea that ethnicity is a discursive phenomenon means just that it depends on ideology, not on facts as such.

Avowals of ethnic difference on the basis of language, then, are as much a matter of discourse as genealogies, and are equally readable in the literary record. So too are identity claims based on religious beliefs or other collective practices. It must be emphasized,

however, that no amount of difference in actual linguistic behavior or in features such as burial customs among interacting populations constitutes in itself evidence that these elements entered into the construction of identity, though it may be highly suggestive, especially in the context of other signs of ethnic sensibility. Cremation and burial have, for example, coexisted in the same community, whether in ancient Greece or in modern America, without serving as ethnic indices. Since ethnicity, as a phenomenon of discourse, necessarily entails socially generalized claims and counter-claims of difference and similarity, one can only be sure that a given trait or distinction enters into the construction of ethnic identity if it is verbalized as such.

Unlike the material remains uncovered and classified by archaeologists, genealogies are verbal artifacts. But they do not on this account alone serve as signs of ethnic discourse. To conclude that they are, one must know also that lines of descent are articulated for the purpose of affirming a collective identity, since genealogies may have other purposes as well, such as conferring aristocratic privilege (particularly clear in the case of royal houses), or putting into systematic relation a diverse assortment of gods and heroes inherited from a long tradition of myth or saga. Even if it is the case, as Hall believes, that putative kinship is the most consistent feature in defining collectivities as ethnic groups, it is not in itself either a necessary or a sufficient condition of ethnicity. It is only when a sense of common lineage or extraction is mobilized (as other traits too may be) in the service of the construction of identity that ethnogenesis occurs.

Kinship, then, like language or social conventions, enters into the formation of ethnicity when it is articulated in the context of an ethnicizing discourse. People often do, of course, assert familial or genetic connections as the grounds of ethnic identity, just as they may point to common language or other qualities. Where, however, there exists a rich genealogical tradition but a relative dearth of historical information and of explicit testimonies to ethnic self-assertion, one must rely on other kinds of evidence to demonstrate that ethnogenesis is at work. This is precisely the situation that faces the investigator of ethnic construction in the archaic age of classical Greece (roughly, the seventh and sixth centuries B.C.). A rich tradition of oral poetry, which survives today only in tattered fragments, passed on, adapted and transformed lineages that purported to describe relations between the ancestors of various families, tribes, populations of entire city-states such as the Athenians or the Spartans, and of the larger, rather amorphous entities into which the Greeks sometimes sorted themselves under the names of Dorians, Ionians, Aeolians, and the like, and, finally, of all Greeks as a whole. These archaic accounts continued to be appealed to, manipulated, and supplemented into the high classical period (fifth

and fourth centuries B.C.), the Hellenistic age (third to first centuries B.C.), and beyond, and finally became the subject of systematizing treatises, such as the so-called "Library" (*Bibliothêkê*) of mythology ascribed to one Apollodorus and composed around the second century A.D., from which is derived today a great deal of what is known of ancient genealogies.

A common device in these family trees is to identify as the ancestor of a group an eponymous figure, that is, someone who is supposed to have given his or her name to the population in question. Thus, for example, Pausanias (3.1), the author of a guidebook to Greece composed in the second century A.D., informs us that the hero Lacedaemon (eponymous forefather of the Lacedaemonians who inhabited the territory of which Sparta was the capital city), took as his wife a woman named Sparta. Or again, an archaic poem ascribed to the poet Hesiod recounts that Hellen, the forebear of the Hellenes or Greeks, had three sons: Aeolus, Dorus, and Xuthus, and that Xuthus's sons in turn were Ion and Achaeus. Apropos this stemma or family tree, Hall observes: "Clearly the function of the Hellenic genealogy is to establish the degree of relatedness between the various Greek ethnic groups which are represented by their eponymous ancestors," that is, the Dorians, Ionians, and the rest (43). Read literally, this model might be taken to signify that Aeolians and Dorians, as the sons of Hellen, are more authentically Hellenic than the Ionians and Achaeans, who are Hellen's grandsons. Hall, indeed, interprets it in this fashion: "the genealogy is implicitly stating that Dorians and Aiolians possess a higher status" by virtue of their closer connection to the founder (43).<sup>1</sup> It is possible that this was the intended meaning of the lineage, though it is worth remarking that there never existed an ethnic group known as "Xuthians" (cf. 177). How is one to determine, however, that the purpose or function of the Hesiodic composition was just that of promoting claims of ethnic priority?

