

Introduction

I expect almost everyone to recognize the phrase “If you want peace, prepare for war”, which is taken from the Latin quotation “si vis pacem, para bellum.” from the end of the prologue in the third book of Vegetius’ *Epitoma Rei Militaris* (Epitome of Military Science). This is itself a paraphrase of “qui desiderat pacem praeparet bellum” (Reeve 2004: 64), or “he who desires peace, let him prepare for war.” (Milner 1993: 63). An alternate title for the manual is *Epitoma Institutorum Rei Militaris* (Reeve 2004: vi) and in the Middle Ages it was often known as *De Re Militari* (On Military Matters).

Scope

This paper will attempt to examine the theory of military science in medieval manuscripts, and the extent to which this theory influenced the actual practice of warfare in the Middle Ages. The main focus will be on Vegetius’ *Epitoma Rei Militaris*, and its medieval adaptations in Western Europe, especially from the 12th century C.E. up through to the introduction of the printing press in the 1450s (and also the rise of gunpowder making much of the classical military advice obsolete).¹ A secondary focus is on Byzantine military writing. The Byzantines had a strong tradition of military writing, preserving classical sources and updating their manuals to reflect current practice.²

Structure

Following definitions the first half of the paper will discuss surviving military texts from classical sources and the traditions of antiquity. Building up to discuss the text I will look at Vegetius the person, why the *Epitoma Rei Militaris* was written, and the date of authorship. A brief overview of the contents of *Epitoma Rei Militaris* will lead into a discussion of the Vegetian science of war in the Middle Ages.

The second half of the paper will focus on the transmission, translation and adaptation of *Epitoma Rei Militaris*. This will involve an excursion into education and literacy in the Middle Ages and a look at original military manuals created in the Middle Ages. Before presenting my conclusions, I have a simple list of all the evidence I have found of military manuals being read or used in the Middle Ages.

Definitions

For this paper, what I mean by military science is the discipline dealing with the principles of warfare. To engage in military science is to adopt a professional (or academic) approach to the study of war, and the requirements for successful preparing for and fighting a war. Military science is applied reason, not pure reason. It is the minimization of fortune in

¹ The first printing of *Epitoma Rei Militaris* is thought to have been done by Nicolaus Ketelaer and Gerardus de leempt in Utrecht in 1473/1474. Shrader n12 p.172.

² See George T. Dennis (trans), *Maurice’s Strategikon: Handbook of Byzantine Military Strategy*, University of Pennsylvania press: Philadelphia, 1984. The maxims in VIII.2 of this *Strategikon* follow those in III.26 of *Epitome Rei Militaris* (Reeve 2004: xi). Byzantine authors also strove to keep their works up to date (Goffart 1989: 45).

battle, through planning, preparation, and organization. This not a definition that would have been present in the Middle Ages and it is very much a modern viewpoint looking backwards.

By contrast, an art of war is a system of principles and rules serving to facilitate the performance of military actions towards a desired end. Rather than being scientific, it is more likely to reflect the strengths and weaknesses of society and individuals. A military art of war tends to become codified into doctrine.

A military doctrine is a codified approach to warfighting. In a modern sense, doctrine provides a shared way of thinking about military problems, but does not direct how military problems will be solved. It is doubtful that the surviving evidence can be interpreted for medieval states possessing a formal doctrine, although the tactics practiced in different battles can indicate continuity in tactics.

Classical Survivors – the traditions of antiquity

One estimate of the number of ancient Greek or Roman writers who composed military manuals (as opposed to general histories) is 30.³ This is a partial list of the military manuals that survived from classical antiquity, and were available in Western Europe in the Middle Ages:

- Publius Flavius Vegetius Renatus, *Epitoma Rei Militaris* (Epitomy of Military Science)
- Frontinus, *Stratagemata* (Stratagems)
- Valerius Maximus, *Facta et dicta memorabilia* (Deeds and Memorable Words) (First century CE)
- Aelian Tacticus, *Taktike Theoria*, (c.106 CE) and
- Aineias the Tactician, *Poliorkētkē biblos* (siegecraft book)⁴ (fourth century BCE)
- Anonymous, *De Rebus Bellicis* (c.366-75 CE).

The most influential of these in the Middle Ages was Vegetius' *Epitoma Rei Militaris*, although it is not possible to explain exactly why it became so popular, or why the other military manuals comparable to it were lost in the 'Dark Ages'. One reason may have been the loss of Greek language in western Europe, while Latin survived through the Church. The Vatican held a copy of *Epitoma Rei Militaris* in the seventh century, so this may have been one source of exposure for clergy who might then have copied the manuscript and spread it to a wider audience in Western Europe.⁵

The balance of popularity between classical texts shifted in the Renaissance – probably as more works were diffused throughout Europe with the introduction of printing.⁶ In addition

³ Maurice J. D. Cockle in *Bibliography of English Military Books Up to 1642*, ed H. D. Cockle, London: Holland Press 1957, cited in (Shrader 1981: 167 n2).

⁴ This survived via the collection of the tenth century Emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus and a copy eventually ended up in the fifteenth century Medici library (Whitehead 1990: 16).

⁵ Pure speculation on my part here.

⁶ Other classical authors that rose in prominence during the Renaissance included Onasander's *Strategikos* on the art of generalship dedicated to Quintus Veranius in the mid-first century CE (Campbell 1987: 14) and

to the strictly military works, other historical and narrative literature could have an education aspect in the military sphere and was available in the Middle Ages.⁷

Frontinus

Frontinus did write a theoretical work on the art of war, but this has been lost (although parts may have been incorporated into Vegetius' *Epitoma Rei Militaris*). Unlike Vegetius, he had military experience while governor of Britain. The *Stratagemata* was intended as a supplementary work which narrated "various instances of successful sieges, which illustrate the rules of military science, and which may serve to foster in other generals the power of conceiving and executing like deeds" (Bennett, xix). Frontinus draws a distinction between strategy and stratagems by presenting stratagems as being a special subset of strategy, resting on skill and cleverness, and includes within it the speeches and personal deeds of the generals.

Basically, it's a collection of "No shit, there I was ..." stories. When you have a long period of time in which the tactics and technology of warfare remains relatively static, then the same stratagems can be reused with some degree of success.

I v 5-7 p.39 "When the consul Gaius Duellius was caught by a chain stretched across the entrance to the harbour of Syracuse, which he had rashly entered, he assembled all his soldiers in the sterns of the boats, and when the boats were thus tilted up, he propelled them forward with the full force of the oarsmen. Thus lifted up over the chain, the prows moved forward. When this part of the boat had been carried over, the soldiers, returning to the prows, depressed these, and the weight thus transferred to them permitted the boats to pass over the chain."

I XII 4-9 p.83 "Gaius Sulpicius Gallus not only announced an approaching eclipse of the moon, in order to prevent the soldiers from taking it as a prodigy, but also gave the reasons and causes of the eclipse."

