

In a recent article (Keyser 2006) Paul Keyser has made an eloquent plea for a re-examination of the long-prevailing tendency of modern scholars to praise Thucydides as superior to Herodotos in "rationality". After a searching examination of the two historians' statements on eclipses, earthquakes, and phenomena that can be quantified, he concludes, "Rational readers of Herodotos or Thucydides must (re)consider the engagement of the two authors with reason and tradition. Herodotos' accounts are no less, and often more, rational than the corresponding kinds of accounts in Thucydides" (Keyser 2006: 349). Keyser's insistence on the need to reassess the relative "rationality" of the two great fifth-century Greek historians, particularly in the light of recent work emphasizing the evident connections between Herodotos' work and other products of Ionian 'Rationalism' (e.g., Thomas 2000), is very salutary. There is, however, more to be said on the subject of what Keyser calls "The World of Number" in Herodotos and Thucydides. In particular, detailed philological study of their practice in using numbers, along the lines expounded in a series of articles by C. Rubincam (Rubincam 1979, 1991, 2001, 2003), helps the modern reader to shed at least some of the modernistic assumptions that so often influence our interpretation of the numbers in these texts. This paper will re-examine the connections made by Keyser between 'rationality' and certain ways of using numbers, and propose a more nuanced solution to the question of which historian better deserves to be praised for his 'rationality' in this respect.

Works cited

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