Though the Greek word *ethnos*, from which "ethnicity" is derived, may designate a wide range of associations, from flocks of birds to whole nations (34–5), Hall is inclined to take the rather vague affiliations among Dorians, Ionians, Aeolians, and so forth as the exemplary ethnic formations in Greek antiquity (36–40). This view, together with his tendency to regard genealogies as already articulated instances of ethnic discourse, predisposes Hall to accept the Dorian pedigree as a manifestation of archaic ethnic identification. In fact, however, Hall's approach to the reconstruction of ethnic discourse in the archaic and classical periods is more complex and sophisticated than this.

Hall is not, as I have already noted, a biological essentialist when it comes to ethnicity, and consequently he does not regard the Dorians or any other ancient population as having a permanent or

transhistorical identity: "Ethnic groups are not static or monolithic, but dynamic and fluid" (33). Ethnicity is constantly being negotiated (19), and responds crucially to social pressures and conflicts, among which the unequal appropriation of resources within a community, and opposition between politically distinct social entities, count as the primary causes of ethnogenesis (32–3). In reconstructing the emergence of ethnic discourse as witnessed by the archaic genealogical tradition, accordingly, Hall is in practice attentive to the political intentions that may have lain behind specific claims of kinship and the active competition between different versions of mythical ancestry, although social factors do not enter into his definition of ethnicity. Thus, the chart that Hall provides of the lineage of the Dorians, Ionians, and the rest (43) gives two variants. According to the Euripidean tragedy entitled *Ion* (end of the fifth century), Ion himself is the son of Apollo and the mortal woman Creusa, while Dorus and Achaëus are the offspring of Creusa and her human husband, Xuthus. Euripides's revised picture is, as Hall carefully sets forth, part of a struggle over claims to political priority that had been going on between Athens and the other Ionian cities after they were reduced to dependencies of the Athenian empire; as Hall comments, Euripides "manages to subvert the Hellenic genealogy which ... no longer served a useful purpose" (56). In the process, the relative statuses of Dorus and Ion are reversed: instead of representing Dorus as the son of Hellen and Ion as Hellen's grandson, Euripides, entering vigorously into the ethnic maneuvering of his age, recasts the pair as Creusa's children, with the difference that Ion has a god for his father, while Dorus's father is a mere man. As Hall remarks, "it is hard not to see a conscious act of propaganda which reflects the antagonistic relationship between Athens and Sparta in the closing stages of the Peloponnesian War" (56).

When it comes to the archaic period, direct evidence for the self-conscious manipulation of genealogical traditions is more difficult to come by, and one of the most rewarding features of Hall's book is the continual effort to situate mythological materials in the context of historical struggles over land and political autonomy. As Hall says, "access to power, property and political rights as well as the right to liberty were invariably based in the ancient world on considerations of descent" (72). Claims to ancestry are never, for Hall, reducible to vague memories of pre-historic events (52); the legends of the wanderings of the Heraclids (the descendants of Heracles), for example, may not be taken, says Hall, as "a dim reflection of genuine population movements" (57). On occasion, as in the discussion of the relationship between the Heraclids and the Dorians, Hall seems to infer the existence of an ethnic discourse from the mere fact of diversity within the genealogical accounts

(59–65). For example, in his discussion of the ethnicity of the Dryopes—inhabitants of the Argolid, a region in the northeastern Peloponnese, who were particularly associated with the town of Asine—Hall calls attention to one version of the story of their mythical origins, according to which their ancestors had been defeated by Heracles; Hall concludes that it probably “first entered into currency at about the time of the Argive destruction of Asine, serving as an etiological doublet of the Argive action” (76), that is, reproducing the historical defeat in the idiom of myth. This is indeed to relate a story of origins to events contemporary with the production of the account rather than to the time (the heroic age) of the actions related within the narrative, but Hall does not make clear whether or how the new myth might have been put to use in the service of ethnicity, rather than, say, having been elaborated as a way of adjusting an existing tradition so as to take account of a change in political relations.

