

## Simon Stevin's *Vita politica. Het Burgherlick leven* (1590)

*A practical guide for civic life in the Netherlands at the end of the sixteenth century*

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### Abstract

Simon Stevin has recently enjoyed a renewed interest. Long considered as mainly an engineer and a mathematician, he also earned fame for having been military advisor to Stadtholder Maurice of Nassau during almost 20 years. His lasting reputation as a scientist was due to his outstanding theoretical works (in algebra, physics, calculation of interest, linguistics, architecture, music theory, etc.) and to his highly innovative technological achievements in various fields: sluices, mills, fortification, navigation, etc. But new aspects of his work have been brought to light, concerning among others his political thought. The short discourse written in Dutch and published in Leiden in 1590, *Vita politica. Het Burgherlick leven*, proves to be a very original political treatise. Stevin here distances himself from both the 'mirrors-for-princes' literary genre and the humanists' claim on a privileged relationship with the supreme political power, asserting instead the capability of any citizen to make a statement on politics. In addition, he deals with the question of civic life as a practical issue.

*Keywords:* Simon Stevin; political philosophy; sixteenth century; theory and practice; Dutch language

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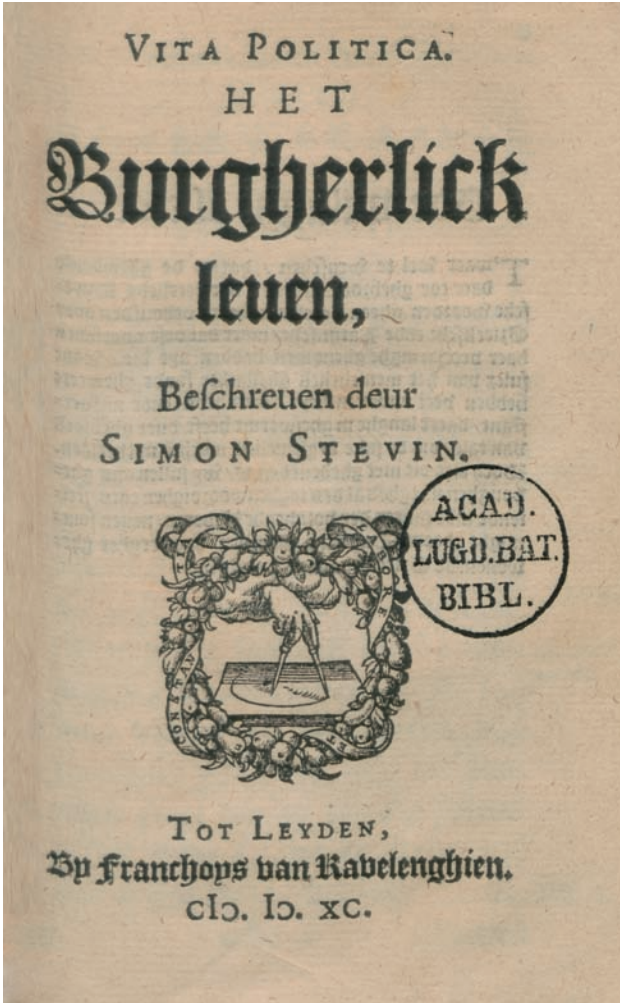
#### *Introduction*

In 1590 a short text was published by Franciscus 1 Raphelengius in Leiden, entitled *Vita politica. Het Burgherlick leven*. Its author was Simon Stevin (1548–1620), a mathematician and engineer mainly known for his scientific publications, who became, a few years later, quartermaster-general of the Army of Prince Maurice of Nassau, stadholder of Holland. For almost thirty years, Stevin remained a very close adviser of the Prince. At the same time, he was a prolific author, writing on fortification, navigation, music theory, bookkeeping, optics, astronomy and geography.<sup>1</sup> Although foreign to the field of his declared competency, the *Vita politica. Het burgherlick leven* was a success and seems to have been the most often republished of his many works. At least nine editions are known between 1590 and the end of the seventeenth century. To what may such a success be ascribed and what political message did its author want to convey? In order to answer this question, this paper will first present the specific style and argumentation of this short treatise. The second part will focus on the content of the *Vita politica* and the format given to this text. Lastly, by setting it within the main trends in political thought at the end of the sixteenth century and in particular, by comparing Stevin to one of his famous contemporaries, Justus Lipsius, I will try to bring out the meaning of this treatise and Stevin's aim in putting to one side mathematics and engineering in order to write on politics.

#### *A bewildering text*

Brief and concise, the *Vita politica. Het Burgherlick leven* surprises its reader by its content and form. What does such an unusual title, 'The Civic Life', mean and how can it be dealt with so summarily, free from the ponderous quality of so many other contemporary texts? We can also ask why an engineer and mathematician should tackle such a

<sup>1</sup> Beside the well-known study on Stevin's life and achievements by E.J. Dijksterhuis, *Simon Stevin. Science in the Netherlands around 1600*, Den Haag 1943, an excellent synthesis on Stevin's life, work and activities has been recently provided by J.T. Devreese and G. Vanden Berghe, *Wonder en is gheen wonder. De geniale wereld van Simon Stevin 1548–1620*, Leuven 2003 (English translation: 'Magic is No Magic'. *The Wonderful World of Simon Stevin*, Southampton, Boston 2008). One should also mention the richly documented and illustrated book published on the occasion of an exhibition devoted to Stevin, in 2004, at the Belgian Royal Library in Brussels: *Simon Stevin 1548–1620. L'émergence de la nouvelle science*, Turnhout 2004.



Ill. 1 Title page of Simon Stevin's *Vita politica*. Leiden, UB, 689 F 10.

political subject. As we have seen, the *Vita politica* was not written by a scholar of politics or a political personage, but from someone who until then had been exclusively occupied with mathematics and technological achievements.<sup>2</sup> In addition, the use of

<sup>2</sup> *Vita politica. Het burgherlick leven, Beschreven deur Simon Stevin*, Leiden 1590. A modern edition, with facsimile of the original, is provided in: S. Stevin, *Het burgherlick leven & anhangh*, P. den Boer (ed.) and A.C.G. Fleurkens (translation), Utrecht 2001; all references to the Dutch text are drawn from this edition, the English version being quoted from *The Principal works of Simon Stevin*, edited and translated by E. Crone, E.J. Dijksterhuis, R.J. Forbes, M.G.J. Minnaert and A. Pannekoek, 5 vols, Amsterdam 1955-1966, vol. v. I have, from my part, published a French translation of the *Vita politica* in: *Simon Stevin. De la vie civile*, 1590. Présentation et traduction de C. Secretan. Etudes réunies par C. Secretan et P. den Boer, Lyon 2005.

the vernacular – which is indicated by the double title – was not yet common practice for theoretical texts. In 1576 Jean Bodin, for example, felt obliged to justify his writing in French.<sup>3</sup> In short, this is an unconventional text on several accounts.

