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978-1-107-68446-1 - The De Re Militari of Vegetius: The Reception, Transmission and Legacy of a Roman Text in the Middle Ages

Christopher Allmand

Frontmatter

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The *De Re Militari* of Vegetius

Vegetius' late Roman text became a well-known and highly respected 'classic' in the Middle Ages, transformed by its readers into the authority on the waging of war. Christopher Allmand analyses the medieval after-life of the *De re militari*, tracing the growing interest in the text from the Carolingian world to the late Middle Ages, suggesting how the written word may have influenced the development of military practice in that period. While emphasising that success depended on a commander's ability to outwit the enemy with a carefully selected, well-trained and disciplined army, the *De re militari* inspired other unexpected developments, such as that of the 'national' army, and helped create a context in which the role of the soldier assumed greater social and political importance. Allmand explores the significance of the text and the changes it brought for those who accepted the implications of its central messages.

CHRISTOPHER ALLMAND is Emeritus Professor of Medieval History at the University of Liverpool. He has published widely on the history of war and medieval society, including *The Hundred Years War: England and France at war c.1300–c.1450* (Cambridge, 1988) and *The New Cambridge Medieval History, Volume VII: c.1415–c.1500* (as editor, Cambridge, 1998).

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Frontispiece: A copy of Vegetius' work is presented to a king (*left*), while the importance of training is underlined (*right*). (BL Royal 20 B xi, fo. 3)

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Contents

<i>List of figures</i>	page vii
<i>Preface</i>	ix
<i>List of abbreviations</i>	xii
Introduction	1
Part I The medieval reception	
1 General remarks on the manuscripts	13
2 Analysis of the manuscripts	17
Book I	17
Book II	26
Book III	33
Book IV	41
3 A particular response to the <i>De re militari</i> . . . and its influence	47
4 Bedfellows	56
5 Owners and their texts	63
Part II The transmission	
6 Particular uses of the <i>De re militari</i>	83
John of Salisbury, <i>Policraticus</i>	84
Guillaume le Breton	92
The <i>Siete Partidas</i> of Alfonso X	96
Giles of Rome, <i>De regimine principum</i>	105
The literature of crusade	112
Christine de Pisan	121
Jean Juvénal des Ursins	128
The Burgundian military ordinances, c.1470	132
Denis the Carthusian	137
Machiavelli	139

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-68446-1 - The De Re Militari of Vegetius: The Reception, Transmission and Legacy of a Roman Text in the Middle Ages

Christopher Allmand

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

vi	Contents	
7	Translations	148
	France	152
	Italy	168
	Iberia	175
	England	185
	Germany	193
8	Texts, drawings and illuminations	197
9	Excerpts	213
	Latin	213
	French	226
	German	229
	Italian	233
	Castilian	234
	Scottish	235
10	Vegetius in print	239
Part III The legacy: the <i>De re militari</i> in medieval military thought and practice		
11	The development of Vegetian influence	251
	Introduction	251
	War and reason	254
	The soldier	261
	Leadership	269
	Chivalry, nobility and the army	277
	The statist army	287
	Provisioning and logistics	304
	Armour	310
	Strategy and battle	314
	War at sea	321
	Conclusion	329
	<i>Appendix I: Table of select terms used in translations of the De re militari</i>	349
	<i>Appendix II: List of manuscripts of the De re militari</i>	354
	<i>Bibliography</i>	367
	<i>Index</i>	394

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-68446-1 - The De Re Militari of Vegetius: The Reception, Transmission and Legacy of a Roman Text in the Middle Ages

