The title of Jacques de Gheyn’s 1565-1629 Wapenhandelinghe – the Exercise of Arms as it is known in English – brings together weapons and the body in the construction of the ideal soldier. As its frontispiece proclaims, this systematic outline of martial activity reflects the training methods of Maurice of Nassau, developed in collaboration with his cousins, the brothers John II of Nassau and William Louis of Nassau, the stadholder of Friesland. They reformulated ancient techniques of military drill for modern soldiers and weapons, to create practices that would transform a heterogeneous group of men into a powerful, coordinated force. Breaking actions into sequences, modeling the controlled behavior of the soldier’s body, the Wapenhandelinghe can easily be assimilated into a teleological progression from a medieval force of hot-headed individual knights to a modern war machine in which soldiers are interchangeable units. But such accounts do not do justice to the elegance of de Gheyn’s images, or to their place within the military discourse of early modern Europe. In proposing a discipline of the body through training in weapons, the Wapenhandelinghe responded to contemporary anxiety about the unruly violence represented by the combatant. The remedy offered by the book’s engraved army of musketeers, pikemen, and arquebusiers was based on bodily constraint, in which a military imperative for reliable, efficient soldiers converged with the civil deportment of the courteous gentleman. The result was a new configuration of the image of the soldier, a figure that would haunt Dutch visual culture throughout the seventeenth century.

How to wage war was a question that engaged many minds in the bellicose early modern period, and in the course of the sixteenth century, a rich, diverse array of military treatises flooded from printing presses. Indeed, the printing press itself seems to have encouraged the creation of a military science constituted in writing, not only through the circulation of modern theories but also through the dissemination of ancient texts on strategy and warfare. As was so often the case in the sixteenth century, the literature of antiquity provided inspiration, through the consultation of Greek and Roman writers on military strategy as well as indirectly by way of the works of Justus Lipsius. Although influenced by ancient writers, early modern military thinkers reworked their ideas for contemporary circumstances, involving new weapons for example, the relative merits and uses of various kinds of firearms, in particular, were debated. Interest in the theory and practice of warfare was international, appropriately enough, considering that the wars