From 18.5 (*modo modo intra paucos illos dies quibus C. Caesar perit*) we know that Caligula was dead when Seneca wrote *De brevitate vitae*. On the basis of *modo modo* Lipsius (1615) dated the treatise to the early 40s, but since the phrase does not necessarily imply immediacy, this argument cannot be sustained. This is especially true if the addressee, Pompeius Paulinus (likely Seneca’s father-in-law), was *praefectus annonae* at the time of writing, as seems certain. Although Seneca does not identify this specific position, all indications point in this direction: Paulinus “managed the accounts of the whole world” and “understood the accounting of the public grain supply” (18.3; cf. 18.4f.). If this is correct, the historical record allows for two periods when Paulinus could have served in this capacity, 1) AD 48–55 or 2) AD 62–71. Scholars have generally fixated on two dates within these periods, AD 49 and AD 62, when Seneca’s political situation could allow him to advise Paulinus to retire without appearing hypocritical. Such attempts to tie Seneca’s essays to his own political situation are, as always, dubious; it would hardly have been hypocritical for Seneca, even at the height of his political involvement, to advise a close family member of somewhat advanced age—perhaps 60 or older—to retire from such a demanding position.

Even so, arguments in favor of AD 62 are much weaker than those for AD 49 (overview: Griffin 1962). Critics who champion 49 usually point to a terminus ante quem suggested by Seneca’s failure to mention Claudius’s extension of the *pomerium* to include the Aventine (13.8), which on inscriptional evidence is securely dated to his ninth tribunate (January 49–January 50). The argument that Sulla was the last to extend the *pomerium*, however, is not

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Seneca’s own but is attributed to a learned pedant, who, as Griffin has well argued (1962: 108–111; contra Abel 1965; Hambüchen 1966: 26–81; response by Griffin 1976: 401–407), is asserting the illegality of Claudius’s extension of the pomerium. Thus, the passage establishes not a terminus ante but a terminus post quem of AD 49. Griffin’s arguments to this end are persuasive; her contention, that De brevitate vitae is Seneca’s public apology aimed at providing Paulinus the means to resign his post gracefully to make way for Faenius Rufus in AD 55, is attractive but cannot be corroborated. On balance, a date between AD 50 and AD 55 seems likely.

**Content**

*De brevitate vitae*, one of Seneca’s most loosely organized treatises, relies not on a rigorously structured plan but, on a constellation of ideas orbiting around a central theme (Albertini 1923: 258–260). Attempts (Grimal 1959, 1960) to give a detailed analysis that presupposes rhetorical divisions are strained. There is no expressed organizational principle, transitions from topic to topic are not well marked, and the dialogue alternates freely between critical depictions of the *occupati* (those consumed by meaningless activity) and exaltations of the philosophical life. The following overview thus offers only a descriptive outline of its contents. See also Williams 2003: 19, 21–24; and André 1989: 1747–1749.

The treatise begins with an *exordium* establishing the topic: most humans, both the *inprudens vulgus* and *clari viri*, complain that human life is too short; but it is long enough if put to proper use (1). To demonstrate this point, Seneca illustrates the myriad ways in which we squander life (2 f.), providing *exempla* of powerful men unable to retire (4, Augustus; 5, Cicero; 6, Livius Drusus). Chapters 7–9 present a wide-ranging overview of why the *occupati* feel as if life is not long enough: they do not value time itself and therefore they do not realize its loss. At 10.1 Seneca expresses a sort of *propositio*, “the lives of the *occupati* are the shortest of all,” but the structural importance of this has been overstated (Grimal 1959: 5 f.). Seneca thereupon presents a technical presentation of the three divisions of time (10.2) and argumentation as to why the *occupati* cannot employ the past (10.3–6) and barely enjoy the present (10.6). Seneca resumes criticism at 11.1 of the *occupati* who have

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2 See André 1989: 1732 for a renewed argument in favor of Albertini’s (1923: 179) transposition of 7.1–7.2 to ch. 12.