Little is known about Simon Stevin's life.<sup>4</sup> He was a native of Bruges (on almost every title page of his books he identified himself as: 'van Brugghe', 'Bruggheleinck', 'de Bruges') and was first employed as a cashier in a commercial firm in Antwerp. Then, after ten years traveling throughout Prussia, Poland, Sweden and Norway (the reasons are unknown), he settled in the Northern Provinces and was registered in Leiden University in 1583.<sup>5</sup> Around 1593, he was taken into Maurice of Nassau's service as military engineer and remained his influential adviser until the end of his life, in 1620. The book he wrote in response to Prince Maurice's desire to be trained in mathematics – *Wiscontige gedachtenissen* ('Mathematical Memoirs') – indicates the close ties between Stevin and the Prince.<sup>6</sup> From 1590 onwards, he contributed greatly to the improvement and accuracy of Dutch artillery. In 1594, his *Stercktenbouwinge* ('Fort building') provided important instructions for fortress building.<sup>7</sup> Although his main area of expertise was mathematics, he wrote on a very wide range of subjects, including logic and dialectics (*Dialectike ofte Bewysconst*, 'Dialectics or the Art of Demonstration', 1585), arithmetic (*L'Arithmetique*, in French), the decimal system (*De Thiende*, 'The Disme', 1585), statics (*De Beghinselen der Weeghconst*, 'The Elements of the Art of Weighing', 1586), navigation (*De Havenvinding*, 'Port finding', 1599), mills (*Vande Molens*, 'On Mills') and music (*Vande Spiegeling der Singconst*, 'On the Theory of the Art of Singing'), the latter being two posthumous treatises published in 1884 by D. Bierens de Haan.<sup>8</sup> In 1600, at Maurice's request, he helped to found a training school for military engineers in Leiden, a relatively new sort of institution.<sup>9</sup> Lastly, he was famous for the Land-yacht he invented and tested in the presence of Maurice of Nassau, Hugo Grotius and the French Ambassador, Nicolas de Buzanval, on the beach of Scheveningen, near The Hague in 1600.<sup>10</sup>

3 'J'ay entrepris le discours de la Republique et en langue populaire, tant pour ce que les sources de la langue latine sont presque taries, et qui seicheront du tout si la barbarie causee par les guerres civiles continue, que pour estre mieux entendu de tous Français naturels', J. Bodin, *Les six livres de la République*, ed. M.D. Couzinet and Chr. Frémont, Paris 1986, Préface, p. 10.

4 An up-to-date clarification of all available data and archives on this point is provided in: J.T. Devreese and G.Vanden Berghe, *Wonder en is gheen wonder*, p. 17–53.

5 E.J. Dijksterhuis, *Simon Stevin*, p. 7–9; *Simon Stevin 1548–1620. L'émergence de la nouvelle science*, p. 19–26.

6 D.J. Struik, *Het land van Stevin en Huygens*, Amsterdam 1958, p. 65–67.

7 See M. Prak, *The Dutch Republic in the Seventeenth Century*, Cambridge 2009 [first print: 2005], p. 224.

8 For Stevin's bibliography, see the overview of Simon Stevin's published work (with an English translation of the titles) in J.T. Devreese and G.Vanden Berghe, *Wonder en is gheen wonder* (n. 1), p. xxiii–xxviii; a more extensive bibliography will be found in E.J. Dijksterhuis, *Simon Stevin* (n. 1).

9 K. van Berkel, 'Simon Stevin et la fondation de l'école militaire de Leyde en 1600', in: *Simon Stevin. De la vie civile, 1590* (n. 2), p. 94.

10 The engraving, after J. de Gheyn (II), in: *Theatrum urbium Belgicae liberae ac foederatae*, Amsterdam 1649, number 27, recalls the event.

From all this, it is clear that Stevin was above all a man of science and not a political writer.

As if anticipating the questions raised by his bewildered reader, Stevin confessed at the outset that his *Vita politica* was atypical in two ways, with regard both to its shortness and to its subject matter:

As to the shortness of this work, which might be reproved with some reason in view of the endless examples and different cases with which it might have been amplified, the excuse for this must be on the one hand my love of briefness and on the other hand my present mathematical work.<sup>11</sup>

In fact, dealing with a question quite unfamiliar to him, Stevin presents in his *Vita politica* a form of argumentation that has little to do with traditional political treatises. Aware of what distinguished his text from others in political theory, Stevin was quick to reassure his reader preemptively that the unusual format of this treatise was intentional and should not be considered as a defect. It would be a mistake to see this only as a form of *captatio benevolentiae*. The ‘excuse’ presented by Simon Stevin underlines two major characteristics of the *Vita politica*: its brevity, informed by its pedagogical purpose, and the influence of mathematics. The second excuse does not only refer to the mathematical work that was occupying Stevin at the time he was writing the *Vita politica*. Chronologically speaking, it is true that this political discourse was published between the *Beghinselen der Weeghconst* (1586) and the *Appendice algébrique* (1594). But this allusion to mathematics may very well be understood as justifying the reasoning Stevin employed in his political discourse. He refused to found political legitimacy on a transcendent principle. For him, the only true legitimacy of a society and its government comes from the fact that it exists. It is as self-sufficient as a mathematical axiom. He likewise rejected the authority of Antiquity. ‘What is the need to prove our assertions with such a sentence as: “Hippocrates has said...?”’ he protested in his *Wisconstighe Ghedachtenissen*.<sup>12</sup> This claim shows clearly the difference between Stevin’s and Lipsius’s projects. At the beginning of his *Politicorum sive civilis doctrinae libri sex* (known as *Politica*), Lipsius announced:

To teach you how you can set out on a right course in Civil Life, and pursue it right, is my project; and to do this not by means of my own counsel, but by that of the ancients, and even in their very words.<sup>13</sup>

The definition here given is that of a *cento* (i.e., a ‘patchwork’ – a poem made up of bits from other poems), as the *Politica* was presented by its author.<sup>14</sup> On the contrary, Stevin did not refer to any classical example and generally dismissed quotations from commonplace books. He only cited events borrowed from recent history. For example,

<sup>11</sup> *Vita politica*, in: *The Principal works of Simon Stevin* (n. 2), vol. v, p. 479–481.

<sup>12</sup> *The Principal Works of Simon Stevin* (n. 2), vol. III, p. 611.

<sup>13</sup> J. Lipsius, *Politica. Six Books of Politics or Political Instruction*, edited with translation and introduction by J. Waszink, Assen 2004, p. 261. The original edition was published in 1590, by the same Leiden printer as the one who published the *Vita politica*: Franciscus Raphelengius.

