

Vegetius and the Late Roman Empire¹

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Περίληψη: Το ζήτημα μιας ενδεχόμενης επίδρασης του Βεγέτιου στους ρωμαϊκούς στρατούς της Ύστερης Αρχαιότητας παραμένει ως σήμερα ένα από δημοφιλές ερευνητικό desideratum για τον σχετικό επιστημονικό χώρο. Παρά τον, πραγματικό ή υποτιθέμενο, αναχρονιστικό χαρακτήρα των προτάσεών του Π. Φλ. Βεγέτιου Ρενάτου, οι εισηγήσεις του για τη μεταρρύθμιση του αυτοκρατορικού στρατού συνιστούν μια άμεση χριστιανική απάντηση σε όσα είχαν ήδη διατυπώσει οι εθνικοί σύγχρονοί του, φιλόσοφοι και ιστορικοί (Πρόκλος, Αμμιανός Μαρκελλίνος), ως αντίδρασή τους στην κρίση της αυτοκρατορίας κατά τα τέλη του 4ου και τις αρχές του 5ου αιώνα. Η παρούσα μελέτη εστιάζει στο ερώτημα κατά πόσον και σε ποιο βαθμό η Ανατολική Ρωμαϊκή Αυτοκρατορία επηρεάστηκε σε πρακτικό επίπεδο από τις ιδέες του Βεγέτιου. Με εξαίρεση ορισμένα αποσπάσματα από το τρίτο βιβλίο του, τα οποία μεταφράστηκαν και ενσωματώθηκαν στο Στρατηγικόν του Μαυρικίου, δεν απαντάται καμία αναφορά στον Βεγέτιο – ή στο έργο του – στις πηγές μετά τον 5ο αιώνα μ.Χ. και σε όλη τη βυζαντινή περίοδο. Εάν το έργο του δεν ήταν μια αμιγώς θεωρητική προσέγγιση, αλλά είχε ασκήσει πράγματι μια κάποια επιρροή στη βυζαντινή στρατιωτική τέχνη, τότε κάποια ίχνη των αντιλήψεών του θα μπορούσαν να αναζητηθούν στον Codex Theodosianus και στη Notitia Dignitatum. Σήμερα, το Epitoma Rei Militaris θεωρείται μια ιδιαιτέρως σημαντική πηγή για την κατανόηση της δομής του πρώιμου ρωμαϊκού αυτοκρατορικού στρατού. Ταυτόχρονα όμως, αυτό το γεγονός ενδέχεται να εξηγεί και το πρόβλημα της περιορισμένης απήχησης του Βεγέτιου στην εποχή του, ανεξαρτήτως των αναγκών των αυτοκρατόρων ή των (ημι)βάρβαρων ηγετών των foederati — μιας ομάδας που αποτελεί συχνό στόχο της κριτικής του. Συνοψίζοντας, ο Βεγέτιος φαίνεται πως απέτυχε να προσαρμόσει τα παραδείγματα και τις προτροπές του στις πραγματικότητες του πολέμου και στην κατάσταση του της Αυτοκρατορίας μετά τη μάχη της Αδριανούπολης (378μΧ) και κατά την εμφάνιση του Αττίλα.

Abstract: The question of Vegetius' potential impact upon the Late Roman armies stands out as a scholarly desideratum in the relevant field. Despite their anachronistic flavor, real or imagined, his proposals for the reformation of the imperial army are a direct Christian response to what his pagan contemporaries, philosophers and historians (Proklos, Ammianus Marcellinus) had already suggested as a reply to the crisis of the Empire by the late 4th and early 5th century. I will focus on the question of whether and to what extent the Eastern Roman Empire was affected on a practical

¹ This article is a revised and expanded version of a paper presented at King's College London on 24 November 2019, in the context of the international conference *Warfare in Antiquity: Perceptions, Realities and Reception in the 21st Century*.

level by Vegetius' ideas. Except for a few passages from his third book that have been translated and added to the *Strategikon* of Maurice, no mention of Vegetius or his work is to be found in any of the sources dating after the 5th century AD throughout the entire Byzantine era. If his work did not remain a purely theoretical edifice but did exert some influence on military practice, traces of his doctrines might be found in the *Codex Theodosianus* and the *Notitia Dignitatum*. The *Epitoma Rei Militaris* is nowadays appreciated as a major source for revealing the structure of the Middle Roman army. This might not be irrelevant to the question of Vegetius' lack of success in his times, regardless of the emperors or the semi-barbarian generals of *foederati* – the latter a favourite group of the author's criticism. Vegetius has failed to adjust his exempla to the realities of warfare and the situation of the state after Adrianople and by the arrival of Attila.

