INTRODUCTION
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TOWARDS A MORE BALANCED VIEW OF JUSTUS LIPSIUS’S
POLITICAL WRITINGS AND THEIR INFLUENCE

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It is a well-established fact that since the nineteenth century the Dutch humanist Justus Lipsius (1547–1606) has mainly been recognised by scholars as a philologist. His contemporaries and their immediate descendants, by contrast, seem to have valued him more for his philosophical and political writings than for his philological and antiquarian studies. However that may be, any intellectual biography aiming to come to terms with Lipsius’s rich personality and manifold activities has to take into account both aspects of his professional endeavours, all the more so since they are closely intertwined with one another and have mutually influenced each other. Consequently, anyone studying Lipsius’s philosophical and political writings ought to be familiar with his philological work and vice versa. Lipsius’s monumental editions of the historian Tacitus and the philosopher Seneca, first issued in 1578 and 1605 respectively, cannot be fully understood without knowledge of his philosophical program; conversely, his political writings cannot be correctly appreciated without acknowledging his enduring efforts to restore the original texts of Tacitus and Seneca, and to present them in a ‘readable’, that is to say ‘philosophical’ way.¹ When focusing, moreover, on Lipsius’s political or philosophical enterprises, one should remember to judge them by early modern standards rather than by contemporary criteria. As has been demonstrated by Conal Condren, Stephen Gaukroger and Ian Hunter, this also entails an investigation into the way in which Lipsius constructed his philosophical persona.