<sup>14</sup> Lipsius, *Politica*, p. 56.

the Duchy of Brabant and the Republic of Venice provided models for a constitutional monarchy, the form of government in which a monarch (what Stevin calls a *staetvorst*) rules with a parliament at his side. Similarly, the case of Jan van Leyden's revolt at Munster, in Germany, and that of the Adamists at Amsterdam, were called on to illustrate 'evidently bad citizenship'.<sup>15</sup> Even the contemporary situation of the Netherlands was cited as an image of harmonious hierarchy between local privileges and general laws:

Let us take as an example the United Netherlands, whose inhabitants as a community have agreed upon certain laws and general rules, to which they all conform and which they engage to follow. In addition each separate province, such as Holland, Zeeland, Friesland, etc., has its own rules.<sup>16</sup>

This certainly explains why Stevin focused on some principal points and refused to enter, as he said, into a broad description of political life:

Because it is not our intention to describe this subject-matter of civic life at length or to pursue it step by step from genus to species, for which we lack time and inclination, we shall only touch upon the principal and most essential doubtful points.<sup>17</sup>

Most likely, the pressure of external circumstances also required this writing process and was responsible for the 'lack of time' of which Stevin complained. The second half of the sixteenth century was dominated by the religious conflicts which followed the spread of the Reformation. In the Dutch provinces in particular, this period was that of the 'Ten years' (1588-1598), the political start of the new state. Therefore, the urgency here was probably the result not only of the need felt by Stevin to get back to his engineering and mathematical work, but also of the contemporary situation, which he thought called for an intervention on his part. According to him, it was not a time for basic research, but for action. The situation did not call for a theoretical treatise but for a practical manual.

### *Simon Stevin's 'burgherlick regel': a new vision of citizenship*

At the core of the *Vita politica* stands the idea of 'burgherlick'. What is to be understood exactly by this word? The Latin equivalent given in the margin each time the Dutch term recurs, does not really help, due to the range of possible meanings: 'political', 'civil', 'urban', according to the context. The ambiguousness bears some similarity with that of the Italian 'civile' of the fourteenth century.<sup>18</sup> No doubt the

<sup>15</sup> *Vita politica*, in: *The Principal works of Simon Stevin* (n. 2), vol. v; both were revolts led by Anabaptists, the second one aiming at founding in Amsterdam a 'New Jerusalem' on the model of that settled by Jan of Leiden in Münster, in 1534-1535.

<sup>16</sup> *Vita politica*, in: *The Principal works of Simon Stevin* (n. 2), vol. v, p. 537.

<sup>17</sup> *Vita politica*, in: *The Principal works of Simon Stevin* (n. 2), vol. v, p. 483.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. N. Rubinstein: 'By the beginning of the fourteenth century, the word *politicus*, and its Latin and Italian equivalents *civilis* and *civile*, had been squarely pre-empted for the republican regime', 'The history of the word *politicus* in early-modern Europe', in: A. Pagden (ed.), *The Languages of Political Theory in Early-Modern*

*Vita politica* retains in its style and ideas something of the Florentine humanism and recalls works like those of Leon Battista Alberti (*I Libri Della Famiglia*, 1437) or Matteo Palmieri (*Vita Civile*, 1438). Throughout the entire duration of the Florentine Republic, the frequently used expression ‘vivere civile’ referred mainly to a form of participation in collective self-determination within the city. Moreover, in this precise linguistic context, ‘civile’ generally qualified a republican form of government, to the exclusion of any other (monarchy or democracy). As a result of the history and political uncertainty of Florence, the word’s connotation tended to define more narrowly every government that followed the law (‘regulated by laws’, in Machiavelli’s words) in contrast to ‘absolutism’ (which evades the law).<sup>19</sup> From the individual point of view, the ‘vivere civile’ became increasingly synonymous with virtue in Florentine vocabulary, an equation that brings us very close to the sense of ‘burgherlickhey’, understood as a civic conduct beneficial to the whole community:

A man who so behaves himself in it that the greatest stability and welfare of the community results from it in this life is called a civic person (burgherlick persoon/politicus). And such proper practice is called a civic life (Burgherlick leven/*Vita politica*).<sup>20</sup>

Admittedly, Stevin’s *Vita politica* combines, in the word ‘politicus’, both ‘the wider sense as relating to the state in general’ and the narrow one, implying ‘virtuous’ because in conformity with the laws.<sup>21</sup>

But to understand Stevin’s political thought correctly, it is also crucial to note that although some of his arguments are founded on general and abstract ideas, his *Vita politica* was not conceived as a theory of the State, even less as a theory of the individual’s place in a transcendent order. His aim was only to provide a practical guide for overcoming various kinds of conflicts as if they were technical challenges:

First defining civic life, we shall subsequently say what is the rightful authority governing a citizen; next, how one is to behave as a good citizen in civil wars: in government; in the laws which we regard as not binding us, those which are dubious, and those which contradict each other; in religion; and finally of civic life in general, the whole to be contained in eight chapters.<sup>22</sup>

What he presents consists in useful advice, in a way easily accessible for all, on how to remain simultaneously in harmony with the government of one’s country and with the dictates of one’s conscience. In his view, ‘burgherlickhey’ mainly required

*Europe*, Cambridge 2002 [first print: 1987], p. 45; see also K. Tilmans, ‘Republikeins burgherschap en het civic humanism in de Bourgondisch-Habsburgse Nederlanden (1477-1566)’, in: J. Kloek and K. Tilmans (eds), *Burger. Een geschiedenis van het begrip ‘burger’ in de Nederlanden van de Middeleeuwen tot de 21ste eeuw*, Amsterdam 2002, p. 79-97.

<sup>19</sup> *The Sweetness of Power: Machiavelli’s ‘Discourses’ and Guicciardini’s ‘Considerations’*, translated by J. Atkinson and D. Sices, Illinois 2002: *Niccolo Machiavelli’s Discourses on the first Ten Books of Titus Livy*, 1.58, p. 148.

<sup>20</sup> *Vita politica*, in: *The Principal works of Simon Stevin* (n. 2), vol. v, p. 489.

<sup>21</sup> N. Rubinstein, ‘The history of the word *politicus*’, p. 46.

<sup>22</sup> *Vita politica*, in: *The Principal works of Simon Stevin* (n. 2), vol. v, p. 483, 485 (slightly modified).

the individual's consent to the political regime of the city or the state where he lived. If this agreement between a country's laws and one's feelings exists, it is then easy, according to Stevin, to be a good citizen. 'It is even so evident', he adds, 'that no instruction is needed, for if he only follows his own inclination, he behaves as a good citizen.'<sup>23</sup>

Stevin's account therefore dealt with the quality of a citizen, what constitutes 'citizenship', and how it is achieved under any circumstances, either from the community's point of view (that is to say, in creating public concord), or from the point of view of the individual (in creating moral tranquility). The central concern of the *Vita politica* with peace and concord obviously points to the historical situation in which the text was written. A single remark in the dedication to one of the burgomasters of the city of Delft, Govert Brasser, summarizes the way Stevin interpreted such a situation: 'There arise great differences in opinion between men, great confusion among minds.' From this, it is clear that his motives for writing about politics derive from the bitter religious and political debates which took place in this period, and the various sorts of conflicts in which individuals could find themselves involved. The aim of the *Vita politica* was to remedy such situations by presenting the solutions 'most suitable for a righteous civic life.'<sup>24</sup> The 'Argument' quoted above clearly circumscribed the inquiry's limits: 'We shall only touch upon the principal and most essential doubtful points, on which there are daily the most violent differences of opinion among people.'<sup>25</sup> For the individual mired in these situations, Stevin's response to these dilemmas consisted in expressing the standard that established all political legitimacy on the government's existence, i.e., the *de facto* principle.<sup>26</sup> This is the meaning of the first 'indubitable general rule', a chief point that is repeated throughout the text: 'Every one must always consider as his rightful authority those who at the present are actually governing the place where he chooses his dwelling.'<sup>27</sup>