Hall is an excellent reader of myths, and he has a good eye for what he calls “fracture points” (87), those places where the logic of a particular lineage breaks down or shows signs of suturing. On the basis of a close examination of the traditional tales, for example, Hall concludes that the Pelopids (descendants of Pelops, for whom the Peloponnese is named) were not “originally associated with the Argive plain” (90), despite the fact that Agamemnon is famously connected with the cities of Argos and Mycenae in the Homeric epics and afterwards. Rather, Hall argues, “the Pelopid stemma bears all the signs of having been ‘grafted on’ to the Argive genealogies” (*ibid.*), and he offers the suggestion (91) that Agamemnon may have been originally connected with Sparta (where his brother Menelaus was king). The purpose of this rectification of the early mythic tradition is to clear the Argive field of Pelopid influence and to leave it free for the fundamental competition, as Hall reconstructs it, between the rival claims of Acrisius (the grandfather of Perseus) and Proetus and their heirs (93–4). It is impossible to reproduce here the subtleties of Hall’s analysis of these complicated lineages and their multiple variants, by which he separates out different historical layers in the evolution of the myths; it is well, however, to quote his conclusion *in extenso*:

It is, then, possible to postulate three stages in the development of the Perseid and Proetid genealogies. Initially, in the Early Iron Age, each was a competing mythology concerned with the domination of the entire Argive plain. By the Archaic period, however, the notion of the shared inheritance had been developed, and the Perseid stemma came to be localised in the eastern half of the plain while the Proetids were firmly situated in Argos. Finally, after the destruction of the eastern



communities of the plain in the 460s B.C., Argos emphasised her control over the region by usurping her former neighbours' mythology: the absorption of their culture heroes symbolised the new Argive synoikism [unification]. (98)

Myths are not autonomous but "need a social context" (99); hence, Hall reasons: "If there existed two competing mythical variants," that is, the Proetid and Perseid families, "then there must also have existed two social groups for whom these genealogies were meaningful" (ibid.). "In short," Hall concludes, "cult and myth served to articulate ancestral claims to the Argive plain which helped to forge ethnic distinctions between the populations of Mykenai [Mycenae], Tiryns and Midea on the one side and the self-styled of Argos on the other" (105–6).

Genealogy is a way—on Hall's view, the most fundamental way—in which any population (or some segment of it) defines itself as an ethnic group. The need for such an identification arises especially where power or authority is contested; in turn, the form that a mythical ancestry assumes is conditioned by the political circumstances that give rise to it. It is here that Hall comes closest to the so-called instrumentalist view of ethnicity, according to which ethnic self-affirmation is always a strategy in the service of political or economic interests (cf. 17–9). Argive genealogies are seen not just as abstract exercises in self-description or products of a passive awareness of common bonds but rather as ideological weapons in an on-going struggle for control of a single territory between two different groups of people. This political dimension to the construction of mythological pedigrees is not accidental; rather, it is essential to the interpretation of such verbal artifacts as elements of ethnogenesis in the Argolid. Hall is not simply showing how mythic kinship may be deployed or exploited; it is implicit in his argument, as I understand it, that, *such fictive affinities emerge precisely in response to pressures that put a premium on forms of social solidarity*, including putative membership in a common descent group and the emotional charge it may carry. It follows, although Hall does not make the point explicitly, that in the absence of expressed appeals to unity and cooperation on the basis of shared descent, it is only by linking genealogical creativity to particular social conflicts that one can demonstrate, or at least render plausible, that kinship is in fact entering into the construction of ethnic identity.