For those unacquainted with Vegetius and his work, a brief introduction is necessary. Publius Flavius Vegetius Renatus is known to us only through two books that are attributed to him, the *Epitoma Rei Militari* (E.R.M.) and the *Digesta Artis Mulomedicinae*, which is a veterinary work. The E.R.M., also known as *De Re Militari*, was written in the very late 4th or in the early 5th century². It is a military textbook, dedicated to an unnamed Emperor to whom the author presents the structure, the training, and the strategies of the Roman Army during the *Res Publica* and the *Principatum*. Though this kind of literature is not an unusual one, this particular text has been proven to be a huge source for scholars and a favorite text during the Middle Ages in Western and central Europe.

Vegetius was probably born in Spain, in the mid-4th century AD, from an elite family of bureaucrats and non-military men. We get to know his full name from the earliest manuscript of the E.R.M., the "*Excerptum Vaticanum*" (*Vat.* -public servants who moved from Spain to Constantinople when Flavius Theodosius became Emperor in 379. However, it does not indicate a blood relation to the new imperial family³. The *gentilicium* Vegetius proves the Celtic Iberian origins of the author and suggests that his family was given the *civitas* and lands in Spain after crossing the Rhine⁴. As far as the cognomen Renatus, it usually indicates a Christian worshiper⁵. Based on the fact that he calls Emperor Gratian *divus* at I.20 and a comment from Eutropius on a certain manuscript, we usually date Vegetius between 383 and 450 AD. However, since he implies three times that the walls of Rome have never been sacked, we can safely claim that there is a *terminus post* 410 AD. The emperor to whom this work is dedicated remains unknown to the researchers, though many suggestions have been made. I do believe that Valentinian II and III must be excluded since their relative Gratian is strongly blamed for military incompetence and for causing the decline in

² Milner N. P. 1996, pp. xxxvii-xli.

³ Milner N.P. 1996, pp. xxxii.

⁴ Schulze W. 1933, p. 53.

⁵ Kajanto I. 1965, p. 135 and p. 355.

the West⁶. Having that in mind, a dedicatee from the Theodosian dynasty is, as far as I am concerned, a more possible option.

Theodosius the 1st is the one that most of the scholars propose as the best candidate for such a text. However, his already battle-hardened son Arcadius, or even the younger but ruler of Rome, Honorius, should also be taken into consideration. Theodosius the 2nd seems less suitable due to the termini restrictions that we gave previously. Nevertheless, Vegetius is writing towards someone who wishes to reorganize a devastated Roman Army, regardless of whether it is the eastern army after Adrianople or the western after Frigidus.

In this paper, there will be two main topics to be presented: Vegetius as a member of a literary tradition that wishes for a return to an earlier, ideal phase of the Empire, and then, the level of the impact that Vegetius had on the Late Roman armies, especially the eastern one.

Before we analyze the effect of Vegetius's work upon the Late Roman Empire, it is necessary that we put him in context with his era and with the state of the Roman Army by that time. Certain hoaxes or ambiguities must be explained before one can examine the relativity of Vegetius's suggestions. Therefore, we shall initially present the state of the Theodosian armies with a fair distance from the pagan or Christian bias towards that era, meaning 383 – 410 AD. Whether we refer to the eastern troops that Theodosius "inherited" after Adrianople or to those that he left to his sons in 395, we have to realize that they consisted mostly of barbaric tribes of *foederati*⁷ and a smaller *comitatus* of Romanized infantry and cavalry, still mostly under the rule of Germanic generals and warlords. The heavily disciplined legionaries had been reduced to rather insignificant veteran forces, still under the control of the *Comites* and *Magistri Militum* (such as Stilicho, Arbogastes, Rufinus) appointed by Theodosius as stewards of his sons.