Although Stevin did not express a preference for a particular form of government, the aim of such a rule might be to provide support for the newly independent state of the United Provinces, which had in 1581 solemnly renounced its sovereign, the King of Spain, Philip II, and was experiencing an era of self-governed 'republic' (the 'Ten Years', 1588-1598). The seven Dutch provinces appeared as an original political state, a federation of provinces, each one enjoying a kind of regional autonomy and cooperating through the States General in political decisions concerning the Union, while the stadholder remained in charge of the army. As such, the young Republic could be seen as defying theoretical programmes such as those developed in Jean Bodin's *République* (1576) or Lipsius's *Politica* (1589) and arguing for a strong

<sup>23</sup> *Vita politica*, in: *The Principal works of Simon Stevin* (n. 2), vol. v, p. 491.

<sup>24</sup> *Vita politica*, in: *The Principal works of Simon Stevin* (n. 2), vol. v, p. 477.

<sup>25</sup> *Vita politica*, in: *The Principal works of Simon Stevin* (n. 2), vol. v, p. 483.

<sup>26</sup> On the *de facto* principle, see my essay: 'L'état de fait comme légitimité. Le pragmatisme politique de Simon Stevin (1548-1620) dans sa *Vita politica*', in: *Revue des Etudes Germaniques* 4 (1986), p. 418-434.

<sup>27</sup> *Vita politica*, in: *The Principal works of Simon Stevin* (n. 2), vol. v, p. 493.



central authority. On the contrary, the examples chosen in the *Vita politica* (Holland, Venice, Brabant), together with the neologism 'staetvorsten' which Stevin coined to designate the 'Princes who do not govern alone as absolute monarchs, but have a parliament at their side', suggest that he distanced himself from those who favored the emerging absolutist monarchies.<sup>28</sup>

However, what seemed more important for Stevin was the way a given form of government conformed to its theoretical definition. He considered that, aside from being justified by the *de facto* principle, the legitimacy of an existing government dwelt in its accordance with its founding principles. The Doge of Venice, for example, would have become illegitimate if he had replaced the Senate with an Inquisition.<sup>29</sup> This is the reason why knowledge and language were brought to the forefront, in politics as well as in science. The question of knowing was crucial for Stevin, as seen above, and particularly in the case of the interpretation of history. The majority of conflicts and political confusions arose from 'misunderstanding' and 'ignorance'. In his view ignorance, even more than antagonistic passions or diverging interests, explained the misfortunes of human societies. Such an assessment was not rare in the rhetoric of political treatises. All kind of social and political troubles were generally ascribed to a lack of knowledge in politics. Stevin's originality lay in the way he closely linked this ignorance to both a lack of method ('goede oir-den') and a lack of good language ('goede talen'). Compared to the 'Age of the Sages' (*Wysentyt*), i.e., a remote past in which Stevin imagined that men possessed an exceptional knowledge, particularly in astronomy and mathematics, Stevin thought that the scholars of the times he lived in lacked three crucial competencies: practical experience ('dadelicke ervaringen'), good method and good language.<sup>30</sup> Although the 'Age of the Sages' mainly referred to a high level of scientific knowledge, the principles suggested by Stevin to restore this blessed period of human history may also be applied to knowledge of politics. Besides language and method, 'practical experience' in politics was to be found in history. Since Cicero's definition of history as *magistra vitae* repeatedly recommended to both Prince and citizen, history was seen as a tool for politics.<sup>31</sup> Machiavelli invited Lorenzo de' Medici (the 'Magnificent'), to whom he dedicated *The Prince*, to draw on history in order to learn how to be a glorious Prince: 'As for mental exercise, a ruler should read historical works, especially for the light they shed on the actions of eminent men: to find out how they waged war, to discover the reasons for their victories and defeats, in order to avoid reverses and achieve conquests; and above all, to imitate some eminent man, who himself set out to imitate some predecessor of his who was considered worthy of praise and glory.'<sup>32</sup> In the Netherlands, an author like Marcus Zuerius Boxhorn (1612-1653) asserted

28 *Vita politica*, in: *The Principal works of Simon Stevin* (n. 2), vol. v, p. 503.

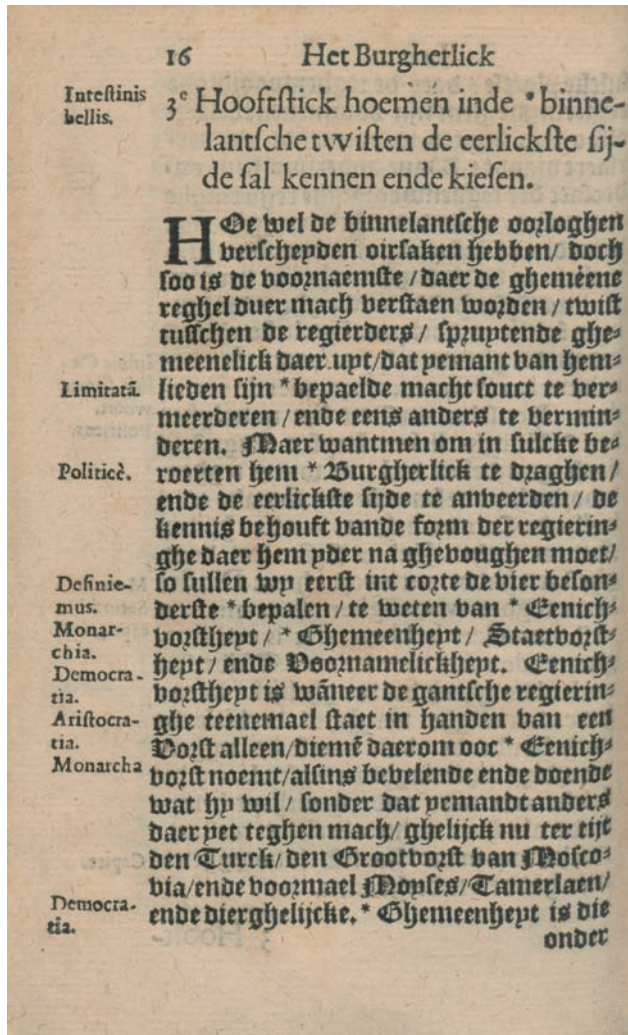
29 *Vita politica*, in: *The Principal works of Simon Stevin* (n. 2), vol. v, p. 409.

