Conference Report: ‘Intended Ambiguity’
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Through the generous support of the Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies General Fund, I was able to attend the ‘Intended Ambiguity’ conference in Thessaloniki. The conference aimed to examine the creative potential of ambiguous writing in literary, rhetorical, and philosophical texts from antiquity through the Middle Ages to the early modern period. The interdisciplinary approach was very useful for tackling the challenges of ambiguity, and allowed us to examine its manifestations in a wide range of genres and periods and to look at it from different perspectives. The discussions benefitted greatly from the different academic cultures the participants work in and from the variety of languages the participants speak, demonstrating how the way we perceive ambiguity is influenced by language and culture.

My paper discussed Seneca the Younger’s approach to ambiguity. Ambiguity plays an important role in Stoicism, which prided itself on giving equal weight to the study of ethics, physics, and logic—that is, with all matters that are related to language—and Seneca’s take on ambiguity is indebted to his Stoic predecessors. However, as I showed in my paper, he also makes an innovative contribution to defining and explaining ambiguity: in his Epistulae Morales, Seneca moves away from an ambiguity that is primarily based on language and focuses on the idea of an ambiguous reality, describing human behaviour and life itself as ambiguous and calling this new kind of ambiguity vitae ambigua. I argued that Seneca attaches great importance to discovering and understanding the ambiguity inherent in life and bring it into line with his treatment of logic, one of the three constitutive elements of Stoic philosophy.

The conference was a great occasion to combine my main research interest, Seneca the Younger and ancient epistolography, with an area of research for which I have developed an interest in the past years. I have revised the paper that I presented at the conference and submitted it as a paper for the conference volume, which is scheduled for publication in 2021 and which will be published in the Trends in Classics Series by De Gruyter.

I would like to thank the Society for the fund without which I would not have been able to attend this conference. It allowed me to present my work in front of scholars working on the same topic. The conference was also a wonderful opportunity to meet many important people and to get invaluable feedback on my work.

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