Evangelos Chrysos made clear, already from 1972, that the Gothic tribes which Theodosius used during his reign as *foederati* were not organic members of the army and were never considered as such. Because of the still in effect *Constitutio Antoniniana*, the barbaric tribes were excluded from the status of the Roman legion due to the fact that their acceptance would also grant them the rights of the Roman Citizen. *Edicta* from Valentinian the 1st and until the Theodosian Code (III, 14, 1) prove the above claim⁸. Therefore, we must focus upon the remnants of the Roman legions, the *comitatus*, the *scholae palatinae*, and the *limitanei*. Since that era, legionaries also descended from a barbaric *gens*, not necessarily born and raised as Roman citizens, but from a tribal environment. However, through their service, they learned how to speak Latin, and they were trained under the Roman standards of the

⁶ For supporters of the case of the Valentinians (E. Gibbon among them) see Milner N.P. 1996, p. xxxvii

⁷ The term was in fact first applied with this interpretation in 406 AD (*CTh.* VII, 13, 16). At the time of Theodosius, these incorporated barbarians that were later described as *foederati*, were in fact mercenaries and allies, Barberi A. 2021, pp. 215-216.

⁸ Chrysos E. K. 1972, p. 165. For this reason, many of them were conscribed either as *dediticii* or as mere bands of mercenaries (the former category being categorically excluded by the *Constitutio Antoniniana*), Barbero A. 2021, pp. 204-207.

4th century⁹. A vast number of these precious few veterans were lost after the clashes in Adrianople and Frigidus, and therefore, each time, new conscripts had to enter service in the legions. It is an army that always bet on the coexistence between experienced veterans and eager but unskilled young conscripts, for the training of the latter. The loss of so many soldiers of the organic army left the state in a situation that only the aftermath of Cannae could resemble, according to Ammianus Marcellinus (*Res Gestae* 31, 13, 18-19). Wisely enough, Theodosius gave time to his remaining legions and made an excessive but successful use of his new Gothic *foederati* (as it was anachronistically used in the legislation after Arcadius¹⁰). Almost a decade after his death in 395 AD, both of his sons tried to diminish the presence of the Gothic tribes among their ranks as well as the power of the semi-barbarian generals in the courts of Constantinople and Milan. Arcadius and Theodosius the 2nd in the East succeeded, mainly because they had excellent fortified cities and a bit more indigenous and better trained troops to rely on, especially the warlike tribe of Isauri during the 4th century. They risked a period with an arguably small in numbers army that remained safe behind the city walls and without vast numbers of uncontrolled *foederati* and *laeti* on their side¹¹. But when the *Reconquista* of Justinian occurred in the 6th century, the army was again largely romanized and the new *foederati* and *bucellarii* were now part of it, though in small numbers and more of a part of a common early-Byzantine background¹². Honorius in the West, however, failed to control and to remove the barbaric tribes from Italy, allowing a rebellious warlord named Alaric to sack Rome. The eastern army had more time to be reorganized after Adrianople, thanks to Theodosius the Great. Perhaps those efforts were what prompted Vegetius to present him the “handbooks” of the old legions. Handbooks that could be partially applied in the eastern armies but not anymore in the western ones, where Arbogastes and his Franks were put in charge of the Rhine front. And as a matter of fact, that later, modest stability of the western front under Valentinian the 3rd is not a result of Vegetius 'antiquitarianism',¹⁴ but the talent of *Patricius Aetius*¹⁵, a general who managed to make the best out of alliances with the Huns and the Visigoths retrospectively.

Coming back to the east, or to the area where Theodosius focused his efforts, a handbook that included the doctrines of the Roman Army seemed exactly what a general needed in order to replace the experience which his troopers and officers lacked. Vegetius is not unaware of the current situation, the weapons, and the tactics of his time. He has a genuine interest in improving his era's legions by demonstrating the ways of the glorious past, not just for the sake of exhibition but for passing on the knowledge that was considered lost among the veterans of the late 4th century. That

⁹ Barbero A. 2021, pp. 217-219.

¹⁰ Barbero A. 2021, p. 216.