30 See *De Wysentyt*, in: *The Principal Works of Simon Stevin* (n. 2), vol. III, p. 609.

31 Cicero, *De Oratore*, 2, 9, 36.

32 Machiavelli, *The Prince*, ed. Q. Skinner and R. Price, Cambridge 1988, p. 53.

Ill. 2 Definitions of the main forms of government according to Simon Stevin in *Vita politica*, p. 16. Leiden, UB, 689 F 10.



that knowledge and capability in public office were first acquired through one's own experience but should also be gained through the experience of others, as collected in history books.<sup>33</sup>

Admittedly, the period when the *Vita politica* was published for the first time coincided with the expansion of the Dutch language, due to nationalistic motives and the need for better communication between the provinces of the Union. In the

33 J. Nieuwstraten, 'Why the wealthy should rule. Marcus Zuerius Boxhorn's defence of Holland's aristocratic mercantile regime', in: J. Hartman, J. Nieuwstraten and M. Reinders (eds), *Public Offices, Personal Demands. Capability in Governance in the Seventeenth-Century Dutch Republic*, Cambridge 2009, p. 138.

Netherlands, the States General decided in 1582 that in most political documents, Dutch should replace French.<sup>34</sup> An important process of linguistic standardization – common to other European countries at the same moment – was undertaken; vocabulary and new grammars sought to lay down some clear morphological and syntactical rules.<sup>35</sup> Thus, the first Dutch grammar by H.L. Spiegel was published in 1584, with the title of *Tive-spraack vande Nederduitsche letterkunst* ('Dialogue over the Dutch Grammar').

Together with Cornelis Kiliaan, author of the first scientific Dutch dictionary, Stevin took part in this movement alongside those great language reformers and language makers.<sup>36</sup> Although he did not publish any linguistic theory or grammar, he expressed his views in *Uytspraeck van de Weerdigheyt der Duytsche Tael* ('Discourse on the worth of the Dutch Language'), which forms the introduction to his *Beghinselen der Weeghconst* (1586). His specific contribution to Dutch was twofold. Firstly, he introduced scientific and technical words, some of them still in use today, such as 'vlak', 'delen', 'wortel', 'meetkunde', 'stof', etc.<sup>37</sup> Not surprisingly, the man of science, like the engineer or the artisan, was precisely the one who could either create new words to render perfectly the designated object, or borrow his practical occupational vocabulary from craftsmen.<sup>38</sup> From this point of view, he can be considered as the 'founder of scientific and technical Dutch'.<sup>39</sup> His other contribution aimed at purifying Dutch of all its 'bastaardwoorden' (i.e., loan words from Roman languages) and replacing them with borrowings from German languages or neologisms built from German roots. For example, the *Vita politica* bears in the margins all kinds of words stemming from Latin, for which Stevin gives the equivalent in the vernacular: wijsheyt/philosophia, daet/praxis, burgherlick/politicè, etc.

Moreover, convinced of Dutch linguistic superiority, Stevin thought that its speakers enjoyed the exceptional privilege of having at their disposal a language that was more perfect than all others. In his view, no language was better than Dutch in offering the possibility of an 'adequatio rei', that is to say a perfect agreement between words and what they signify. This condition allowed for maximum intelligibility since it eliminated

34 See M.J. van der Wal and C. van Bree, *Geschiedenis van het Nederlands*, Utrecht 1994 [first print 1992], p. 191–199.

35 M.J. van der Wal, *De moedertaal centraal. Standaardisatie-aspecten in de Nederlanden omstreeks 1650*, Den Haag 1995, p. 1–21.

36 C. van Kiel (Kiliaan), *Thesaurus Theutonice lingue*, Antwerpen 1573; see: T. van Hal, 'De belangstelling voor taalwetenschap in de Lage Landen', in: S. van Rossem (ed.), *Portret van een Woordenaar. Cornelis Kiliaan en het woordenboek in de Nederlanden*, Antwerp 2007, p. 54–55.

37 E.J. Dijksterhuis, *Simon Stevin* (n. 1), p. 298–320; K. Porteman and M.B. Smits-Veldt, *Een nieuw vaderland voor de muzen. Geschiedenis van de Nederlandse literatuur 1560–1700*, Amsterdam 2008, p. 138–141.

38 Stevin was not the only one to collect technical vocabulary from craftsmen: Albrecht Dürer, for example, before writing his big treatise on Geometry published in Nuremberg in 1525, *Udenweysung der messung mit dem zirkel und richtscheyt* ('Instructions for measuring with ruler and compass'), questioned skilled workmen in order to get a specific terminology, see J. Peiffer, 'La création d'une langue mathématique allemande par Albrecht Dürer', in: R. Chartier and P. Corsi (eds), *Sciences et langues en Europe*, Paris 1996, p. 79–94.

39 E.J. Dijksterhuis, *Simon Stevin* (n. 1), p. 126.

all polysemic words.<sup>40</sup> For this reason – and also because the vernacular allowed access for those unlearned in Latin – he insisted on using Dutch for scholarly works, setting an example himself by publishing almost all his work in Dutch. The value Stevin placed on the vernacular explains how he helped it to gain a true linguistic status:

To arrive at so great a number of men as is needed for this [i.e., a large body of data obtained by practical experience], the aforesaid experiences and pursuit of the sciences would have to be practised by a nation in its own native language.<sup>41</sup>

Stevin's interest in linguistics is wholly consistent with his interest in politics and should not be overshadowed by his political ideas. For the author of the *Vita politica*, political knowledge and understanding were strictly subordinate to linguistic ability as was any other field of knowledge; they could only proceed from this perfect 'equation of words and things'. Like a leitmotiv, verging on an obsession, he repeatedly warned against using any improper terminology, metaphor or whatever did not make sense. 'Words without reason' ('woorden sonder reden') or 'improper names' ('oneyghen naem') have often been at the origin of civil wars because they induce wrong definitions and these generally stand at the root of conflicts.<sup>42</sup>

### *Neither Stoic constancy nor Calvinist resistance: a third way suggested by Stevin*

Stevin's reflections took place, as recalled above, amidst the repercussions of the religious conflicts that fractured Europe from the Reformation and amplified the vagaries of Dutch history. His *Vita politica* provides a clear account of the two main intellectual and moral issues that reflected the spirit of the time: Justus Lipsius's neo-Stoicism and Calvinist thought. In confronting the subject of civil life, Stevin evidently took a stand against the two proposed theories, the first being interior peace, the Lipsian theme developed in the *De Constantia* (1584), and the second being lawful resistance to a persecuting government, the Calvinist argument put forward by Theodore Beza in his *Du droit des Magistrats* (1574) and by an anonymous author in the *Vindiciae Contra Tyrannos*, published in 1581.<sup>43</sup> While political resistance was seen as legitimate behavior by Calvinist theoreticians, for Lipsius, on the contrary, public authorities should never be opposed but obeyed with patience and constancy.

<sup>40</sup> This conception explains Stevin's predilection for the monosyllables he judged 'unambiguous' and 'immediately clear'. From this standpoint, he made seniority the first quality category of his language: each mother language ('oertaal') is recognizable by an abundance of monosyllables, surviving from a time when each thing was designated by a one-syllable word, fit to exhaust the possibilities of its meaning. The details of his conception are mainly to be found in his text *De Wysentyt*, in: *The Principal Works of Simon Stevin* (n. 2), vol. III, p. 591–615.