The point that I am making about the relationship between genealogy and ethnicity may become clearer after a consideration of Hall's treatment of the evidence deriving from archaeology and linguistics, which forms the substance of the two final chapters of his book. In the introduction to the book, Hall reviews the way the

Dorians have figured in the modern historical imagination over the past two centuries, beginning with nineteenth-century Romantic theories of their racial superiority as late invaders of the Greek peninsula; in turn, chapter five, on archaeology, begins with a summary of the contemporary stalemate over the very existence of such an invasion. “The apparent *impasse*,” Hall concludes, “between the proponents and opponents of an archaeologically visible Dorian invasion arises from the fact that both camps subscribe to the same fallacy—namely, that an ethnic group must necessarily be identifiable in the archaeological record” (128–9). Research on still-existing societies justifies, Hall believes, a skeptical attitude toward archaeology’s capacity to demonstrate distinctions in cultural identification. While it may be possible to pick out certain styles, whether of clothing or other indicia (as Hall labels such features) in the material record, there is no way of proving that such differences reflect ethnicity rather than any number of other factors such as “technology, climate or access to resources” (135). These latter influences will generate what Hall describes as “passive behaviour”—for example, the unself-conscious use of certain furs for clothing in cold climates, or local clays for pottery—as opposed to “active praxis” (136), which is essential to ethnicity as a self-conscious affirmation of identity. The modern investigator must be wary of building hypotheses about ethnicity on the basis of traits that either went unnoticed by the original population or did not enter into the construction of an ethnic discourse. Only rarely, and even then only with the support of evidence for discursive claims of common ancestry (which for Hall constitute the sole criterion as opposed to indicium of ethnicity), can material remains signal an ethnic practice, as in the case, Hall suggests, of the Dryopes of Asine, who preserved an independent style of burial in marked contrast to the preferences of their neighbors (137).

“Doric” is the name given to a literary dialect of ancient Greek that was particularly, though not exclusively, associated with the Peloponnese, and language has been perhaps the most enduring basis for assigning ethnic identity to the Dorians. Hall elegantly and concisely rehearses the current state of the question concerning the emergence of the Greek dialects, and shows how insecure is the traditional model of linguistic evolution, according to which an originally unified Greek tongue diversified into the classically recognized speech patterns (169). Hall goes on to question whether ancient Greeks could recognize the several dialects identified by modern linguistic science: “it seems barely credible that the Greeks were capable of using linguistic criteria to assign local dialects to dialect groups” such as Dorian, Ionian, and the like (177). They knew, of course, that other Greeks might speak differently, even, perhaps, unintelligibly to themselves, but they were unable to

identify the several sub-dialects of, say, Dorian (as modern linguists might reconstruct it), as pertaining to a single language group. Consequently, Hall argues, when Greeks recognized each other as Ionians or Dorians, it was not on the basis of language alone, though where an ethnic distinction was identified on other grounds, dialect might act as an indicium or additional factor of recognition: "in other words, the relationship between language and ethnicity is unidirectional" (177), the latter always having priority over the former. Where independent evidence for ethnicity exists, which for Hall reduces to claims of common ancestry, one may sometimes interpret certain linguistic innovations or archaisms as signs of "active signalling" (179), as in the case, Hall suggests, of a particular vocalic assimilation in the dialect spoken in the western part of the Argolid (180). Indeed, even a variation in local script may on occasion represent a positive choice, as in the example of the scripts employed at Argus, Mycenae, and Tiryns; however, "such active praxis could easily be intended to signal the identity of these emergent *poleis* [city-states] rather than acting as part of any broader ethnic strategy" (149).

But might not genealogies, too, have been constructed in the service of civic rather than ethnic identity? Hall does not raise this question, in part because of his concentration on entities such as Dorians, Ionians, and Aeolians, which covered broad populations and were not identified with a specific city-state. Nevertheless, fictions of shared ancestry, even in regard to eponymous founders like Dorus or Ion, might well have been invented to advance political solidarity, as for example in the case of the Athenian myth of autochthony (discussed on 51–6), which cast Athenian citizens as descendants of kings who were born from the soil and thus symbolized an enduring attachment to the land. Whatever the status of kinship as a criterion or indicium of ethnicity, not all claims of common pedigree necessarily point to affirmations of *ethnic* identity. Just as in the case of linguistic features, so too with genealogies, what is required is evidence that recognized differences and commonalities among groups were "intended to signal" ethnicity.