Tacitus

Aelianus Tacticus was a Greek military writer of the 2nd century, resident at Rome. Aelian's military treatise in fifty-three chapters on the tactics of the Greeks, titled "On Tactical Arrays of the Greeks" may have been written 106 CE. It is a handbook of Greek drill and tactics as practiced by the Hellenistic successors of Alexander the Great. The author claims to have consulted all the best authorities, the most important of which was a lost treatise on the subject by Polybius. Perhaps the chief value of Aelian's work lies in his critical account of preceding works on the art of war, and in the fullness of his technical details in matters of drill.⁸ Known in Byzantium, the Muslim world (Arabic translation in 1350), and perhaps southern Italy.⁹ First translated into Latin by Theodoras of

there was interest in Polybius' descriptions of Greek tactics and in Aelian Tacticus (Vale 1981: 166).

⁷ During the siege of Naples, Ferdinand of Aragon, while reading the *Gothic Wars* of Procopius, discovered the ruse that enabled him to enter the town via an aqueduct (Contamine 1985:214).

⁸ [http://www.1911encyclopedia.org/Aelian_\(Aelianus_Tacticus\)](http://www.1911encyclopedia.org/Aelian_(Aelianus_Tacticus)).

⁹ David Nicolle, p.252.

Thessalonica, published in 1487, it proved to be of more use to post-feudal armies than to medieval writers and practitioners.

Byzantine tradition

Byzantine military manuals were obviously important within Byzantium, but I have found little evidence for transmission of this knowledge from Byzantium directly to the west. Maurice's *Strategikon* was not published in western Europe until 1664 – people were more interested in the authors of the ancient world than those of the Byzantine Empire.

The best single treatment I have read of the Byzantine manuals is in Edward N Luttwak's *The Grand Strategy of the Byzantine Empire*.¹⁰ This consideration is shaped by Luttwak's argument that Byzantine art of war was focused on avoiding decisive battle:

- Byzantium could not afford the casualties of attrition and decisive battles – the Empire was always fighting on multiple fronts
- even if a victory was obtained, there was always another tribe of barbarians on the border to replace the tribe you just defeated
- today's enemy might be tomorrow's ally – so worth keeping alive

So Byzantine strategic operations were a mix of maneuvers and sieges, rather than the decisive battles of the old Roman Empire. The risks of the decisive battle were well demonstrated at the Battle of Mazikert.

Some parts of the Byzantine manuals were conservative. Such as the persistence of Latin commands in a Greek speaking army. Things that worked were kept, and apart from a fascination with the long obsolete Macedonian Phalanx, Byzantine writers tended to be pragmatic and their suggestions were reflective of the shift from infantry based to cavalry based armies in late antiquity.

The Byzantine Empire had a well trained army that could coordinate heavy and light infantry operations, along with cavalry operations on the field. This training took a long time to complete, which made it a very expensive army, both to recruit and to maintain. An example of the relative prestige of the fighting man was the advice that each was to have a servant, or at worst one servant shared between three-four men. It would have been difficult to replicate this style of Army in western Europe until the late middle ages/early renaissance.

The Byzantine's paid attention to their enemies, recording cultural, tactical and other details that could be used by Byzantine Generals to understand and defeat their enemies. This was something the Romans rarely did, and was an innovation that helped the Empire endure.

¹⁰ Edward N Luttwak, *The Grand Strategy of the Roman Empire*, Harvard University Press, 2011.

Vegetius the person

Everything known about Publius Flavius Vegetius Renatus is deduced from his writings, which apart from the *Epitome Rei Militaris* is usually assumed to include a veterinary work on the ailments of horse and cattle (the *Digesta Artis Mulomedicina*). The honorific name ‘Flavius’ indicates that he may have been an imperial servant. The *Mulomedicina* tells us that Vegetius was a prominent horse breeder who travelled the Empire extensively (Milner 1993: xxxiii). Milner suggests this as a source of his knowledge about the barbarians (Milner 1993: xxxiv).

He was a Count (first class), indicating a rank high in the imperial bureaucracy (Milner 1993: xxxv). In the medieval tradition, Vegetius is referred to as a *comes sacrarum largitionum* (imperial finance minister), which would have made him familiar with recruitment, provisioning and training (Lester 1988: 9). This might be reflected in the emphasis on those activities in Book I. However, he had no practical military experience or high military office.

Vegetius was a Christian, for example in II.5 he urges soldiers to swear their oath of allegiance by the Holy Trinity. The bulk of the work is couched in secular terms, lacking the belief in divine intervention that was to influence medieval attitudes towards war and battle. Vegetius was fond of medical metaphors and preferred Latin to Greek sources.

Why was the *Epitoma Rei Militaris* written?

The *Epitoma Rei Militaris* is an example of the genre of epitomes of technical treatises. In preparing the work Vegetius drew on the works of Cato the Censor, Cornelius Celsus, Frontinus, Paternus, and the constitutions of Augustus, Trajan, and Hadrian, among others (Vegetius: I.8 and II.3). This makes it a bit of a “Reader’s Digest” edition. Scholars debate whether the *Epitome* is a ‘scissors-and-paste’ mosaic of its sources, or if Vegetius included material of his own composition (Milner 1993: xvi-xvii). Repetitions in the text suggest a work executed according to a general plan based on a small number of secondary sources (Milner 1993: xxv-xxviii).

Vegetius addressed his work to a late-Roman Emperor, probably Theodosius I (reigned 379-395 CE). Book I was written first, followed by books II-III (Vegetius: II. preface). The main goal of the *Epitome Rei Militaris* was to reduce the dependence on barbarian mercenaries in the Roman field armies through the recruitment and training of Roman citizens (Milner 1993: xxviii-xxix).¹¹ Vegetius was interested in providing remedies for deficiencies in the Roman Army, so he did not discuss what they were doing well such as the use of cavalry and river patrols. This means the *Epitome Rei Militaris* is not a history, it makes selective use of facts, and there is repetition in places to deliberate to emphasise important points. Milner summed it up by writing that:

[Vegetius] was not an historian, but something more akin to a politician, seeking to reform contemporary institutions and strategic thinking ... As a strategist he presents the ‘ancient legion’

¹¹ Niccolo Machiavelli, in his *Art of War* (1519-20) was also interested in the value of citizen soldiers over the condottieri mercenaries.

throughout as a model for the present. Ancient institutions and titles are set side-by-side with modern. Lessons for contemporary practice are sought and suggested. the *Epitome* is, then, not a true Art of War, but a political and strategic tract (Milner 1993: xxviii).

Vegetius has been criticised for writing both poor history and bad policy. Gordon felt there two possible types of solutions for the Roman Empire's strategic problems, innovation or a return to a proven system. Gordon argued that Vegetius proposed neither solution. For example, "Never was such advice more needed and seldom can such useless advice have been proffered in a crisis" (Gordon 1974: 44). Other scholars consider the idea of returning to heavy infantry to be an innovation (Goffart 1989: 75).

A work from a similar time, *De Rebus Bellicus*, offered a different approach. It argued for a reduction in state largesse, an end to the debasing of coins, controls on corrupt officials. The cost of the army was to be contained by a reduction in the number of high paid officers, and settling veterans as tax-payers. The book also elaborates various 'high-tech' weapons, such as a warship driven by oxen turning flanged paddlewheels (Gordon 1974: 54-55). Whether these innovations were possible is highly questionable, and *De Rebus Bellicus* was not a popular manuscript the Middle Ages, being lost in the sixteenth century (Goffart 1989: 45).