<sup>41</sup> *De Wysentyt*, in: *The Principal Works of Simon Stevin* (n. 2), vol. III, p. 609.

<sup>42</sup> *Vita politica*, in: *The Principal works of Simon Stevin* (n. 2), vol. v, p. 503, 535.

<sup>43</sup> For the Calvinist resistance theory, see Q. Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, vol. 2: *The Age of Reformation*, Cambridge 1978, p. 302–349.

It is well known that the author of the *De Constantia* recommended escaping one's emotion rather than one's country:

And therefore no so much our country as our Passions are to be fled: and this mind of ours is to be so fram'd and establish'd, as that we may find repose in the midst of troubles, and peace in the midst of wars. They are rather to be fled, Langius, (reply'd I with an ardour youthfull enough) for certainly those evils that we hear of, do more lightly affect us, than those we behold.<sup>44</sup>

Stevin counters the first and second theories with a third choice: to conform to the established laws of one's country or to go and live elsewhere. His advice meant, in short, acceptance or exile, which implied a truly original alternative for the time. It was in fact the case of Stevin himself, who left Bruges and Antwerp for Leiden, displaying liberty to choose (for whatever reason) the place he wished to live and work for the rest of his life.<sup>45</sup> The last chapter of the *Vita politica* ('Of civic life in general') is devoted to Stevin's conception of how to turn political resistance into an 'honest force' ('eerlijk geweld'), in the sense of 'legitimate' force. The advice Stevin gives to those citizens who cannot endure the situation in which they find themselves and feel trapped by conflicts, whether about the legitimacy of the current government (chap. II-IV), incompatible laws (chap. V) or religious freedom (chap. VIII), is to choose another country instead of opposing the current government:

Therefore, when it says to you (which is also considered to have been said to every inhabitant by the laws): 'Look here, these are the general rules in accordance with which we all live; if you wish to live with us in our country, you must conform to them; if not, look for another place', one is obliged either to conform thereto or to leave the country.<sup>46</sup>

Even in the case of laws that can be considered unjust, no right of resistance is allowed:

And even if some of their rules were unreasonable [...] this does not entitle anyone to remain with them against their will in order to correct those bad rules as he thinks suitable.<sup>47</sup>

Any reform, however urgent, may only be requested through peacefully submitted advice and petitions. If this method proves ineffective, Stevin then suggests a very specific right of resistance against a tyrant or a bad government: the right of 'honest force'. By this formula, he means the process of going abroad and obtaining the consent of a foreign political authority to revolt against one's own government:

But if you cannot yet attain your end in this way, the last remedy which is open to anyone, in order to punish cruel tyrants and to appease furious communities as well as to change bad laws, is honest force.<sup>48</sup>

44 J. Lipsius, *A discourse of Constancy in two books chiefly containing consolations against publick evils*. Written in Latin by Justus Lipsius and translated to English by N. Wanley, London 1670, p. 6-7.

45 See my paper: 'Vérité et politique dans la *Vita politica*: la norme individuelle', in: *Simon Stevin. De la vie civile*, 1590 (n. 2), p. 213-214.

46 *Vita politica*, in: *The Principal works of Simon Stevin* (n. 2), vol. v, p. 575.

47 *Vita politica*, in: *The Principal works of Simon Stevin* (n. 2), vol. v, p. 575, 577.

48 *Vita politica*, in: *The Principal works of Simon Stevin* (n. 2), vol. v, p. 579.

As convincingly shown by Mario Turchetti, such a conception may be considered as one of the most innovative contributions to the modern theory of the right of resistance.<sup>49</sup>

Although intended for the Prince as well as for the subject, Stevin's work cannot be classified under the heading of the 'mirrors-for-princes'. The political 'mirror' tradition goes back to Seneca's *De Clementia* and was originally conceived as an ideal model presented to the Prince in order to encourage his moral improvement. In the course of the centuries, things evolved and the content of these texts underwent a marked change.<sup>50</sup> From the thirteenth century onwards, 'mirrors-for-princes' tended to be founded on a more realistic view of the world and to serve as a sort of guide book for political action. The perspective became more political and less moral. Although he departs from it, Stevin appears to be well acquainted with this literary tradition and refers to it when quoting an example drawn from Spanish history:

[A]lthough the parliament of Spain has consented to it, it is now greatly regretted by the imprudent deposed body, which in the beginning did not expect such an end, and thus they hold such a mirror to all rulers that no parliament of any country consents to such a change.<sup>51</sup>

Such a category is better suited to Lipsius's *Politica*, a work aimed at giving advice to a Prince and about which its author explicitly declared:

The work which I now present to you is a Politics. In which it is my aim, just as in De Constantia I equipped citizens for endurance and obedience, now to equip those who rule for governing.<sup>52</sup>

### *Theory and Practice: the commitment of the citizen*

Stevin is known for having advocated the importance of practice and striven to give it a status equal to that of theory. In his view, all knowledge, including political knowledge, was a 'combination of theory and practice'. The significance he gave to practice – on which he insisted in some of his writings – largely corresponded to one of the period's widespread preoccupations. The urgent need for the revolted provinces to find an immediate solution to their military and political conflict with Spain was a

49 'Pour clore son texte, Stevin revient sur la recommandation qu'il a donnée auparavant: s'exiler plutôt que tramer contre l'autorité constituée. [...] Cet impératif représente le sommet de la spéculation de l'auteur. Par son œuvre, malgré sa concision argumentative, Simon Stevin offrait au public des lecteurs à la fois un manuel de comportement civil et un texte de réflexions sur les questions politiques les plus difficiles de son époque. [...] La *Vita politica* constitue, peut-être, la contribution la plus originale à la théorie moderne du droit de résistance qui veille à la sauvegarde des valeurs civiles, religieuses, juridiques et politiques acquises par une civilisation,' 'Terminologie politique au xv<sup>e</sup> siècle', in: *Simon Stevin. De la vie civile*, 1590 (n. 2), p. 230.

50 Cf. M. Senellart, *Les arts de gouverner. Du régime médiéval au concept de gouvernement*, Paris 1995, p. 45–59; Q. Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, vol. 2 (n. 43), p. 118–130.

51 *Vita politica*, in: *The Principal works of Simon Stevin* (n. 2), vol. v, p. 511, 513.

52 Lipsius, *Politica* (n. 13), p. 231.

decisive impulse for the development of such practical knowledge as military fortification, navigation, astronomy and cartography.<sup>53</sup> This conception of knowledge could be summarized by the formula Stevin employed in the *Vita politica's* sixth chapter: 'Reason confirmed by practice' ('de reden bevesticht met de daet'). This means that all knowledge is constructed by a give-and-take relationship between theory and practice. Theory ('spiegheling') is as essential as practice ('daet'). One cannot construct true knowledge without combining abstract speculation with practice. This idea is central to his work and it also reflects Stevin's own concern: to be at the same time an author of theoretical works and a man capable of experimental investigation. Of the accounts he gave the clearest is to be found in 'The Age of the Sages'. Looking to pinpoint the conditions which would allow the restoration of this golden age of knowledge, Stevin specified what for him signified theory on one hand, and practice on the other:

Theory is a fictitious operation without natural material such as e.g. the theories of the theoretician Euclid, which operates by the assumption of quantities and numbers, but each of them without connection with natural material. Practice is an operation which essentially takes place with natural material, such as the measurement of land and ramparts, counting the number of rods or feet contained therein, and the like. [...] The property and the end of theory is that it furnishes a sure foundation for the method of practical operation.<sup>54</sup>

The relationship between theory and practice was not one of subordination. Instead their relation was more one of concordance or concomitance. Stevin objected to any practice that blindly followed rules which were, to him, prescribed without theory-supported evidence. He similarly denounced all speculation which did not have a practical purpose.