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Figures

Frontispiece: A copy of Vegetius' work is presented to a king (<i>left</i>), while the importance of training is underlined (<i>right</i>). (BL Royal 20 B xi, fo. 3)	page ii
1 In two scenes the author is shown presenting aspects of his teaching: cavalry advancing in good order; training in the use of swords; soldiers mounting horses. (BnF fr. 1604, fo. 2)	161
2 In two scenes, Vegetius is shown giving instruction: how armies may be drawn up, and how a camp should be built. (BnF fr. 1604, fo. 27v)	162
3 Three soldiers, a slinger, a spearman and a mounted knight, practise against a target. (BnF fr. 1229, fo. 5)	163
4 A king prepares to lead an army. (BnF lat. 7242, fo. 41)	200
5 A French king leads his army to war. (BnF lat. 7470, fo. 15)	201
6 An officer on horseback holds what is probably a baton, symbol of his promotion to command. (BnF Smith-Lesouëf 13, fo. 23v)	202
7 Vegetius' recommendation that soldiers should be able to swim is emphasised in this vignette. (BnF Smith-Lesouëf 13, fo. 6)	203
8 A slinger ready for action. (BnF Smith-Lesouëf 13, fo. 8)	204
9 A spy peeps surreptitiously into a tent. (BnF Smith-Lesouëf 13, fo. 32)	205
10 A commander ponders the possibilities before him. (BnF Smith-Lesouëf 13, fo. 36v)	206
11 Supplies are brought to a walled town about to be besieged, while its defences are strengthened. (BnF Smith-Lesouëf 13, fo. 52v)	206
12 A woman cuts her hair to provide sinews for a broken-down torsion engine. (BnF Smith-Lesouëf 13, fo. 55v)	207
13 A man cuts wood for the building of ships. (BnF Smith-Lesouëf 13, fo. 63v)	323
14 Soldiers sail away to fight at sea. (BnF lat. 7470, fo. 101)	324
	vii

Cambridge University Press

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Cambridge University Press

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Preface

It is now some forty years since I first became aware of the name Vegetius, and of how often I was meeting it in a variety of medieval texts, in particular in those concerned with war. It is getting on for thirty-five years that I first spoke about him and other ‘veteres scriptores de re militari’ at a meeting at the University of Nottingham. For years, thereafter, I copied down information on odd bits of paper which came to hand. Elsewhere, unbeknown to me, historians of late Antiquity and the Middle Ages were working more scientifically on aspects of his work, the classicists being interested in his sources and contemporary context and relevance, the medievalists rather more in showing the influence of his text upon the practice of war during the long Middle Ages. The past generation has seen a marked growth of interest in Vegetius, witnessed to by new editions and, not least, by translations of his work. Furthermore, the medieval translations of his text have provided not only historians, but philologists and those interested in the development of European vernacular languages, with evidence useful to more than a single discipline. In 1998, Philippe Richardot published the first historical study of Vegetius’ text, which helped me in a number of ways as I approached the subject from sometimes rather different directions.

From the start, it seemed important to appreciate how Vegetius’ medieval readers had responded to the texts which they read. The limitations of microfilms, however carefully made, soon became obvious to one wanting to read and study such responses, mostly written in the margins of manuscripts. In the end, I handled more than 200 manuscripts of the Latin text and almost 100 of those of vernacular translations. It is pleasant to record that the staff in libraries where it is policy to offer the researcher a film of a manuscript being studied understood the problem, and were willing to modify their practices to help me.

I have been constantly accompanied on my travels by the invaluable *Handlist of extant manuscripts of the De re militari*, published in 1979, a copy of which its author, Charles R. Shrader, kindly gave me many years ago, and which became a well-used and annotated companion. More

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-68446-1 - The De Re Militari of Vegetius: The Reception, Transmission and Legacy of a Roman Text in the Middle Ages

Christopher Allmand

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

x Preface

recently, Dr Shrader's list has to some extent been overtaken by a more complete one drawn up by Michael Reeve, lately Professor of Latin at Cambridge, who has provided the world of scholarship with the second new edition of Vegetius' text to appear in less than ten years. In preparing his edition Professor Reeve consulted almost every known manuscript. I have benefited greatly from his practical experience, and I am deeply grateful to him for help and advice generously offered over a period of years, as I am, too, for his willingness to read and comment on an early version of this study.

I am grateful, too, to colleagues who have invited me to speak on aspects of Vegetius' work at meetings in Bristol, Durham, Edinburgh, Leeds, Liverpool, London, Nottingham, Oxford, Paris, Perth (Western Australia) and York. Long ago Professor R. B. Tate, and more recently Professor Sir Peter Russell, offered me bibliographical help on Iberian matters related to the study of Vegetius; I have three times had the pleasure of addressing groups of Hispanic scholars, and have greatly benefited from hearing their views. Bernard Guenée invited me to address his *séminaire* in Paris many years ago. My thanks also go to Peter Lewis not only for reading some of the pages which appear below, but for giving me the opportunity of speaking more than once to his 'Late Medieval France' seminar, held at All Souls College, Oxford, on Vegetian and related subjects.