¹¹ Late 4th century *laeti* were usually accused of joining invading tribes into pillaging the lands of the western provinces, Barbero A. 2021, pp. 259-261.

¹² Southern D. & Dixon K. R. 1996, pp. 51-52.

¹⁴ Birley E. 1988, p. 57-67.

¹⁵ Milner N. P. 1996, p. xxxviii

doesn't mean, however, that the return to an earlier battle style was the right thing to do, even if we suppose that such an idea was still possible.

Vegetius suggests indeed a return to the Roman past, but not in the way that various pagan writers had hoped for. The rise of Christianity and the neglect of the traditional deities of the Empire were described in many texts as reasons for the Crisis and the Downfall of Rome during the following centuries (Zosimus, *Historia Nova*, 2, 29-31). There is a long tradition of authors, philosophers, politicians, and even an Emperor who believe that salvation from the barbaric attacks and the renewed Persian threat will come from the reinstatement of all those deities that Christianity was preaching against and forbidding when possible. It is not unusual but rather a part of human nature to look back at times of prosperity during a crisis and then try to recreate or reinstitute patterns of that lifestyle in order to reach for salvation. Even from the era of Augustus and until the times of Marcus Aurelius (*Meditations* 8, 5), due to the heavy influence of stoicism, there is a wish among the Empire for returning to some "old ways" or to what many had in mind as the *mos maiorum*. This wish was translated after the late 4th century, not as a call to a more philosophized governing, reminiscent of the Res Publica, but rather as the atavistic repetition of the neglected cults. Initially, as appeals for (bloodied) sacrifices and later as mystical rites of theurgy for the protection of a city from invaders or natural disasters, those were acts that grew largely popular during late antiquity¹⁶.

It is worth mentioning that pagan historiographers, including Ammianus Marcellinus, do not blame the Roman Army for incompetence, though it was a Christian army in name by the reign of Valentinian and Valens, especially since Constans I and Constantius II standardized the use of their father's labarum with the inscribed Chi-Ro (*Res Gestae* 16, 10, 6 and 21, 16, 15). It is rather the incapability of interpreting the omens (*Res Gestae* 21, 1, 7-14) and the breaking of what it was once known as the "truce with the gods" (*pax deorum*) that it is causing defeats like those that Julian and Valens had suffered (Zosimus, *Historia Nova*, 1, 1; Libanius, *Pro Templis*, 38). Furthermore, their anger would be shared by the Orthodox-Nicene Christians, who would also see new military elites of Arian Christian Goths dominating the Roman Army, elites that despise the old religion of Rome and do not hesitate to enforce through violence their iconoclastic views against any depiction of divinity. Nicene Christian writers therefore target the *laeti* units, their barbarian (*gentiles*) generals and the previous emperors who allowed them to spread further chaos and division among the empire that gave them land and shelter (Ambrosius, *Epist.* 20). Synesius of Cyrene, being a Neoplatonist Christian and thus a perfect mix of the old and the new religion, is also worried of the great privileges that those newcomers enjoy and urges for the need of "a national army of Romans" (*De Regno*, PL 66, 1092-11100)¹⁷.

It is not the purpose of this work to present every text that promotes older traditions of Rome as a salvation from the barbaric invasions, but rather to place

¹⁶ Di Branco 2006, p. 130-143.

¹⁷ Dagron 1984, pp. 85-89.

Vegetius among them. An excellent case-study is that of Athens. After the raising of the post-Herrulian walls of the city after 268, proconsul Iuliannus is mentioned in inscriptions as the new Amphion, the musician and mythical builder of the famous walls of Thebes¹⁸. There is a strong Neoplatonic background to this comparison, and it is related to the events of the siege of the city under Alaric in 395/6¹⁹. Whether Athens was actually sacked or spared is something that neither our sources nor the archaeologists seems to agree on²⁰. However, Zosimus (5, 5-6), based on Eunapius (482), narrates a story where Athena and Achilles appear on the city walls and scare the Visigoths away. Earlier in his work, Zosimus also mentioned a time when the Neoplatonist hierophant Nestorius practiced a ritual that is based on Iamblichus and commanded the spirit of Achilles to save Athens from an earthquake that devastated the rest of southern Greece, in 375 (4, 18, 1-4). Both cases, according to Di Branco²¹, are attempts on behalf of Eunapius and Zosimus, who belong to the pagan literature, for demonstrating the omnipotence of the theurgic rituals over grave dangers.