Writers of military manuals asserted that they were giving practical advice – but how far was this assertion a literary *topos*, a conventional justification for an educational work? That a writer claims to be useful does not mean that they were actually found to be useful by those who read their books (Campbell 1987: 19). One answer to this may lie in the amateur nature of military high command in the Roman Empire. The lack of training or military experience in many appointees to high military office meant that an introductory manual would have been useful (Campbell 1987:21-23).

The *Epitome Rei Militaris* is exclusively defensive "This is no manual for world conquest." (Goffart 1989: 73). It is a book for generals in whose power lay the fortunes of landowners, city defence, safety of soldiers, and state glory (in that order).

The Date of Authorship

Vegetius addressed his work to an unnamed late-Roman Emperor, with some scholars arguing it was Theodosius I (reigned 379-395 CE), and others arguing for a later fifth century date (Gordon 1974: 37). The latest possible date for authorship is 450 CE when it was edited by Flavius Eutropius and the chapter summaries were added. A reference in I.20 to the emperor Gratian dates it no earlier than 383 CE (Lester 1988: 9).

I lean towards the reign of Theodosius I, because if the *Epitome Rei Militaris* is viewed as a policy document, then its recommendations have to make sense in the context of the time they were published. In this instance, I find the idea of reforming the Roman military institutions more plausible under Theodosius I, than under the later Emperors. During the reign of Theodosius I, the regular infantry units were in decline, in the fifth century these units had been replaced by Barbarian mercenaries (Milner 1993: xlii-xliii). In the fifth century Empire, the military situation was more desperate and less conducive to reform. I

also note that there were massacres of barbarian troops early on the fifth century (Milner 1993:xxx), but there is no way that these acts can be adduced to Vegetius.

The Contents of *Epitoma Rei Militaris*

Surviving editions are divided into four books (sometimes five). The first discusses the selection and training of recruits. The second describes the organisation of the ancient infantry army. The third describes strategic skills necessary to land warfare. The fourth book lists the machines used to attack and defend cities, and the precepts of naval warfare. The last sixteen sections on naval warfare were sometimes treated as a fifth book (Bornstein 1975: 470). There were many spurious additions and accretions over time, and while we have a good idea of what the original text mainly consisted of, there is still room for argument about it.

A few examples will have to suffice to give a flavour of the text:

I.11 Training against posts

“Against the post as if against an adversary the recruit trained himself using the foil and hurdle like a sword and shield, so that now he aimed as at it were the head and face, now threatened the flanks, then tried to cut the hamstrings and legs, backed off, came on, sprang, and aimed at the post with every method of attack and art of combat, as though it were an actual opponent.”¹²

II.18 soldiers had to write their own names on their shields

“Also the name of each soldier was inscribed in letters on the face of his shield, with a note of which cohort or century he was from.”

III.14 How to draw up the battle line

“When the general is ready to draw up the line, he should attend first to three things, sun, dust and wind ... therefore let the lines be ranged with these problems at our backs, and if possible so that they strike the faces of the enemy.”

III.26 General rules of war (Maxims)

“It is preferable to subdue an enemy by famine, raids and terror, than in battle where fortune tends to have more influence than bravery.”

“Few men are born naturally brave; hard work and good training makes many so”

“He who does not prepare grain-supplies and provisions is conquered without a blow.”

¹² I wonder if the order of the attacks, head/face first, flanks, then legs was important?



Image Source: <http://www.thearma.org/essays/pell/pellhistory.htm>

Not everyone liked this: “The book ends with a long collection of military maxims of quite paralyzing triteness.” (Gordon 1974: 46) One maxim, for example, suggests changing your plans when the enemy finds out what they are. A modern list of general rules (or principles) tends to be much shorter, and tries to be even more general than specific. Modern attitudes to technology are also quite different, making modern prescriptions more future focused.

The Vegetian Science of War in the Middle Ages

The ‘old school’ view of medieval warfare as lacking in strategic purpose began to be replaced by a ‘new school’ of thought in the second half of the twentieth century. This has led to a change in views about the importance and relevance of Vegetius in explaining medieval strategy. The *Epitoma Rei Militaris* is not an intellectual work, but one which emphasises thinking over heroic fortitude – avoid battle and reliance on fortune, and instead seek victory by manoeuvre, diplomacy or starvation.

Charles Oman called Vegetius an “archaeologist” (Oman 1924: 17), and represents the historians interest in preferring Vegetius to describe things as they are, rather than as they ought to be. Hans Delbrück, *Epitome Rei Militaris* does not have a higher philosophical value, and has not had a real influence on the art of war and its development (Delbrück 1990: 203). Delbrück criticised the “doctrinary-fantastic trivialities” in *Epitome Rei Militaris*, such as the battle formations, and felt that practical military men would not have paid attention to them (Delbrück 1990: 204). I assume that practical military men could look at the text and say this bit is useful, and this bit is not (although poor advice in one section might make you doubtful about advice in a different area).

The rarity of battles in the Middle Ages may have occurred because the war-leaders recognised the inherent wisdom of the battle-averse strategy recommended by Vegetius (Rogers 2002: 2). Vegetius was unlikely to be interpreted as requiring an enemy army to be drawn onto the battlefield and defeated (Allmand 1988: 55). Whether this was self-consciously Vegetian is impossible to prove. The case for this was put by John Gillingham in a series of articles reprinted by Matthew Strickland in *Anglo-Norman Warfare*,¹³ “For the medieval reality of war was very like the medieval theory of war outlined by Vegetius and it was in his cautious mastery of the logistics of Vegetian warfare that even a ‘romantic hero’ like Richard I showed his real competence as a general” (Gillingham 1992: 207).

Decisive Battle Strategy

Battles were risky and victories provided limited gains. A landscape (in some places) dominated by castles limited the benefits of battlefield victory, when defence was superior in strength. Battles were personally risky for the leaders, on whom the existence of the army often depended, and one defeat or chance death could undo years of work. Battle, for a cautious commander, might then be a strategy of last resort (Rogers 2002: 4-5).

Instead of battle-seeking, an army might present itself as battle-threatening in order to fulfil its strategic aims, without its commander actually wanting to carry through on that threat (Morillo 2002: 26). Vegetius stressed the risk that chance played in battles – making the outcomes uncontrollable despite planning and preparation. This contrasts with a medieval view that risks of battle allowed God to intervene in mortal affairs.

Persistent Raiding Strategy

Use the *chevauchée* (war-ride). Avoid battle, attack without warning, and ravage the enemy’s lands. The result of this raiding is to undermine political support for the enemy, and to deny them the economic resources to launch their own offensive. This can also be used to let the war pay for itself – an important consideration in era that lacked large standing forces and the funds to pay for them. A side on the strategic defensive could also adopt a ‘scorched earth’ strategy of avoiding battle and devastating the countryside to deny an invading army the resources it needed to sustain itself (especially food). Famine increases the chance of epidemic (Gillingham 1992: 202-204). This is, however, an expensive strategy both in prestige and economic terms (Rogers 2002: 15-16).