Concerning political judgment, this view leads to far-reaching consequences. First, it links very closely civic virtue to a mix of experience and knowledge, as may be deduced from the very language Stevin uses. The *Vita politica* contains a recurring semantic couple which relates the idea of 'experience' to that of 'knowledge': 'ervaren'/'gheleert' (as well in its positive form as in its opposite: 'onervaren'/'ongheleert'). One also finds this expression at the beginning of chapter four: 'De gheleerde ervaren Burgerlicke...' ('The educated and experienced citizens'). The same association is also found in 'The Age of the Sages', where Stevin precisely stated that he who has 'experience' in a certain area can also be judged very learned: 'en die daer in seer ervaren sijn worden daerom ook seer gheleert ghenoeemt.'<sup>55</sup> This was about the poetic talent of authors who successfully practiced a mix of profane and religious genres in their art, but one may consider that the logic here linking 'experience' ('ervaren sijn worden') to learning is also valid for any field of knowledge.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. K. van Berkel, *Citaten uit het boek der natuur. Opstellen over Nederlandse wetenschapsgeschiedenis*, Amsterdam 1998, p. 38-48; W. van Bunge, 'Before Philosophy. Theory and Practice in the emerging Dutch Republic, 1580-1620', in: *The European Legacy* 4.5 (1999), p. 2-7.

<sup>54</sup> 'Vant menghen der spiegheling en daet', *De Wysentyt*, in: *The Principal Works of Simon Stevin* (n. 2), vol. III, p. 619.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 592.

Secondly, the relationship between theory and practice is essential in providing a justification for Stevin writing about politics. Indeed, he considered that his right to deal with politics was the direct result of this combination of practice and theory:

As one may ask me if this matter belongs to my profession, I will answer to this point in the following terms [...]: the first question is about civic subjection, the other, about government. Concerning subjection, since I have been living under it from my childhood till now, without ever playing a part in the government, I wrote about a matter I did practise myself, or at least practised as long as I could. There is no better knowledge of subjection than the one subjection itself can teach, this is what declare the most experienced rulers themselves.<sup>56</sup>

In such a case, 'practice' consisted in living in society, while 'theory' came from the knowledge of history and reflection on recent social or political events. But what, then, about governing? Did Stevin have any competence to write on the rights and needs of a Prince? Once more, he imagined the objection that could be made to him: 'Since, according to your own sayings, you never governed, what can you say on the question of government?'<sup>57</sup> The combination of theory and practice here proves of crucial importance and Stevin refers to the error that one often makes in separating them:

I will answer [...] to this by saying that those who make these remarks are unaware of a distinction, which can be presented in the following way: Ptolemy was not a sailor endowed with a real sailing experience but nevertheless provided pilots with such useful rules that they always appear ready to rely on his teaching. [...] Euclid was not a Geometry practitioner [...] but he laid on such a learned way the basis of land surveying that few of those who actually practise Geometry are able to understand his propositions. Then, would you say: 'You, Ptolemy, you, Euclid, how may you write about the sailor's or the surveyor's profession if you never practiced these jobs yourself'? You will not say that, otherwise these practitioners would laugh at you. [...] Generally, the Philosophers of the past, as well as those of the present time, tend to make such a distinction between theory and practice that it becomes possible to be, at the same time, learned and not trained in the practice. Admittedly, to possess both would be of great benefit.<sup>58</sup>

But – Stevin conceded – life is too short and one can hardly be both an architect and a mason, carpenter or stone cutter. Vitruvius did not combine competence in both theory and practice. Following this argument, it appears that in seeking to surpass the usual distinction between the theorist and the man of practice, between the learned

<sup>56</sup> *Het burgherlick leven & anhangh* (n. 2), p. 130, 132.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 132.

<sup>58</sup> 'Ick antwoorde dat sulc een [...] kennis der onderscheyding gebreect, 't welc aldus bewesen wort: Ptolemeus en was geen stierman in dadelicke stiering ervaren, nochtans heeft hy regelen tottet stier-ampt dienende soo eygentlick beschreven, dat de stierlyuden self, met groot vernougen hun daer op betrouwen; [...] Euclides en was geen dadelick Landtmeter [...] nochtans heeft hy Meetconstige vertooghden, Eyschen, ende in't gemeen geseyt voorstellen, so aerdigh na gelaten, ende den gront der Lantmeterie soo gantsch constig geleyt, dat weynich dadelicke Landtmeters al sijn voorstellen begrijpen connen.', in: *Het burgherlick leven & anhangh* (n. 2), p. 132, 134; on theory and practice by Stevin, see K. van Berkel, 'Spiegheling en daet bij Beeckman en Stevin', in: *Tijdschrift voor de Geschiedenis der Geneeskunde, Natuurwetenschappen, Wiskunde en Tecshniek* 79.2 (1979), p. 97.



and the engineer, the author of the *Vita politica* put himself in a situation where the exercise of a theory constituted a ‘practice’ as much as any other. His right to confront the question of government and that of the Prince’s situation came from the ‘practice’ of history, the treasure of experience conserved in the books to which every individual has access and on which he can draw.

Thus, Stevin’s confidence that he can write about politics seems to be grounded in an opposition to both the ‘mirrors-for-princes’ literary genre and the humanists’ claim to entertain a privileged relationship with the supreme political power. Arguing from a very different point of view, he asserted the capability of any citizen to make a statement on politics.