For the sake of argument, if we suppose that Athens was indeed saved, then it is very interesting to see what happened in Rome. Zosimus again (5, 41, 1-3) narrates that in 408, when Alaric was *ante portas*, bishop Innocentius forbade the Senate from performing a similar ritual for the traditional deities of the city in plain public view, and therefore, he condemned Rome to destruction. This resemblance through contradiction cannot be by coincidence. In Rome, in 384, *Praefectus Urbis* Symmachus addressed a letter, at the request of the Senate, to Emperor Valentinian II for the altar of Victory to return to the Senate House (*Relationes*, 3). It is the altar that Augustus dedicated after Actium, and that emperor Gratian had removed, under the orders of bishop Ambrosius of Milan. The request of Symmachus was denied, and his letter was debunked, point by point, by the bishop himself in his letters to Valentinian (*Epist.* 17 and 18). What interests us is that Ambrosius confronted the idea that the old gods granted Rome all those victories by saying what we now consider to be obvious. He said that those triumphs came simply by the greatness and the training of the legions and not by divine intervention²². Exactly as Vegetius wrote, perhaps at the same time, in the first chapter of his first book, with the title: “*That the Romans conquered all people solely because of their military training*”. Furthermore, the fourth book of E.R.M. returns us to Thebes and offers a retelling of the famous siege of the “*Seven Against Thebes*”. In his version, the city was saved not by divine intervention but by a crossbow dart that killed Capaneus (4, 21). This is clearly a Christian rationalization of a siege that can be compared to the one of Rome by the Gauls in 390 BC²³. A siege, which, according to Orosius, is a proof that even the old gods could not protect the Eternal City efficiently (*Historiae Contra Paganos* VII 39).

¹⁸ Sironen 1997, p. 30 and p. 31.

¹⁹ Di Branco 2006, pp. 117-143.

²⁰ On this debate see an extended summary on Di Branco M. 2006, pp. 123-142.

²¹ Di Branco M. 2006, p. 135.

²² Williams S. & Friell G. 1994, pp. 59-60.

²³ Milner N.P. 1996, p. 133

Therefore, Vegetius belongs to a larger group of scholars who simply believe that the empire is in a crisis and that it must seek salvation and counseling into the past. He gives, however, his own Christian answer to those voices that blame for this crisis the new dominant religion. An answer that is not a result of theology or superstition but of pure logic and examination of the ancient legions.

Coming to our second subject, it is interesting to notice that the first book of E.R.M. focuses on the recruitment and training of the new soldiers. According to the prefaces, each book was written after the demand or the presentation of a previous one to the emperor. Therefore, it makes absolute sense that Vegetius starts with this specific topic since it corresponds to the creation of a new army from a zero base. Can we then believe that the acceptance of his works meant that his proposals were also applied and considered as practical solutions? That might be “a bridge too far”. Vegetius’ point of view is totally antiquitarian and based on the works of very early scholars, like Arrian and Frontinus. As a Spaniard, Theodosius would have enjoyed possible connections to a glorious past, shared with Trajan and Hadrian, but his experience would prevent him from turning back, as Arrian’s doctrines (*Ἐκταζις κατὰ Ἀλανῶν*).

As far as it concerns Theodosius’ sons, they were controlled by their courts and their advisors. Though they wished to reduce the influence of the *foederati*²⁴, this could never happen with tactics of an open battle, difficult maneuvers, and by ignoring the cavalry (II 14). Even the weapons had changed due to the ever-changing needs of warfare. That time, using the shorter *gladius* instead of the longer *spatha* and striking with the point instead of the edge (I, 12) were totally insufficient tactics against mounted charges and quite unfamiliar to the Late Roman legionary. This legionary had insufficient training in a single combat duel and was no match for the tall and strong invaders from the North. As we can also see in various reliefs, the eastern armies after Theodosius preferred the spear and not the sword as the main weapon of the infantry²⁵, thus enabling it to engage easier cavalry attacks from Goths, Huns, Persians, or Slavs.