This can be overstated; after all, if one side wants to avoid battle, then their enemy probably wants to seek battle (Rogers 2002: 8). A “battle *cannot* be, on general principle, both unprofitable for the winning side *and* disastrous for the defeated party.” (Rogers 2002: 9). If castles existed in a region, then the defenders had to be willing to put up a fight, had to have enough troops to garrison them, and a substantial field force (Rogers 2002: 10-11), so depending on the context a battle-seeking strategy could pay off. The defender’s field force was important to impede enemy ravaging, because effective ravaging required dispersal of forces, which could then be vulnerable to a previously weaker enemy force (Gillingham

¹³ One of these articles can be found online: John Gillingham, *Richard I and the Science of War in the Middle Ages*, <http://www.deremilitari.org/resources/pdfs/gillingham2.pdf>, (1 August 2006).

1992: 201-202). An invading army that was unable to plunder was an army that was going to suffer morale problems (Gillingham 2004: 153).

The relative rarity of medieval battles may in part be due to the ability of a battle-averse force to avoid battle, either by retiring into fortifications, or by offering battle on terms likely to lead to a humiliating defeat to their enemies. The side resting on the defensive in a medieval battle possessed several advantages: good terrain and good formations and it could choose to offer battle only when it had these advantages (Rogers 2002: 14-15). While the element of personal risk to commanders was balanced by the motivations of gain (Rogers 2002: 13), the fact that medieval commanders perhaps had more at risk than Roman commanders might explain why Vegetius' ideas were more notably popular in the Middle Ages than in the late Roman Empire. The post-medieval decline in commander's fighting on the front lines, can partly explain why post-medieval warfare was more likely to lead to battles (Gillingham 2004: 154).

Being on the defensive, however, required an active defence, not a passive one. Skirmishing with foraging parties was going to lead to a lot of combat, even if there was no head to head engagement between the two main armies (Gillingham 2004: 152-153). In situations when both sides were battle-seeking, then battles would occur, such as during civil wars (Rogers 2002: 18). Also, while an army might be on the defensive in strategic terms, if a tactical opportunity presented itself, then a good commander could change their strategy.

The principles of Vegetian strategy are logistical, reflecting the limited productivity of traditional agriculture and seasonal foodstuffs (Morillo 2002: 23). The logistic necessity of feeding the army determines its tactical operations and limits the strategic aims that fall into the realm of the possible. This leads to a central role for using fortifications to defend territory until an enemy was forced to go home, and to sieges being a more common military operation than field battles.

Vegetian strategy is the 'natural mode' of pre-modern warfare only when the warfare occurs between sedentary (that is, agriculturally based) military actors engaged in 'foreign' or external wars, that is wars that cross political (and often cultural) boundaries. In addition, Vegetian strategy usually (though not always) requires warfare that is guided by grand strategies of territorial aggrandizement or conquest and defense thereagainst, within a geopolitical context that does not allow for flight by an entire military-political entity as an option (Morillo 2002: 29).

When nomad forces engage sedentary societies, they are eventually forced to adopt Vegetian modes of strategy if they are to occupy the lands long-term. Vegetian strategy also did not apply if both sides chose to follow rules that rendered warfare non-territorial, i.e. warfare about prestige, hierarchy, or the elimination of rivals (Morillo 2002: 31). This requires an agreed set of cultural or political norms, or a set of legal rules within a political system. European warfare perhaps reflected a tension between ancient cultural norms of honourable trial by battle, and the growing territorial defensive norms of the state (Morillo 2002: 36).

Warfare between states thus became *more* Vegetian as the Middle Ages went on, even though the time since the conditions present during the writing of the *Epitome Rei Militaris*

grew longer.¹⁴ Warfare within states became *less* Vegetian as the central state grew – if you could gain control of the central authority, then you controlled the rule-making organs of the state that legitimated the control of land (e.g. Japan alternated between periods with and without castles).¹⁵

Table of Strategic Stances Common to Medieval Armies

Degree of Risk	Defensive Stance	Offensive Stance	Potential Outcomes
High	Battle Seeking	Battle Seeking	Deliberate decisive battle
	Shadow army	Feigned offer of battle	Accidental decisive battle
Moderate	Relieve siege	Siege	Territorial loss/gain
	Pursue raiders	Raids	Skirmishes, regional devastation
Low	Harass Forages	Foraging	Skirmishes, logistic disruption

The Transmission of *Epitoma Rei Militaris*

The eventual popularity of *Epitoma Rei Militaris* insured its preservation and transmission to future readers, although there is no evidence that its reception prior to the seventh century was in any way remarkable.¹⁶ Alcuin quoted (without acknowledgement) two passages from the preface to Book I of *Epitome Rei Militaris* in a letter to Charlemagne (Reeve 2004: xiv). It subsequently became the most read, and most copied of the ancient military manuals,¹⁷ “the bible of warfare throughout the Middle Ages” (Goffart 1989: 45).

The *Epitome Rei Militaris* began to enjoy a particular vogue in the twelfth century renaissance, being referred to as an authority on military matters by writers with no first hand knowledge of war. Vegetius’ view that war could be justified by the need to find peace was to be an influential one (Allmand 1988: 37). At the same time, war was becoming more of intellectual exercise; the knight had to be both a fighter and thinker capable of foresight and prudence (Allmand 1988: 157). The phrase ‘military experts’ (*docti ad bellum*) became common in western sources from the time of the Carolingian era (Murray 1978: 129).

¹⁴ The growth in nationalism caused by the long conflict of the Hundred Years War is one example of this. As states became to resemble that of the Romans, “the popularity of ...Vegetius, was partly due to the stress which he had placed upon communal responsibility for defence and the need to serve the common good.” (Allmand 1988: 147)

¹⁵ Civil wars also tended to non-Vegetian, due to the necessity of a quick resolution of competing claims to the throne, which made it difficult to pursue logistics based strategies.

¹⁶ The earliest fragments of *Epitome Rei Militaris* are held in the Vatican library and date to the seventh century.

¹⁷ There are at least 54 extant manuscripts of *Epitome Rei Militaris* written before 1300. Only Cicero (>600), Ovid (305) and Virgil (223) were copied more often. By way of comparison, Frontinus survived in nine manuscripts (Shrader 1981: 171 n10).

The *Epitoma Rei Militaris* was popular in the Middle Ages because of the following factors:

- Succinct epitome of military thought
- Medieval reverence of ancient Rome and all things Roman
- Appealed to the practical needs of medieval readers
- Valued as a guide to proper military practice (Shrader 1981: 168) and (Allmand 1988: 157)
- Vegetius sometimes cited in 15th C English sources as the most venerable authority on ancient chivalry (Lester 1988: 16).
- It appealed to medieval taste
 - Effusive prologue and epilogue
 - Practical common sense of much of the material
 - Helpful explanations of manoeuvres in the field
 - Military precepts appended to book III
 - Pithy maxims¹⁸

In some manuscripts only a portion of *Epitome Rei Militaris* was copied, usually the more practical sections. Often copied, or kept with companion volumes of a practical nature such as geography, weather, and agriculture (Shrader 1981: 169). In the early Middle Ages *Epitome Rei Militaris* was copied and preserved by clerics. Late 10th century reports of *Epitome Rei Militaris* in the hands of political and military leaders began to increase (Shrader 1981: 169). The presence of the *Epitoma Rei Militaris* can be found in many libraries and personal book collections. The *Epitoma Rei Militaris* would have been a prestigious book for a military man to own, and few fifteenth century aristocratic libraries would have been without a copy (Lester 1988: 17).