That modern linguists can (or cannot) discriminate dialects of classical Greek into hard and fast sub-groups, each with its own speech community and geographical range, is as immaterial to the affirmation of ethnicity in antiquity as whether biological research will (or will not) succeed in dividing the Greeks into diverse populations on the basis of DNA analyses. What counts is how the Greeks perceived themselves and each other, and like all other societies *they availed themselves of a limited and largely arbitrary spectrum of traits by which to define identities*. Furthermore, the mere recognition of difference, irrespective of its basis in fact, still falls short of ethnic consciousness. This is why archaeology is hard

pressed to identify signs of ethnicity: differences in the material culture may have been readily perceived by the original inhabitants of a site, but this does not prove that they were adopted self-consciously as a means of asserting a collective identity.

Like clothing (and unlike language under normal circumstances), genealogies are products of conscious human activity. By their nature, they make a statement about relationships among people, but this does not mean that they were originally composed to define ethnic consanguinity. The test that Hall applies to variations in scripts, dialects, and material remains must be brought to bear on ancestral stemmata as well. Even if one accepts the idea that kinship is a more fundamental or pervasive marker of ethnic consubstantiality than language (a criterion as opposed to an indicium), it is still necessary to show that a particular affirmation of common descent was intended as an ethnic claim, for example by situating it, as Hall indeed usually attempts to do, in the context of political or territorial struggles. The discursivity of genealogies in the sense of their being verbal artifacts is irrelevant in this connection.

While putative kinship was undoubtedly an important means of generating group solidarity in Greek antiquity, it was not the only method available. In a passage that is often cited in connection with Greek perceptions of ethnicity, Herodotus (8.144.2–3) describes how, after the battle at Salamis (480 B.C.), the Persians sent envoys to Athens to propose a separate treaty, in the hope of detaching the Athenians from the collective resistance to the invasion. In the presence of the Persians, the Athenian spokesmen reassure their allies of their good faith. After noting their obligation to avenge the burning of their temples and statues of the gods, the speakers add,

[b]ut there is also the fact that the Greek people [*to Hellênikon*] are of the same blood and the same tongue, that we have in common the edifices of our gods and our sacrifices, and that our traditional ways are all alike, and it would not be well that the Athenians should be traitors to all this. Know then, if you did not already know it, that so long as one Athenian survives, we shall never make a pact with Xerxes.

The Athenian representatives point to kinship (*homaimon*, “same blood”), language (*homoglôsson*), religious practices (*theôn hidrumata koina kai thusiai*), and common customs (*êthea homotropa*) as the qualities that bind them to the Hellenes, and prevent them from coming to an agreement (*homologeein*) with the Persians.

Hall cites this passage (44) as evidence of a change in the way Greeks constructed their identity. In the archaic period, Hall suggests, Greeks tended to attach themselves to one another by a process of genealogical assimilation; after the Persian invasion,

however, they were more disposed to define themselves over and against an enemy they now perceived as the barbarian "other."

If, from the fifth century, Greek self-definition was *oppositional*, prior to the Persian Wars it was *aggregative*. Rather than being defined "from without," it was constructed cumulatively "from within." It was a definition based not on difference from the barbarian but on similarity with peer groups which attempted to attach themselves to one another by invoking common descent from Hellen. (47)

It might appear from this account that indicia such as common language and customs are here being granted the status of criteria, since in the new, oppositional form of self-definition they are appealed to in tandem with the claim of common blood as markers of difference in respect to the Persians: "To find the language, culture or rituals of the barbarian desperately alien was immediately to define oneself as Greek" (ibid.). But Hall does not draw this conclusion.

Hall does not explain why the shift to the oppositional mode fails to bring with it a new form of ethnic identification, in which the narrow privileging of descent specific to the aggregative period is now widened to include what were previously marginal elements. In his preface, however, Hall offers a hint:

[A]lthough Hellenic identity was clearly envisaged in the sixth century B.C. as being ethnic in character, there is some evidence that by the fourth century it was conceived more in cultural terms. The clearest enunciation of this comes in Isokrates' comment (*Panegyrikos* 50) that "the name of Hellene should be applied to persons sharing in the culture rather than the ancestry of the Greeks." (xiii)

Here, ethnicity is contrasted with claims of cultural similarity. While the speech that Herodotus attributes to the Athenians has as its dramatic date the year 480 B.C., Herodotus composed his *Histories* toward the end of the fifth century, and may be taken, I presume, as an early representative of the cultural view of identity.