What would have interested everyone, though, would have been the recruitment suggestions. The author urges seeking soldiers from the countryside instead of the urban centers where a big amount of the population had fled during the barbaric plunders (I, 2-3). Theodosius indeed is praised for filling once more Thrace with farmers instead of corpses (Themistius, Λόγ. 16, 212b: 303, 6/7) as a consequence of the peace treaties with warlords from 380 to 383 AD. Of course, Vegetius, if he was writing before 395 and in accordance with the imperial propaganda, he could not have foreseen the new devastation of Thrace and Achaia that occurred when Alaric rebelled once more, after Frigidus. If not, then he is possibly referring to the rural areas in Asia, such as Isauria. Whatever it was, the empire, as it is attested in the Theodosian Code as well, tried its best to recruit as many as possible from the fields and to keep the people at a fairly distance from the major cities. Not only because of the

²⁴ Karagiannopoulos I. 2001, p. 89.

²⁵ Elton H. 1996, p. 110.

“softness” of the urban masses but also due to the need of keeping specific professions out of the legions. As it was proposed by Veg. (I.7) and attested in the Cod. Theod. (7.13.8. AD 380) Degraded professions (e.g., bakers or brothel-workers) should not be allowed to enter the army.

At the end of the first book, there can be found instructions, which are very valuable for modern archaeologists, for building a field camp. However, those instructions will be completely ignored in tactical books like the late 6th century *Strategikon* of Maurice, although this author/general/emperor had read Vegetius and showed a great interest in the above subjects (Str. 12.B). His approach, however, is completely different and in accordance with his time.

Coming to the second book, there is a presentation of all the ranks, the battle arrangements, the administration, and the duties within the legion. A book with an antiquarian character, a very valuable tool for us today, but with very few ideas to offer to any Late Roman or Byzantine general. The introduction of so many new units, weapons, and ranks had altered the ranking system inside the legion. The officers were also acting as local authorities, the allied tribes with their own warlords and “captains” were fighting next to the legions – or even replacing them – and the imperial bureaucracy had largely incorporated the army as its tool²⁶.

Chapters 15 to 18 of this book, however, are worthy of discussion. They deal with battle formations of the ancient legion. Contemporary generals would, of course, find as obsolete the manipular system with the *principes* and the *triarii*, and, as we know for certain from the entirety of Maurice’s *Strategikon*, early Byzantine armies were far more homogenous than the pre-Marian legions. They were, however, lined in formations which allowed them to engage the enemy on different fronts, in case of an overrunning of their flanks from cavalry. What Vegetius describes as standing like a wall of iron (II,17) can be compared to the *fulcon* formation in the 16th chapter of the 12th book of Maurice. If we take a closer look at this particular book, we can see that there is a very close relation of his chapters and the work of Vegetius. But the suggestions that we receive are a lot different. We can only imagine Maurice reading his own copy of E.R.M. and answering Vegetius with modern tactics from the late 6th century.

The third book of Vegetius is the one with arguably the most impact, and it must have been the most popular one for the centuries to come²⁷. The first eight chapters continue where the second book ended, and so does Maurice as he deals with those subjects as well. In the tenth chapter, however, it becomes obvious that Vegetius writes with the events of Adrianople in mind and explains ways for preparing an army of fresh recruits for its first battle. Historians like Ammianus (31.7.2) approve the guerrilla war tactics that Vegetius proposes, and Theodosius applied during the first stages of his campaigns against the Goths (379 – 382 AD)²⁸. Obviously not as a result of reading the E.R.M. since Gratian, our *terminus antem*, was still alive. Nonetheless, various Byzantine emperors, especially after disastrous defeats, waged war by

²⁶ Southern P. & Dixon K. R. 1996, pp. 39-64.

²⁷ Allmand C. 2011, pp. 33-34.

