Although I have entitled my paper ‘Stoicism in the Renaissance from Petrarch to Lipsius’, a more accurate title, but one which I avoided because it seemed too awkward, would be ‘Renaissance Stoicism up to, but not including, Lipsius’. In other words, I shall not be discussing the achievements of the great Flemish humanist — that is a task I leave to the far more competent hands of Jan Papy. ¹ What I intend to do, instead, is to trace the Renaissance background to Lipsius, showing how this first period in the Stoic revival differed from the later phase which he initiated. I hope that these considerations will help to answer a question which I believe is fundamental for understanding ‘Grotius and the Stoa’: what was new about Neostoicism?

My story begins with the Italian humanist and poet, Petrarch. Historians of the Renaissance like myself always begin with Petrarch — a déformation professionelle, arising from the fact that so many of the traditions that we study started with him. When it comes to Petrarch’s knowledge of Stoicism, however, he was not all that different from earlier scholars, since he learned about the philosophy largely from Latin authors known and studied throughout most of the Middle Ages: Seneca, the chief Roman spokesman for the sect, and Cicero, a sympathetic and well-informed outsider. Petrarch compared these two figures very favourably to Aristotle, who had come to dominate university teaching of moral philosophy since the middle of the thirteenth century. He complained that the Greek philosopher’s words, especially in the overly literal Latin translations which were read at the time, lacked the expressive power to ‘sting and set on fire and urge us to love virtue and hate vice’. For such persuasive eloquence, which was high on Petrarch’s list of priorities, one had to turn instead to the Roman writers Cicero and Seneca.²

¹ See J. Papy’s contribution to this volume.

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If Petrarch differed little from his medieval predecessors in his appreciation of these two ever-popular authors, he nevertheless distinguished himself from them through his superior philological skills, on account of which he is justly regarded as the founding father of the humanist movement. In Book II of his *Rerum senilium libri* (Letters of Old Age), Petrarch included among works falsely attributed to ancient authors *De quattuor virtutibus* (The Four Virtues). Aware that this treatise, which had an enormous *fortuna* in the Middle Ages, had been ascribed to Seneca 'against his will', he complained that the multitude 'cite and admire Seneca in something Seneca never saw'. Indeed, there were 'those who among all the works of Seneca himself love this one because it most suits their intelligence'. Petrarch knew that the treatise was not genuine because, while hunting for manuscripts of classical works in French libraries – a quintessentially humanist activity – he had encountered a codex containing the preface, missing from Italian copies of the text, which identified the author as a certain bishop Martin. In fact, it was written in the 570s by Bishop Martin of Braga and acquired its attribution to Seneca only in the tenth century. Somewhat surprisingly, Petrarch's discovery did not make much of an impression; for the treatise continued to circulate among Seneca's writings and got into print under his name in 1470, five years before the first edition of the philosopher's genuine works.

Petrarch's intense interest in classical antiquity – another characteristic feature of his humanism – found expression in the rather odd one-sided correspondence he carried on with his favourite authors, in which admiration is frequently mingled with reproach: a curious mixture of fan mail and a crank letter. This is especially true of his epistle to Seneca, written in 1348. Petrarch struggles to understand how this master of virtue, to whose words he listened daily with extraordinary attention, had become so enmeshed in a life of ease and wealth and so caught up in the hollow pursuit of glory that he refused to detach himself from the disgraceful court of the emperor Nero, lavishing praise on his inhuman and bloodstained pupil that was worthy neither of the giver nor of the recipient. 'I do not know whether you are

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