

In this paper I will argue that two passages from Seneca's *Natural Questions* support the view that ancient historiography was a fundamentally rhetorical endeavor but also challenge the idea that the authors viewed truth differently or considered it of secondary importance in the presentation of the past (Woodman 1988). The *Natural Questions* is an out-of-the-way and largely ignored text (the work of H. Hine and G. Williams, and interest in the notorious character Hostius Quadra being the biggest exceptions) within Seneca's oeuvre which mixes scientific theories about aspects of the natural world such as rainbows, the Nile, and earthquakes with characteristic Senecan moralizing. Stating that writers of history are intentionally dishonest, Seneca twice ridicules historiography as a literary mode for liars in the NQ. He explains that this dishonesty is based not on bias but on the demands of creating compelling narrative. Only the second passage discussed in this paper has received any recent notice from scholars of ancient historiography (Wiseman 1994).

At NQ 4b.3 Seneca acknowledges that he cannot assert from first-hand knowledge that hail falls from frozen clouds so he states that he will cite the great first-century Stoic polymath Posidonius as an authority. Seneca's main focus here is not historiography itself but the appropriate use of second-hand testimony in an authoritative presentation of natural phenomena. Seneca singles out (and ultimately rejects) as an option for how to present second hand material the practice of historians who deceptively hide the lack of proof for their dishonest claims (*multa mentiti sunt*) behind the appearance of proof in the citation of an authority. Importantly for the debate about the nature of ancient historiography, Seneca presumes that there is a true version of the past but that historians due to lack of access do not present it. In the seventh book's more sustained attack on the truthfulness of historians Seneca explores the causes of their dishonesty. At NQ 7.16 in the context of a discussion about comets, Seneca asserts that it is not a difficult feat to destroy Ephorus' credibility since that fourth century Greek writer was a historian (*historicus est*). According to Seneca the authority of historians cannot be trusted. Their presentation of the past is heavily fabricated because what really happened, simply *cotidiana* in Seneca's language, is just not interesting enough to engage readers' attention. Since historians seek not the truth but popular approval, they seek out the fabulous, fantastic, and false. Again, Seneca presumes that a factual accounting of what occurred in the past is possible but that historians are not interested in it. In fact, Seneca's use of *cotidiana* for the real events of history may point to annals as Seneca's preferred mode of more honest historiography. I will conclude by noting that both of these passages emphasize an opposition between truth and falsehood instead of truth and bias, and therefore present evidence that while historiography was indeed a branch of rhetoric, the idea that it should be a truthful (in our terms) accounting of the past is not an anachronistic claim.