²⁸ Williams S. & Friell G. 1994, pp. 23 – 35.

constantly harassing the enemy with skirmishes, until their army was ready and eager to fight again. Basileios II, after such a defeat from the Bulgarians, tuned into guerilla tactics for many years before giving the decisive battles of Spercheios and Kleidion. Such instructions are not noted in the earlier texts that Vegetius usually uses as sources, but rely on what 4th and 5th century historians write about the aftermath of Adrianople. We can therefore suggest that this chapter was one of the few that the Eastern Empire could take directly under consideration from him and not from another source. Nonetheless, with the exception of Maurice and probably Leo VI, who still refuse to name their source, the Eastern Empire after the Theodosian era, couldn't care less for the E.R.M. With a brief translation of some of Vegetius' chapters into other authors' works, and in the best case, by taking into consideration his suggestions as articles in the *Codex Theodosianus*, Byzantium seems to provocatively ignore one of the most beloved authors of the Middle Ages.

The “dialogue” between Vegetius and Maurice will last throughout the 3rd book of E.R.M., with stratagems, drills, and tactics against cavalry or other exotic weapons, such as camels, elephants, or chariots. Then, the very famous chapter 26 comes as a conclusion. It is a chapter where various short general rules of warfare are offered to the anonymous emperor, and more or less Maurice has included them in his 8th and 9th books.

As we reach the final part of the E.R.M we have a 4th book divided between siege and naval warfare. The art of sieging was something that the Byzantines always knew very well, and for that, they had indeed studied their Roman and Hellenistic predecessors. Maurice has dedicated his short, 10th book to this subject, where a very discreet comparison can be made with the proposals of Vegetius (cf. IV, 16 with *Strat.* 10, i). We must not, however, disregard the value of sieging warfare as the West did. The Eastern Empire had a long history of sieging and being sieged on the Euphrates border by the Persians. On the other hand, the invading tribes from the north, like the Goths or the Huns, could not harm cities with strong fortifications. Not at least until 410 AD. It is not that his ideas were irrelevant to his era. Vegetius is a careful reader of Vitruvius, but has also in mind events from sieges that Ammianus has already described. He is synthesizing from his sources and from recent events, and what he offers is an epitome of late 4th century sieging technology. However, the arrival of the composite masonry of triple walls in Constantinople or the double walls of Thessaloniki was a game-changing factor. The Theodosian Empire focused on those cities and neglected the needs of their eastern forts and cities. When a century later, Justinian started the renovation of those fortifications, as it can be deduced by Prokopius, his architects started again with Vitruvius as a core reading and then applied to him the experiences from the 5th and early 6th centuries.

Finally, as it was mentioned earlier, the last part of the 4th book of E.R.M. is dedicated to naval warfare. After some brief information concerning the ranks of the roman navy and sea fare, Vegetius suggests on chapter 44 that the crews must not avoid heavy armor while fighting on board, a remark that it is repeated by Leo IV the “Wise” in his *Tactica* (19.13), a strong indication for Vegetius's influence in the

byzantine court, even during the 9th century²⁹. Therefore, we see for one last time that a text of E.R.M. was still in existence in the libraries of Constantinople, and it was still considered worth reading by Emperors who showed a special interest in military textbooks. This doesn't mean, however, that Byzantine scholars, generals, or even the Emperors cared enough for a translation (as if they needed such) and a distribution of a book that, for the most part, offered obsolete and inapplicable tactics for such a vital issue as it was the reformation of the army. They only took what they considered practical at the time or as an idea with a diachronic effect.

To conclude, Vegetius should probably not be seen as a military reformer who really shaped the armies of the Late Roman or the Byzantine Empire. His work is better understood as part of a wider intellectual trend of Late Antiquity, when many writers looked back to the Roman past during a time of crisis and uncertainty. The *Epitoma Rei Militaris* preserves valuable information about earlier Roman military institutions and, at some points, it also reflects the conditions of the late fourth and early fifth centuries. But its strongly antiquarian character limited how useful it could be in practice for the armies of that time. Byzantine military writers clearly knew the work of Vegetius and sometimes used parts of it, yet they did so selectively and according to the needs of their own period. For an empire that, until its final moment in 1453, constantly claimed to be the legal successor of Rome, the relative neglect of this summary of the Roman army should not be understood as a rejection of the past. Rather, it can be seen as a step forward, towards a millennium of new tactics and new enemies, and towards the military realities of the Middle Ages.

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²⁹ Milner N.P. 1996, p. 149.

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