

Qualification of Numbers in the Greek Historians.

The systematic philological study of numbers in ancient historical texts is a laborious but rewarding enterprise. It requires the establishment of a system for coding numbers (whether written in words or in symbols) that captures a standard set of data concerning each number, in such a way as to facilitate the quantification of number use. These data can then be used to generate a statistical profile of each text, which can become the basis for comparisons between different texts or authors. The compilation and analysis of such data is a time-consuming business, but the results shed light from a new angle on the many numbers included in these texts. The rewards are of two kinds: on the micro-scale they make it possible to place any particular number in the context of the usage of a particular author or text or genre, a process that helps the modern reader to read the text in question in a manner more sensitive to the mindset of its original author; on the macro-scale they bring the modern reader face-to-face with some significant differences in numeric mentality between ancient and modern practice in the use of numbers and the quantification of information. These insights provide a useful complement to other approaches taken to the numbers in ancient texts.

This paper will present (on a handout) some statistics for comparison, and discuss some of the insights (on both the micro- and the macro-scales) that can be drawn from them. Statistics presented for comparison between ancient and modern texts and among individual texts will include: overall frequency of numbers; range and distribution of numbers (e.g., highest and next-to-highest numbers used; percentage of numbers concentrated below 20 or above 1,000; percentage of multiples of 10, 100, 1,000, etc.); percentages of numbers applied to different subjects (e.g., indications of time or distance; numbers of individual fighters or pieces of military equipment); frequency and distribution of qualification of numbers (by expressions such as "about"/ ὅτι "more than"/ ὀλίγος , "only"/ μόνον ").

Some of the most interesting insights, on both the micro- and the macro-scales, emerge from the analysis of this last element, the use of qualification with numbers. A small selection of exemplary cases drawn from five Greek historians (Herodotus, Thucydides, Xenophon, Polybius, and Diodorus) will be examined, so as to demonstrate the results that can be obtained by this method of studying the numbers in Greek historical texts.

Bibliography:

- C. Rubincam, "Qualification of numerals in Thucydides", *AJAH* 4 (1979) 77-95.
- C. Rubincam, "Casualty figures in Thucydides' descriptions of battle", *TAPA* 121 (1991) 181-198.
- C. Rubincam, "The topography of Pylos and Sphacteria and Thucydides' measurements of distance", *JHS* 121 (2001) 77-90.
- C. Rubincam, "Numbers in Greek poetry and historiography: Quantifying Fehling", *CQ* 53.2 (2003) 448-463.

Catherine Rubincam
 Graduate Dept. of Classics & Dept. of Historical Studies
 University of Toronto at Mississauga
 Mississauga, ON, L5L 1C6, Canada
 rubincam@utm.utoronto.ca