It is difficult to assess the full impact of the writings of Vegetius on medieval military science, although it has been called “the most influential military manual in use during the middle ages”.¹⁹ In part because while a few other manuals survived, Vegetius was unique in among the military works in copies and distribution.²⁰ Some argue that its real influence was in the Renaissance (Shrader 1981: 167) when the notion of the full-time soldier paid regular wages began to re-emerge in Europe.

I think that *Epitome Rei Militaris* has value where it concerns matters that are more easily described than demonstrated, such as logistics. Other things can be easier to teach in person, such as drill, but having an authority source can be helpful for getting other people to go along with it. I imagine that knights in medieval Europe – with its fragmented states, decentralised authority and constant wars – would be impressed by a book containing the secrets of Roman military success.

¹⁸ Lester p.13. Delbruck p.203-4 *Epitoma Rei Militaris* had a useful series of clearly explained tenants, useful for military reflection and discussion. Truths can be grasped without the need for a classical authority, but someone had to write a popular book compiling commonplace expressions.

¹⁹ Lester p.7. Lester thought the popularity and influence was a bit strange considering the outdated technology and tactics in ERM. p.12.

²⁰ “For most of the middle ages, Vegetius’ *Epitome Rei Militaris* was virtually unique as a military manual, and it served as the main vehicle of the living science it taught.” (Murray 1978: 128).

The Translation of *Epitoma Rei Militaris* into the Vernacular

I am not sure if translation into the vernacular was a ‘chicken and egg’ phenomenon when it comes to demand and supply but when “noble literacy could no longer cope so well with Latin” (Orme 1984: 185) vernacular translations became a necessity. The following table (after Lester and Shrader) lists some of the most important translations:

Translator	Date	Language	Notes
Bono Gimaboni	c.1250	Italian	Language of Tuscany
Maitre Richard	1254-6	Anglo-Norman	For Edward I or II
Jean de Meun	1284	French	Most influential French translation
Jean de Priorat	1286-90	French	Recast in verse
Anonymous	Early 14th Century	French	Based on Jean de Meun’s
Jean de Vignay	c.1320	French	
Philippe de Vitri	1335	French	Abridgement
Spain	Late 14th Century	Spanish	
?	1408	English	For Thomas, Lord Berkley ²¹
The parson of Calais	1457-60	English	Recast in verse
Germany	1475	German	Four more German language editions by 1500
	15th Century	Spanish	
	15th Century	Portuguese	
	15th Century	Hebrew	
Adam Loutfut?	1494	Scottish	Only Books I and III.

Education and Literacy in the Middle Ages

Church education often had a narrow literary focus, while noble education was broader and more general (Orme 1984: xii). Knights were often tutors to princes, although clerics were cheaper (Orme 1984: 10). For children and youths, large part of their training was physical, whether games, riding, wrestling, or training with arms and armour. It is worth remembering that “medieval writers criticized children for indolence, oaths and insubordination, but not for aggression.” (Orme 1984: 183).

Formal military education was an Italian innovation in the sixteenth century. University education increased during the thirteenth century, but this was usually intended as preparation for a clerical career. Drop-outs could follow secular careers. The first cases of

²¹ In 1408 Lord Berkley was besieging rebels in Aberystwyth castle, and so had a “practical and immediate reason for commissioning the translation.” (Bornstein 1975: 470). Lord Berkley commissioned many translations. The English probably used French versions of the *Epitome Rei Militaris* prior to the fifteenth century.

students studying in England and intending to follow secular careers date from 1430s-40s (Orme 1984: 69).

The pattern of literacy in the aristocracy was limited to Latin in the first half of the twelfth century (Orme 1984: 147). By 1199-1216 fluency in Latin could no longer be assumed. You might write in Latin to impress, but expect it to be translated to be understood. So there was a switch to the vernacular in the thirteenth-fourteenth centuries, but a resumption in Latin learning in the fifteenth century (Orme 1984: 149-156).

The ability to read was known as “clergy”, and “the lettered” was a synonym for Churchman (Orme 1984: 142). The Latin tag *Rex illiterates asinus coronatus*, meaning “an illiterate king is a crowned ass” was maxim used from 1125 onwards. It meant that Kings should know how to read, and from 1100 they generally did (Orme 1984: 143). Slow diffusion of literacy in the aristocracy. By 1260s literacy was an essential skill, usually with proficiency in Latin. Boys raised to be knights probably spent fewer years than boys destined for the Church on learning literacy.

Ghillebert de Lannoy in *Enseignements Paternels* (c.1440) told his son to read Roman authors such as Valerius Maximus, Tullius, Lucan, Orosius, Sallust, and Justin for examples of how people loved honour, risked death for the good of the land, and preserved their reputation with the discipline of *chevalerie* (Vale 1981: 15). A well read noble would not be misled by the ready advice of his counsellors.²²

Texts like military manuals are only useful if you can afford to own the text, and can either read yourself, or to hire someone who could read the text to you. The cost of texts prior to the printing press restricted their use to the aristocracy and the clergy.²³

New Military manuals created in the Middle Ages

The later in history, the more surviving documents there are, including written advice, regulations, instructions for specific projects – such as campaigns, sieges, and battles. This is due both to the documents being more likely to survive the later they were written, and due to the increase in volume of publication as literacy (and later the printing press) became more common. Areas in which expressions of military thought can be found include:

- Laws
- Rule of the Templars
- Crusade plans
- The literary genre of ‘mirrors’ (instruction texts for princes)

²² P. de Commynes, *Memoires*, ed. J. Calmette and G. Durville, ii (Paris 1924) pp.129-30 [in Vale n28 p.20]

²³ “And the rarity of books made them precious in a way that we can only dimly grasp today. Petrarch’s paean to his books still defines the humanities’ most elevated ideal of reading as a communion of souls: “Gold, silver, gems, fine raiment, a marble palace, well-cultivated fields, paintings, a splendidly caparisoned horse—such things as these give one nothing more than a mute and superficial pleasure. Books delight us through and through, they converse with us, they give us good advice; they become living and lively companions to us.” Kirsch, Adam (2006), ‘Rereading the Renaissance: Reviving the foundational humanist texts’ *Harvard Magazine*, March-April 2006, <http://www.harvardmagazine.com/on-line/030637.html>, (2 August 2006).