Over the years, I have benefited from practical help in tracing manuscripts given me by a number of antiquarian booksellers. Librarians, too numerous to mention by name, in more than a dozen countries have either replied to my enquiries or welcomed me and given me help when I have visited their libraries, which have generally proved to be very agreeable places in which to work. In the spirit of generous co-operation common among scholars Lola Badia, Diane Bornstein, Cecil Clough, Philippe Contamine, Jean Devaux, Frank Fürbeth, John Gillingham, Walter Goffart, Michael C. E. Jones, Rainer Leng, the late Michael Mallett, João Monteiro and Richard and Mary Rouse gave me copies of their published works; Antoni Alomar Canyelles sent me copies of his unpublished transcriptions of the two Catalan translations; and José Manuel Fradejas helped me with problems arising from the Castilian translation, an edition of which he is preparing for publication. Barry Taylor, of the British Library, kindly took an active interest in my work, and was a source of up-to-the-minute bibliographical information from Spain, while my one-time colleague Roger Wright helped me with matters of translation. Sydney Anglo, Christopher Tyerman and Daniel Wakelin each cast a critical eye over a section of my work for me. I am particularly indebted to two good friends, Maurice Keen and Tony Goodman, who

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

both read an early version of this book. I hope to have taken account of the suggestions for improvement which they made.

By making positive suggestions for improvement, pointing out the traps which I had set myself, encouraging me to modify both my opinions and my use of language, the two readers for Cambridge University Press have contributed to making this a better book. I thank them both for their professional approach to the task given them, as I do those members of the Press' staff, Liz Friend-Smith, Chloe Howell, Rosina Di Marzo, Beata Mako and not least Frances Brown, a wonderful copy-editor, who have done so much to transform a text into a book. I alone admit responsibility for what is to be read in the pages which follow.

While pursuing evidence in nearly 100 libraries I received financial assistance from the University of La Sapienza, Rome, as part of an exchange scheme arranged with the University of Liverpool, for two visits to the Vatican Library. Above all, I am hugely indebted to the Leverhulme Trust for making a generous and greatly appreciated financial contribution towards the costs of this undertaking. I feel that the Trustees must have long ago written off the investment which they made in giving me their support. Belatedly, but no less very sincerely, I thank them for upholding the confidence expressed (I can only suppose!) in my referees' reports regarding my ability to deliver a book. Without that assistance, I could never have contemplated starting upon this journey.

My wife, Bernadette, has helped in innumerable ways to bring this project to a conclusion. The book is dedicated to her, with gratitude.

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Abbreviations

<i>AHR</i>	<i>American Historical Review</i>
AN	Archives Nationales, Paris
<i>Annales ESC</i>	<i>Annales: Economies, Sociétés, Civilisations</i>
Add. Ms.	Additional Manuscript (British Library)
<i>BEC</i>	<i>Bibliothèque de l'École des Chartes</i>
<i>BIHR</i>	<i>Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research</i>
BL	British Library, London
BN	Biblioteca Nacional, Madrid
BnF	Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris
<i>CCCM</i>	<i>Corpus Christianorum, Continuatio medievalis</i>
<i>DRM</i>	<i>De re militari</i>
<i>DRP</i>	<i>De regimine principum</i>
EETS	Early English Text Society
<i>EHR</i>	<i>English Historical Review</i>
<i>JMMH</i>	<i>Journal of Medieval Military History</i>
<i>JMedH</i>	<i>Journal of Medieval History</i>
<i>JWCI</i>	<i>Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes</i>
MGH	Monumenta Germaniae Historica
<i>RH</i>	<i>Revue Historique</i>
RHistS	Royal Historical Society
RS	Rolls Series
SATF	Société des Anciens Textes Français
SHF	Société de l'Histoire de France
<i>SP</i>	<i>Siete Partidas</i>