In his Monita et exempla politica (1605), Lipsius defines prudence (prudentia) as acquaintance with facts and events and the correct judgment of them.\(^1\) He further explains that prudence is generated by nature, experience and learning,\(^2\) the last of these being the most important especially as knowledge of history.\(^3\) Furthermore, being the memory of events, history itself represents a type of experience, for what is seen and done in experience can be read and learned in history as in a mirror of examples.\(^4\) Such a definition will immediately call to mind Tacitus, the ultimate source of prudence for the good prince in Lipsius,\(^5\) and also an author insisting on the importance of experience in acquiring prudence (Ann. 4.33.2). Machiavelli’s own definition of prudence in The Prince, as expertise, analytical insight and the capacity of reading the signs in texts and in historical events and of applying them to specific situations\(^6\) is not to be neglected as a possible source either. However, the study of Lipsius’s further clarifications and quotations as well as a comparison of his views in the Monita with those in the Politica\(^7\) suggest that Lipsius did not abandon the more complex Aristotelian concept of prudence or practical wisdom (phronesis) either. Other possible sources cited by Lipsius are Cicero and Polybius.

\(^1\) Lipsius J., Monita et exempla politica libri qui virtutes et vitia principum spectant (Antwerp, Plantin-Moretus: 1606), Bk. I, Ch. 8, 58: ‘Haec non aliud est quam notitia rerum eventuumque et iudicium in iis rectum.’
\(^2\) Lipsius, Monita 58.
\(^3\) Lipsius, Monita 58.
\(^4\) Lipsius, Monita 58.
\(^5\) Lipsius J., Ep. ad Belg. 2.52, quoted in Morford M., Stoics and Neostoics: Rubens and the Circle of Lipsius (Princeton: 1991) 157; for more details, see the entire chapter 5 (139–180).
\(^7\) Lipsius J., Politicorum sive civilis doctrinae libri sex, qui ad principatum maxime spectant (Antwerp, Plantin-Moretus: 1604).
Thus, one hypothesis proposed here is that Lipsius’s prudence is rather eclectic and quite ambiguous and the first aim of this study is to analyse its definition in detail, with special attention to the tension between practical and theoretical wisdom. To emphasise Lipsius’s ambiguity, no difference will be made between the terms prudence and practical wisdom; they will be used interchangeably. The term practical wisdom employed instead of prudence could indeed help eliminate the emphasis on caution and self-referential care, the so-called ‘devolution’ or ‘demise’ of the concept of prudence,8 censured by scholars nowadays. Such a view, that makes prudence just self-protective, preferring safety to change,9 is certainly far removed from prudence as Lipsius or his sources, Aristotle, Cicero, Tacitus or even Machiavelli had conceived it. Then, there are differences between prudence as defined by Cicero and by other Latin authors, and prudence or practical wisdom as defined by Aristotle.10 However, Lipsius used the term prudence and, while using it, he often cited Aristotle in the margin and retained many notes of the Aristotelian concept of practical wisdom. At the same time, he used the term prudence also according to the definitions in his other sources such as Cicero, Tacitus or Polybius.

Lipsius seems to have been indeed eclectic both in the Monita and in the Politica, which should not necessarily surprise us, but it is surprising though that his concept of prudence apparently does not retain too much of the Stoic concept of virtue. An even more striking feature of Lipsius’s prudence is that in general it is not defined as a virtue anymore, and that creates even more ambiguity. At any rate, Lipsius is very vague in this respect and even if in the Politica he sometimes still defines prudence as a virtue,11 in the Monita he clearly separates them;12 a situation that seems, at first sight, to strengthen the influence of Machiavelli in Lipsius. One may also consider this to be just a lack of systematic approach, acknowledged by the author himself elsewhere, in the Politica, due to the difficulty of defining prudence.13 Or the situation may be caused simply by an arbitrary combination of definitions that are not necessarily consistent with each other due

11 Lipsius, *Politica*, Bk. 3, Ch. 1, 60.
12 Lipsius, *Monita* 58.
13 Lipsius, *Politica*, Bk. 4, Ch. 1, 77.