### *Capability and citizenship*

Clearly, Stevin’s claim that he is making a valid statement about civic life is founded on a crucial issue: competence. Interestingly, this reflection was inspired by his personal situation and status. As an advisor to Prince Maurice of Nassau on fortification and war, he also decided to advise on politics. But since this subject matter did not belong to his field of competence, he answered by arguing about what competence really was. Far from being the result of birth or social status, it was derived from knowledge closely associated with practice. Indeed, on several occasions, throughout his different works, Stevin made allusion to a new feature which can be described as capability. One of the best examples is found in his *Materiae politicae*, in the chapter concerning the recruitment of civil officers (‘Van de amptlienkiezing’), where Stevin insisted on recruiting skilled people (‘in haer Ampt wel ervaren’):

Since a good running of military, judicial, financial and other parts of the common good consists in having these things done according to the order and rules each of them requires, which cannot be achieved except by people well-trained in their specific job, a condition only attained when the most skilful possible people are recruited, it is therefore wise to start with the question of the choice one has to do of individuals.<sup>59</sup>

Stevin’s entire account was centered on the idea of ‘burgherlickheyt,’ or ‘citizenship’, but as seen above, he came to this question from a very particular standpoint, that

<sup>59</sup> ‘Gemerckt een goet beleyt des Crijchshandels, des Gherechts, der Rekeningen, en ander gedeelten der Gheemeensaeck, bestaet in yder dinck oirdentlick en wel uytgherecht te worden, ’t welc niet geschien en can, dan deur menschen elck in haer Ampt wel ervaren, daermen niet toe en geraeckt, dan deur verkiesing der bequaemste diemen crijghen can, Soo ist billich mette verkiesing te beginnen, als eerste en voornaemste gront, sonder welcke niet goets te verwachten en is...’, in: *Materiae Politicae. Burgherlicke Stoffen*, [...] *uyt sijn nagelate Hantschriften by een gestelt door sijn soon Hendrick Stevin*, Leiden 1649, p. 91. On this edition made by the son of Simon Stevin, Hendrick Stevin, and first published in 1649, see Dijksterhuis, *Simon Stevin* (n. 1), p. 333–336. On capability, see G. Vermeesch, ‘Capability, patrimonialism and bureaucracy in the urban administrations of the Low Countries (c.1300–1780)’, in: J. Hartman a.o., *Public Offices, Personal Demands* (n. 33), p. 60–66.

of conflicts involving a citizen or a sovereign. The *Vita politica* attempted to define the appropriate rules of civic virtue and to make it easily accessible for everyone. The first rule is to gather information and to acquire a fair understanding of the circumstances. The words Stevin uses here clearly show that this is the intellectual moment of the decision: in case of conflicting situations, one should first 'learn' ('kennis behouft'), 'consider' ('te ansien'), 'acquire a fair knowledge of the affair' ('goet bescheyt wetende').<sup>60</sup> Then, and only then, will the good citizen be able to 'weigh' ('de redenen van beyden sijden overweghen') and reach the second stage, that of the personal choice.<sup>61</sup> The advice Stevin gives here may be surprising. Refusing the individual the right to revolt or resist political authority on the basis of external standards, Stevin refers the individual to his 'own feeling' ('sijn eygen ghemoet') and his personal opinion. As seen above, in case of disagreement with the government or the laws of his country, the individual should leave the country and 'choose from the various communities on the earth one in which he is able and willing to conform to its present condition.'<sup>62</sup> In other words, the criterion of subjectivity was as valuable for founding a political decision as any objective understanding of the political, institutional or religious issues in question.<sup>63</sup> Admittedly, in the *Vita politica*, one notes the predominance of language that refers to subjectivity. Rather than discrediting it as would a logic founded on the opposition passion/reason, this language instead valued subjectivity for the essential role that it played in the elaboration of a just civic method. Unexpectedly, Stevin's discourse frequently invoked such notions as 'personal feelings', 'individual feelings' ('yemants ghevoelen', 'eyghen ghemoet'), 'innermost feeling' ('innerlijk ghemoet'), and inclination ('gheneghenthey'). The 'good citizen' is therefore he who above all agrees with the constitution of his country. But it is necessary to see that in the realization of this accord, 'inclination', 'personal opinion', played as decisive a role as would a rational conclusion about the legitimacy of the current authority.

We have now come to the true originality of the *Vita politica*. Simon Stevin was a man of the late sixteenth century. His *Vita politica* was a product of the time dominated by *mala publica*, when 'public calamities' inspired the political thought of the period. Stevin made a very clear allusion to this main feature of the period in his dedication to one of the burgomasters of Delft, and there he spoke of the 'great changes' that had occurred in governments and the confusion these changes could create in public opinion. The result is twofold: on one hand, his *de facto* theory of political legitimacy sounds like a kind of skepticism resulting from worn down certainties. On the other, the practical content he gave to the 'burgherlickheit' drew heavily on the emerging idea of individual freedom introduced by the Protestant Reformation. The place given

<sup>60</sup> *Het burgherlick leven & anhangh* (n. 2), p. 49, 55.

<sup>61</sup> *Het burgherlick leven & anhangh* (n. 2), p. 59.

<sup>62</sup> *Vita politica*, in: *The Principal Works* (n. 2), vol. v, p. 573.

<sup>63</sup> See my paper 'L'émergence de l'idée d'individu dans la *Vita politica* de Simon Stevin', in: *Nouvelles de la République des Lettres* 2 (1990), p. 45-60.

here to subjectivity may indeed be ascribed to the influence of religious emancipation encouraged by the Reformation.

This is one of the things that arouse great interest in this work. The other is the *Vita politica's* relationship to Lipsius's *Politica*. Admittedly, the concomitance of place and time of publication with Lipsius's *Politica* (which appeared in 1589, also in Leiden and with the same publisher, as seen above) suggests a comparison of these two texts.<sup>64</sup> Both were intended to give practical guidelines, Lipsius's treatise being no less than Stevin's a 'true political guider.'<sup>65</sup> But apart from this common feature, Stevin's text may be seen as the exact opposite of Justus Lipsius's. First, the clear-cut formal differences between these two discourses are glaring: while the *Politica* consists in a thick volume, abundantly quoting antiquity, the *Vita politica* is a short discourse mainly founded on history and some recent political events. From Stevin's point of view, such a format was coherent with the world from which the *Vita politica* stems, a world which was distinct from the one of Justus Lipsius: i.e., not the 'Republic of Letters', the world of the learned who cultivated the *bonae literae* and who shared the same elitist conception of knowledge but the world of ordinary men and citizens of the new emerging Dutch state.

Still more conclusive, in our view, is the standpoint of Stevin, who seems to challenge the 'mirrors-for-princes' literary genre, both by addressing predominantly the citizen and by arguing for a true citizenship resting on experience: 'Above all, I have written about matters in which I have been *practising myself* for long.'<sup>66</sup> Rather than condemning individuals to resigned obedience, he insisted on active citizenship, a committed 'burgherlickheyt', synonymous with deliberate participation in civic life. Stevin thereby suggested that questions relating to politics actually pertained to the public sphere. Such a conception pervaded the entire *Vita politica* and may be the reason behind the hidden meaning of the somewhat terse title given to this political discourse.

<sup>64</sup> All the more since Lipsius made a slightly disdainful allusion to Stevin in a letter, written in 1584, to the Hungarian Mathematician Andras Dudith where he speaks of him as 'a pure mathematician with no particular talent', cf. R. De Smet, 'Simon Stevin et le paradoxe de l'humanisme fragmenté', in: *Simon Stevin 1548-1620. L'émergence de la nouvelle science* (n. 1), p. 27-29.

<sup>65</sup> Senellart, *Les arts de gouverner* (n. 50), p. 230-232.

<sup>66</sup> 'so heb ick voor al geschreven van stof daer in ick my lang genoug [...] *geoeffent hadde*' (my underlying), in: *Het burgherlick leven & anhangh* (n. 2), p. 130, 132.