If, however, the oppositional sense of identity was accompanied by a stress on elements other than genetic kinship, what is gained by restricting the notion of ethnicity to the idea of shared descent? At the very moment at which the Greeks, so far as surviving texts permit one to judge, begin to make explicit claims of common affiliation, Hall is obliged to terminate his study on the grounds that their own markers of identity do not conform to what Hall isolates as the unique criterion of ethnicity. It would seem more useful to admit a latitudinarian conception of ethnicity, according

to which an emphasis on genealogy was one strategy among many for asserting identity, whether local, such as Athenian, or global, such as Greekness as a whole. Ethnicity might be construed, then, as the self-conscious insistence on an image of the organic cohesion of a community, however it may be constructed, as opposed to and complementary to the integrity that derives from political or contractual bonds. So formulated, one would be in a position to inquire, for example, why the bases for claims of ethnic identity shifted their ground after the Persian invasion and new forms of solidarity emerged. More generally, it would become possible to historicize the notion of ethnicity itself. Thus one might explore the relative lack of importance accorded to the idea of a homeland in classical antiquity among ethnic entities larger than the city-state.

There is some danger that what appears as a distinct, aggregative method of self-definition may be in part a consequence of the fragmentary condition of the sources for the archaic epoch of Greece. At all events, it is certain that genealogies continued to be produced and to circulate in the classical and later periods, so that one cannot draw a sharp temporal line dividing the aggregative and the oppositional modes. While, in the absence of explicit statements, scholars must inevitably depend largely on inference in order to determine the uses, ethnic or otherwise, to which the early genealogies were put, it is reasonably clear that toward the end of the fifth century, on the eve of the Peloponnesian War (begun in 431 B.C.), there was a fierce competition among claims and counter-claims of identity. Evidence for such ideological activity may be found in the Athenian effort to assert its autochthonous origins (see especially the Platonic dialogue *Menexenus* for a resounding indication of the jingoistic purposes to which this myth might be put), in the radical assertion of Athenian versus Spartan national character developed by Pericles in the funeral oration recorded in the second book of Thucydides's *History of the Peloponnesian War*, in the partisan appropriation of claims to Ionian or Dorian affiliation that emerged during the war, and in affirmations of pan-Hellenic identity like that reported by Herodotus. In my judgment, it is to the general currency of and competition among asseverations of ethnic identity, each availing itself of the traits most suitable in the context, whether common blood or customs or gods or language, that one ought to apply the name of ethnic discourse.

If I differ with Hall, however, over the method of defining ethnicity, I must again call attention to the great service he has performed in setting out clearly, coherently, and with scrupulous scholarship, the basis on which any discussion of ethnicity in Greek antiquity will proceed henceforth. Hall has made an excellent case that there was a pre-history, so to speak, to Greek ethnic identity in the archaic age, for which there survives evidence not only in the

form of genealogical stemmata, which Hall has interpreted with extraordinary learning and ingenuity, but also in the plausible connections he has drawn between the complex evolution of these family trees and the political or social conditions under which they may originally have been produced. The task now is to extend Hall's arguments to include the cultural forms of identification that emerged in the fifth century, if not sooner, to form part of the repertoire of strategies, alongside kinship, that entered into the construction of ancient Greek ethnicity.<sup>2</sup>

#### Notes

1. Hall's way of transliterating Greek differs slightly from mine: hence, "Aiolians" in the cited text = my "Aeolians." These variations will not normally cause the reader any difficulty.

2. In a recent conference on "Ancient Perceptions of Greek Ethnicity," held in August 1997 at the Center for Hellenic Studies in Washington D.C., Hall himself acknowledged the need to explain in more detail the new style of self-definition (irrespective of whether it is to be labeled as ethnic or otherwise). I understand that Hall is working on a second book on Greek ethnicity, in which it may be hoped that he will treat these broader issues with the same learning and imagination he has brought to the examination of genealogy in the archaic age.