The date of *De constantia sapientis* can only be established within a wide range. The mention of Caligula's death (18.1) places it certainly after AD 41; it is also unlikely that Seneca would relate the embarrassing story of Valerius Asiaticus before his death in AD 47 (18.2). The treatise must have been written before the death of the addressee, Annaeus Serenus, reported in *epist.* 63.14 (likely dated to AD 63–64). Beyond this, however, little can be said. *De constantia sapientis* likely predates *De tranquillitate animi* since Serenus is portrayed as not yet a Stoic in the former (3.2) but committed to Stoic principles in the latter (1.10). But since that treatise also eludes dating (perhaps AD 60?), only a relative chronology is possible. If *De constantia sapientis* reflects Serenus's (or Seneca's) concerns as part of Nero's court, a date of AD 54–59 is perhaps called for (Minissale 1977: 9–13, Viansino 1968: 10 f.; Albertini 1923: 31), but such a biographical reading of the text is impossible to corroborate without clear historical allusions, of which there are none.

**Content**

Although we refer to this essay as *De constantia sapientis* (“On the Steadfastness of the Wise Man”) there is no evidence that it was called this in antiquity. The index in the Codex Ambrosianus, the *incipit*, and the *explicit* all transmit the title *Nec iniuriam nec contumeliam accipere sapientem* (“That a Wise Man Receives neither Injury nor Insult”), which is itself drawn from the thesis advanced at 2.1. The term *constantia* does not occur in the essay, so here, as with *De providentia*, we likely have an attempt to shorten a cumbersome title (see Klei 1950: 2–5).

---

An overview of the treatise:

ch. 1 (*exordium*): Seneca argues that Stoicism, though an aggressive, masculine philosophy, is not as harsh as it appears (*captatio benevolentiae*).

ch. 2 (*narratio*): Seneca recalls an earlier conversation with Serenus about the mistreatment of Cato the Younger. Since Cato was a Wise Man, he could suffer neither injury nor insult.

ch. 3 f. (*propositio/quæstio*): Serenus objects to this Stoic paradox (3.1 f.); Seneca establishes the nature of the question, emphasizing the impervious nature of the *sapiens* through a series of analogies.

ch. 5.1 f. (*divisio*) separates *contumelia* from *iniuria*, establishing the general framework for the rest of the treatise.

ch. 5.3–ch. 9 (*argumentatio I*): exposition of proofs that the *sapiens* is impervious to *iniuria*; *exemplum* of the Megarian Stilpo (5.6–6.8)

ch. 10–18 (*argumentatio II*): discussion of *contumelia*, though both *iniuria* and *contumelia* are treated together at 12.3, 13.5, and ch. 15 f.; *exempla* drawn from the senate and imperial court (ch. 17 f.).

ch. 19 (*peroratio*) Seneca extols the *sapiens* while offering advice for the rest of us *imperfecti*.

**TOPICS**

At the center of the work stands the Stoic paradox “the Wise Man is not subject to harm,” one of many paradoxes involving the Stoic *sapiens*. The figure of the *sapiens*, that rare—critics would say imaginary—human, perfect in every way, differentiated from god only in his mortality, and impervious to the blows of Fortune, was open to criticism for obvious reasons. How, for example, could a man of flesh and blood be impervious to injury, pain, bereavement, even death? Such is Serenus’s objection, but his criticism of

---

2 Rhetorical divisions following Grimal 1949b; for composition see also Albertini 1923: 75 f., 265; André 1989: 1756 f.