When studying early modern political writing in the Netherlands, it is impossible not to mention Justus Lipsius. He was not only renowned as a classical philologist, antiquarian and Neostoic thinker, but also made a major contribution to early modern European political thought with the publication of his *Politica*, published in Leiden in 1589. With over sixty editions and translations, the work was a best seller in its day – a popularity which is reflected by the scholarly attention it has recently received. A steady stream of publications on Lipsius’s political views and their reception have revealed, and continue to reveal, that the work was indeed widely read, discussed and imitated in Europe in the course of the seventeenth century. Sitting somewhat in the shadow of its elder brother is the *Monita et exempla politica* (1605). It was written by Lipsius after his return to the Southern Netherlands and was conceived as an illustration of the more theoretical sentences of the *Politica* by means of historical examples. Remarkably, scholarly discussions of Lipsius’s political thought and legacy often only mention the *Monita* in passing, or even ignore it completely. Moreover, the *Monita* has often been dismissed as a stereotypical amplification of Lipsius’s political masterpiece, a product bearing the marks of his old age and of the intellectually repressive climate of the Catholic Southern Netherlands. However, in order to get a comprehensive

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view of Lipsius’s political ideology and its development, the *Monita* cannot and should not be overlooked.

In the present contribution we shall therefore analyse the *Monita* as a representative of political writing in the Southern Netherlands in the period 1550 to 1650 by indicating its affinity with various traditions of political and moral writing, as far as its genre and content are concerned, as well as by defining its singularity or originality. This might put us in a better position to judge whether we are indeed looking at the last scribblings of an old man, or rather at his political testament.3

Dedicated to Archduke Albert of Austria in 1605, Lipsius’s *Monita et exempla politica. Libri duo qui virtutes et vitia principum spectant* advises the then co-sovereign of the Spanish Netherlands on the virtues and vices of princely rule by drawing lessons from history. In the introductory chapters Lipsius leaves no doubt as to the intentions of the work. In the preface to the reader he writes that these two books have been written to illustrate and confirm the *Politica*; therefore the same structure has been maintained. He had planned to illustrate each of the six books of the *Politica*, but published the first two separately because he was afraid that illness or death would prevent him from finishing the project, as indeed it did. In the first chapter of the *Monita* Lipsius is requested by a pupil to clarify and corroborate the learned aphorisms of the *Politica* with practical applications in the form of historical examples, and thus finish the exquisite work he has started (“Pulcherrime coeptum opus absolve”). Historical examples are praised by Lipsius for their quality of representing general principles graphically and encouraging imitation. History is defined as a mirror in which politicians can see themselves and as an image upon which they can model their lives. Historical examples were used and considered as the best rhetorical technique to teach and influence public and private behaviour from antiquity onwards.4 Thus Cicero defined history as a school for life (“historia magistra vitae”),5 a view

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3 As the *Monita* is called by Jean Jehasse, *La Renaissance de la critique: l’essor de l’Humanisme érudit de 1560 à 1614* (Saint-Etienne, 1976), 428.


5 Cicero *De Oratore* 2.36.