Laws

Laws can often indicate military organisation through local and army ordinances. Army ordinances were focused on maintaining discipline in armies, e.g. in 1158 Frederick Barbarossa issued ordinances prior to campaigning in Italy.²⁴ Local ordinances focused on the recruitment, equipment, and training obligations of the community.²⁵

Rule of the Templars

The Old French Rule of the Knights Templar a compilation of the mid-thirteenth century. It is neither a drill manual nor a military manual, but it is the empirical product of the largely French-speaking warrior class that made up the Order. There are none of the references to classical authority so beloved of military treatises (not even to Vegetius). The focus is on cavalry and the distinctions in equipment, status and role. The order had knights, sergeants (who were potential infantry), and the “Turcopole” archers. It is unclear how their training was done, but it resulted in an extremely disciplined force – driven by the importance of getting the timing of the charge right in battle.²⁶

Crusader plans

Following the expulsion of the Crusaders from their last outpost of Acre in 1291, several attempts and plans were made to bring back Christian rule to Jerusalem and the Holy Land. While not a generic science of war, these documents give some insight into the planning that was possible.

The Provincial Council of Canterbury met in February 1292, and came up with one such plan which incorporated gathering as much money as possible, and assembling all the knights of the military orders into one army.²⁷ The Hospitallars also developed a plan in 1305.²⁸ This plan urged a repeat of the successful first crusade and covered the important grounds of timing (as soon as possible), unity of command, sound finances, and the

²⁴ <http://www.deremilitari.org/resources/sources/rulesfrederick.htm> (30 July 2006). Among various rules on good conduct is one on how properly forage for wine: “If anyone find vessels full of wine, let him drain off the wine so carefully that he will not break the vessels, or cut the bindings of the vessels, so that all the wine is not drained off, to the loss of the army.”

²⁵ James F Powers, *A Society Organized for War: The Iberian Municipal Militias in the Central Middle Ages 1000-1284*, The University of California Press, 1987. Online version at: <http://libro.uca.edu/socwar/war.htm> (30 July 2006). The Spanish civic militias were sufficiently well organized to be capable of operating 400 kilometers away from their home towns, and to aggressively attack and defeat Muslim armies. “Certainly the most emphatic endorsement of towns and their military prowess was offered in November of 1264 at the Cortes of Aragon in Zaragoza, when King Jaime I threatened his recalcitrant nobles with the use of the municipal militias of the realm, noting ‘I have all the towns of Aragon and Catalonia that would be against you, and concerning warfare they are as skilled as yourselves.’” P.3.

²⁶ *La Règle du Temple as a Military Manual or How to Deliver a Cavalry Charge*, Matthew Bennett, *Studies in Medieval History presented to R. Allen Brown* (1989) <http://www.deremilitari.org/resources/articles/bennett1.htm> (30 July 2006).

²⁷ *Crusade planning in the late thirteenth century*. Translated by Helen J Nicholson. <http://www.deremilitari.org/resources/sources/canterbury.htm> (site visited 30 July 2006).

²⁸ *A plan to regain the Holy Land from the Master of the Hospitallars*. <http://www.deremilitari.org/resources/sources/housley1.htm> (site visited 30 July 2006). This text was first translated in *Documents on the Later Crusades, 1274-1580*, edited and translated by Norman Housley (London, 1996).

importance of blockading the Saracens to prevent wicked Christians from trading weapons.²⁹ It also argued for a sea passage instead of an overland route.

Other examples of crusading plans:

- *Liber recuperationis terre sancta*, composed by the Franciscan Fidenzo of Padua (1274-91)
- Plan presented to Pope John XXII by the Venetian Marino Sanuto Torselleo, (1306-1321)
- Memoir addressed to Philip the Good, duke of Burgundy, by Bertrandon de la Brocquière (1432), included the ‘dream team’ army gathering together the best military elements of Europe, French men-at-arms and archers, German nobles and horse crossbows, 1,000 English men-at-arms and 10,000 English archers (Contamine 1985: 212-214).³⁰

The genre of mirrors

Mirrors are an example of development of didactic literature, an instruction manual for princes with both moral and practical advice on how best to rule. The focus tended to be on someone who would become king, rather than someone who was king. Perhaps the writers assumed a prince would have more time for leisure? A reason for writing a text is that it is one way of communicating with someone that you do not have immediate access too – if you did you would be able to instruct them in person.

Part of the art of ruling, was being able to succeed in warfare. Clerical writers turned to the standard handbooks to find the information they needed (Allmand 1988: 67). The introduction of gunpowder led to renewed interest in technical manuals, such as Konrad Kyeser’s *Bellafortis* (1405), which had a large number of illustrations and Latin explanations (Delbrück 1990b: 641). Other examples of Mirrors include:

- *The King’s Mirror*
- *De regimine principum*
- *The Prince* (Machiavelli)³¹

The King’s Mirror is a Norwegian text,³² written in the style of a son asking their Father questions, one chapter deals with training, equipment, naval warfare and sieges. This text argues that the weapons useful in sieges are also very useful on ships. “You must also be specially careful, when in the battle line, never to throw your spear, unless you have two, for in battle array on land one spear is more effective than two swords.” *De regimine principum* was the most popular contribution to the ‘Mirror’ genre (Allmand 1988: 163).

²⁹ “The Saracens are famed for their cleverness and ingenuity. As soon as they learn that the Christians have initiated a passage, they will make haste to forearm themselves with weapons, iron, pitch, timber and everything else with which they can mount their defence. And those wicked Christians who are cursed by a blind greed for profit will strive with all their might to supply them with these things, for the Saracens are only able to get hold of them from over here, through the services of impious Christians.”

³⁰ The ‘dream team’ resembles the kind of army built by wargamers who play toy soldier games in its idealistic approach that minimises the difficulties of commanding such a composite force and maximises its theoretical military effectiveness.

³¹ Long list of mirrors at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mirrors_for_princes

³² *The King’s Mirror (Speculum Regale – Konungs Skuggsja)*, trans. Lawrence M. Larson (New York, 1917).

Adaptations of *Epitoma Rei Militaris* in the Middle Ages

Another sign of its popularity was the constant reworking of passages from the *Epitoma Rei Militaris* into new military works. The *Epitoma Rei Militaris* was quoted or abridged by many authors. Book II of ERM, concerning the composition of the legion, was often abridged or omitted (Bornstein 1975: 470). *Epitoma Rei Militaris* also had little on sieges (the Goths didn't have many big cities) or on cavalry warfare (something Vegetius said the Romans were doing well). These deficiencies may have encouraged new works, but when *Epitoma Rei Militaris* was likely the only military manual you had, it would make sense to start by adapting or improving that, rather than starting from a blank slate. Vernacular translations might have encouraged adaptation and augmentation, but this is speculation on my part.

This is a table of the works I am aware of that substantially rewrite *Epitoma Rei Militaris*, unlike some of the translations listed earlier, which abridge or update sections for relevance.

The Venerable Bede	8 th century	Shipbuilding book <i>De Temporum Ratione</i>
Alcuin	802	Letter to Charlemagne
Hrabanus Maurus	(780-856)	<i>De Procinctu Romanae</i>
John of Salisbury	1159	<i>Politicratus</i>
Alfonso X	1260	<i>Siete Partidas</i> (Seven Divisions)
Giles of Rome	1270-80	<i>De Regimine Principum</i> (On the Rule of Princes)
Jean de Meun (or Meung)	1284	<i>Le livre de Végèce de l'art de chevalerie</i>
Vincent of Beauvais	13 th century	<i>Speculum Doctrinale</i> (Mirror of Doctrine)
Honoré Bonet	1387	<i>L'Arbre des Batailles</i> (The Tree of Battles)
Christine de Pizan	c.1410	<i>The Book of Deeds of Arms and of Chivalry</i>
Parson of Calais	1458-60	<i>Knyghthode and Bataile</i>
William Worcester	1475	<i>Boke of Noblesse</i>
Jean de Fayt among others. ³³		

Especially notable here is the version by a woman, Christine de Pisan, and another writer (the parson of Calais) translated it into verse, *Knyghthode and Bataile*. Hrabanus Maurus (780-856), updated extract for Carolingian Emperor Lothar II in ninth century.³⁴ Books I-II of *De Procinctu Romanae* were based on an extraction from *Epitome Rei Militaris*, with some additions. Book I of *Epitome Rei Militaris* became part of Book VI of *Politicratus* by John of Salisbury (1159), Book II of *Speculum Doctrinale* by Vincent of Beauvais, and part III of *De Regimine Principum* (On the Rule of Princes) by Giles of Rome (also known as Aegidius Romanus) who was tutor to Phillip IV of France (1270-80).

³³ n11 Shrader p.172. Thomas Aquinas used Vegetius in arguing for a just war. Lester p.14.

³⁴ Hans Delbrück, *History of the Art of War, Vol II: Medieval Warfare*, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990, p.636. Also known as Hrabanus or Rhabanus.

Vegetius was incorporated *en bloc* in the political manuals of Alfonso X the Wise of Castile (1260) in the *Siete Partidas*.³⁵ There was an explosion of interest in war as a science during this period of time (Murray 1978: 130). The *Tree of Battles* incorporates a few references from Vegetius, via the *de Bello de Represaliis et de Duello* of John of Legnano (Coopland 1949: 31), although the work has a whole focuses on what be thought of as ‘employment law’, ‘codes of conduct’, and the consideration of the rights of the combatant. Honore Bouvet made the cynical observation “that no man who did not know how to set places on fire was worthy of the name of soldier” (Coopland 1949: 189).

When used by the Friar educationalists, the *Epitome Rei Militaris* was a work for young warriors, not just adult knights. One illustration in the Anglo-Norman manuscript of Vegetius saying to a group of young men “come to me, sirs knights, who wish to have the honour of knighthood”.³⁶ The medieval interest in starting training at puberty, emphasis on physical skills, use of heavy training equipment, training with posts, plus the combination of individual skills and army discipline.³⁷ The system recommended by Vegetius was not adopted unquestioningly, the Berkeley translator noted that some Roman techniques were influenced by the Devil, and Knights were always reluctant to training in the use of bow³⁸ or the skill of swimming.³⁹

Knyghthode and Bataile

This work survives in three manuscripts. Recasting it in verse was not an easy task, as many of the Latin terms are of a technical nature that defy easy translation.

The poet modifies the Roman soldier to more closely resemble the medieval knight, emphasizing birth more than virtue (Dyboski & Arend 1935: xxix). Tournaments are added to the training program, and courage in a commander is emphasised over experience. Rules on how to retreat and Vegetius’ comment that infantry are the main strength of the army are also dropped (Bornstein 1975: 473). In writing for an English audience, many references to the glory of Rome are dropped (Dyboski & Arend 1935: xxiii). The naval section also gains a colourful account of a battle at sea (Dyboski & Arend 1935: xxxvi).

³⁵ Murray p.129. Alfonso’s book had a section recommending tying the feet of the infantry together in a hollow square formation. Delbruck suggests that these errors occur because the clerics writing the books lacked military experience. [Vol III, p.639.]

³⁶ Orme, p.187. n29 Thorpe in *Scriptorium*, vi (1952), plates 13-14.

³⁷ Orme pp.187-8.

³⁸ “The Berkeley translator observes that some Roman techniques came into being through ‘feigned and false visions and dreams through illusions of devils, the which the Romans worshipped’, although he admits that when the Romans were well instructed they were superior to pagans and to uninstructed Christian knights.” (Orme 1984: 188).

³⁹ Two fifteenth century *Epitome Rei Militaris* translations agree that swimming is a correct skill for knights. This reflects the medieval respect for Vegetius, but is not what knights actually did. Swimming became unfashionable after the Norman Conquest, and in literature the heroes were rarely portrayed as swimmers (Orme 1984: 207).

The Book of Deeds of Arms and of Chivalry

This work was possibly commissioned for the duke of Burgundy (Pizan 1999: 3-5). Caxton commissioned an English translation of *Deeds of Arms* in 1489. A copy of *Deeds of Arms* was given to Margaret of Anjou (wife of Henry VI, and the decision-maker of the pair) from John Talbot, Earl of Shrewsbury (Boardman 1998: 42).

The Book of Deeds of Arms and of Chivalry is divided into four parts. The first book starts with an apology for the author's gender (I), and then considers who can declare war and the role a King should play in war (II-VI). This is followed (VII) by considering who should be placed in charge of the King's army, and Christine argues that experience is more important than age, and that skill and virtue is more important than noble birth. Sections VIII-XI cover training, "For Vegetius says that whoever wants peace should learn war" (Pizan 1999: 26).

Sections XII-XVII describe the organisation of an army and its movement. Food supply and security is stressed, as is the use of intelligence. Sections XVIII- XIX discuss the decisions that need to be made when a battle is eminent, including how to retreat. XX concerns the care to be taken with peace/truce negotiations (not V). The rest of the first book (XXI-XXIX) are concerned with the conduct of the army on the field of battle, starting with the general's pre-battle speech. The important terrain considerations are high ground, placing the sun in the enemy's eyes, and having the wind (+ dust) be against them. (Pizan 1999: 64).

The Book of Deeds of Arms and of Chivalry then discusses battlefield formations according to present day usage noting that these are different from Vegetius' formations, perhaps because "then troops fought more commonly on horseback than on foot." (Pizan 1999: 65). The 'modern' formations are linked to examples of recent practice (battles that the French won). The first book closes with a long list of maxim's taken from *Epitome Rei Militaris* III xxvi.

The first part draws heavily on books I (quality/training) and III of *Epitome Rei Militaris* (handling an army). The second part is a selection of historical anecdotes (I-XIII), mostly drawn from *Strategemata* and *Facta et dicta memorabilia*. For example, the tale of Scipio falling when disembarking in Africa, "Heaven be praised, this is a good omen. I am seized by the African land. It is ours without a doubt." (Pizan 1999: 91-92) Compare with Frontinus "Congratulate me, my men! I have hit Africa hard"⁴⁰

The siege warfare section (XIV-XXXIX) is partly drawn from Book IV of *Epitome Rei Militaris*, but also adds detailed accounts of contemporary requirements of siege warfare, e.g. nails and stone cannon balls). The naval warfare section follows (XL-XLI).

The third part is a dialogue concerning the laws of warfare, drawn from Book IV of *Tree of Battles*. Questions of when you can legitimately resort to force and warfare are discussed.

⁴⁰ Frontinus p.81 and also: "Gaius Caesar, having slipped as he was about to embark on ship exclaimed: 'I hold thee fast, Mother Earth.'" I have heard an apocryphal story of William the Conqueror saying something similar on landing in England, but I have found no evidence for this.

The fourth part of *Deeds of Arms* also draws on *Tree of Battles*, but is concerned with safe-conducts, treaties, letters of marque, private combats, and coats of arms.

Evidence of Military Manuals Being Read or Used in the Middle Ages

Some of the advice in *Epitome Rei Militaris* would not have been useful to follow, or even outright hazardous to imitate. Vegetius' advice on archery training ignored the development of compound bows.⁴¹

While the following can appear to be a very short list of occasions when *Epitome Rei Militaris* was known to be read, as opposed to merely being part of a library or listed in a will, this is more evidence for its use than most other literary works had in the Middle Ages.⁴²

- Ninth Century Rabanus Maurus advised Lothair I to re-read Vegetius to better resist the Normans.⁴³ Rabanus Maurus also made an abridgement with an emphasis on cavalry.
- Certainly, in the mid-ninth century, Hrabanus Maurus was very selective in the excerpts he sent to King Lothar II. The Carolingian scholar recognised that strictures on the qualities and skills of the young warriors were of more use than a dissertation on the long-gone Roman legion. It is not the size of the army that counts; he urged Lothar, but the skill and courage of its *milites*.⁴⁴
- In 1147 Geoffrey Plantagenet, Count of Anjou, was unsuccessfully besieging a castle in the Loire valley. With the assistance of a literate monk the Count found a passage detailing instructions on how to make an incendiary device, which was manufactured and used. “Count Geoffrey said: ‘what you have read out today you will see put in action tomorrow’. So it happened, and the castle was taken.”⁴⁵ Geoffrey encouraged scholars, and habitually had a scholar on call during campaigns.
- Possible that this may have been the same manual owned by his great-grandfather, Count Fulk the Black, in the 10th century.⁴⁶
- Hugues de Noyers (1183-1206) bishop of Auxerre, “rejoiced in gathering a crowd of knights about him with whom he most gladly discussed military matters and also often re-read Vegetius, who talks about these problems, and he explained to the knights many of the lessons to be drawn from the author.”⁴⁷
- In 1474/75 during the siege of Neuss by Charles the Bold, Duke of Burgundy, a Castilian knight inspired by Vegetius persuaded the Duke to build a 60’ movable tower and drawbridge – however the engine got stuck in the mud.

⁴¹ Luttwak p.240.

⁴² Shrader p.169 few other works of antiquity can match the number of references to *Epitome Rei Militaris* being read, carried, or consulted.

⁴³ Contamine p.211.

⁴⁴ <http://www.deremilitari.org/resources/articles/bennett1.htm>

⁴⁵ Murray p.128 This was an augmented text, the original manuscript has no details of incendiary weapons.

⁴⁶ Murray p.129.

⁴⁷ Contamine p.211.

- Same siege, Jean Molinet deplored the duke of Burgundy for not following the counsel of Vegetius as to placing tents where they cannot be flooded.⁴⁸
- Vegetius was sufficiently familiar to the aristocracy of later medieval England that the poet Hocclere reproved Sir John Oldcastle for his heretical opinions in 1415, urging him to read Vegetius rather than scripture.⁴⁹
- There are some surviving pocket-sized folding manuscripts.⁵⁰ This suggests that *Epitome Rei Militaris* was consulted in the field.
- Richard III had a personal copy of *De Rei Militari*.⁵¹ Viscount Beaumont gave a copy of *De Rei Militari* to Henry VI “perhaps with the hope of inspiring the indifferent king with a more martial and aggressive attitude towards his enemies.”⁵²
- There is an apocryphal story that Henry II and Richard Coeur de Lion carried a copy everywhere on their campaigns.⁵³

Conclusions – Was Theory put into Practice?

I agree with Allmand that although the particulars of the ancient manuals were often ignored, the general principles were considered valuable.⁵⁴ These general principles may have contributed to the growing professionalisation of armies, and their subordination to central authority in the late middle ages. The influence on modern military thought is certain; the timing of when that influence occurred is not.

The art of war, and a degree of professionalism underpinning that, were often gained by practical experience. Simon de Montfort, observing Prince Edward’s advance at Evesham is reported to have said “By the arm of St James, they are advancing well. They have not learned that for themselves, but were taught it by me.”⁵⁵ Such practical experience could be lost in lengthy periods of peace. Some books like Jean de Buels *Le Jouvencel* suggest that people learnt the art of war through experience, apprenticeship and general maturation over time.

Books did, however, stress training and preparation.⁵⁶ Given the immense effort required to produce manuscripts before the invention of the printing press, the copying of Vegetius and other ancient works, plus vernacular translations and adaptations suggest that theoretical works were seen as having value. Why would you devote the resources to producing a mirror text, with an audience of one prince, if you did not think it was worth it?

⁴⁸ Contamine p.214.

⁴⁹ Orme pp.186-7.

⁵⁰ Murray n.67 p.446-447

⁵¹ Andrew W. Boardman, *The Medieval Soldier in the Wars of the Roses*, Sutton Publishing, 1998, p.39.

⁵² Boardman, p.41.

⁵³ “I have searched for, but failed to find, contemporary authority for these assertions.” [Need to find where this quote came from]. Compare with story of Alexander the great keeping a copy of the Iliad under his pillow because it was a portable treasure of all military virtue and knowledge, Plutarch *Alexander* 2.2-3.

⁵⁴ “It has to be recognized that since the examples which they read came from the very distant past, it was more the generalities of military experience than the niceties of military art, the general rather than the particular, which they could obtain from books.” (Allmand 1988: 163).

⁵⁵ Prestwich p.159.

⁵⁶ Contamine – intellectual influence was minimal, but practical training was significant. Contamine p.215.

I also note the determined effort by public authorities to encourage military exercise rather than frivolous sports – they obviously thought the training was of some use.⁵⁷

To medieval re-enactors Vegetius' writings have value because they are the text that was actually being read by the people whose lives we seek to imitate. So reading it can satisfy curiosity, aid in personae construction, and possibly help develop *coup d'oeille*⁵⁸ for martial activities. The first book I find the first one of the most use in recreation activities, because of its emphasise on training exercises and the importance of drill and discipline can be a useful authority source for encouraging new fighters to do the dull boring drills. The wider work helps illuminate the conduct of strategic defensive warfare in the middle ages. The concepts of Vegetian strategy remain valid until the dominance of gunpowder begins, which is when the popularity of *Epitoma Rei Militaris* peaked.

⁵⁷ A statute of Richard II in 1389 imposed on 'servants and labourers' the need to obtain bows and arrows and to practice archery on Sundays and public holidays, renouncing ball and other games. Contamine p.217.

⁵⁸ French 'comprehensive gaze', the ability to immediately understand a tactical situation, and to formulate an effective response to that situation. This was an 18th Century concept for sorting out good officers from bad officers.

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