

Thesis of PhD dissertation

Vegetius: Epitoma rei militaris

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The Influence of the "Epitome" on the (Military) Science and Literature of the Medieval Age

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Debrecen, 2012

I. The purpose of the thesis, definition of the chosen topic

"*Books have their destiny.*" It is particularly true of the work, in which this dissertation focuses. The original purpose of the *Epitoma Rei Militaris* (for the purposes of this paper I refer to Vegetius' *Epitoma rei militaris* as "Epitome") was to demonstrate renown for the art of Roman military warfare. "Epitome" utilized glorious examples to lead the Romans from their existing crisis, but the Romans, to whom it was originally written for, were unable to utilize it. 1600 years later, we know that another fate was destined for this work. Some take the view that this booklet did influence military art of the period fundamentally, while others maintain that the impact was theoretical. The author was criticized as being an extractor who made attempts to study military matters without any real military experience. It was the approach that he undertook for history writing to mimic the great Roman military authors of the time as he had no real experience nor was he an actual scholar. His writing is also criticized as trite, obscure and repetitive. The most cited question also belongs here, which is put to researchers: "1600 years have passed since this source of information was written about; what affects does the past have on the 21st century?" After many years research, I determined that there has been a substantial amount of truth in all statements.

Within the paper I formulated the theoretical and practical thesis of Vegetius from a perspective of relevance to the middle ages and how they affect current military affairs. After many years of studying Vegetius academically, and analyzing every part of the Roman warfare, I encountered the Vegetian "principles" many times and concluded that his general considerations are relevant at all times.

Military history of Hungary is rich in traditions, although Hungarian military writing is relatively a young discipline, compared the Western world, and started only after the Second World War as an auxiliary sciences of history. After the political transition in Hungary, with the influence of Western ideas, the research of military history has been improved upon. The range of sources has been expanded; this includes the wider access to Western archives, due to access of the Internet, and the expansion of professional and civic communities, such as researchers of Miklós Zrínyi University of National Defence and Institute of Military History, university students, museums, collectors, etc. With the increase of institutions, we can now deal in deeper details with military history. Researching these topics are not easy, as many are seen as a sensitive subject in Hungarian Culture. Examples of this would be the First and Second World War or the Hungarian Revolution of 1956. The interest in studying previous

history, such as medieval military, has been negated until the Hungarian military writer, Miklós Zrínyi. He wished to renew the military organization of the Hungarian Kingdom through his writings, mainly by the inspiration of Roman samples, such as Caesar, Tacitus and Vegetius. This proposal, as we will read later, was not the only one, but was an integral part of the 16-17th century reforms, first of all had been started in the Low Countries, which aspired to renovate the ancient samples. There is still room on this research field. Zrínyi's research and writings are well-processed, however there is still much to be examined and learned. I feel a summary which focuses on the origins of Zrínyi's principles need updated. The Hungarian connection is obvious, but the historical studies still do not pay enough attention on the exploration of Zrínyi's arguments; and I feel, the knowledge of late Roman sessions should be known for this. As mentioned above, Zrínyi's plan was part of a universal, European wide concept, which might be only understood if we look at the similar initiatives of the middle ages. Considering all of these, I have come to the conclusion that, it is worth studying Vegetius' universal effects, and to approach it step by step by using the results of the Hungarian relations. I undertook only the first task of my dissertation focusing on this model. As I continued by studies, I thought it is worth using the principle of gradience, but on the other hand this proposition might be regard as a Zrínyi-study but not a doctoral dissertation.

As far as motivational factors are concerned, even more aspects played a role. Although during the last years the Hungarian translation of some most well known ancient writers'/military writers', such as Herodotus, Thucydides, Xenophon, Polybius work's were completed, the number of military history-related resources is still unsatisfactory. Zrínyi studied Vegetius in Latin, therefore the creation of a Hungarian translation had not arised. While the "Epitome" had been translated into major European languages in Western-Europe even in the 14-15th century, and e. g. the Hebrew-German or Portugese translations were also completed early on yet, the Hungarian translation was not made until 1963, by László Várady. This translation was not published as a part of an independent volume, but in István Hahn's "A hadművészet ókori klasszikusai" (The classics of the ancient art of warfare), along with the partly translated Frontinus, Onosandrus or Aelianus Tacticus. Even though this Vegetian translation is complete and might be regarded as the most useful until recently, but it is often inaccurate, and moreover, it did not contain comments or explanations, which would be essential to the overall understanding of Roman art of war. An independent Vegetius-volume based on a new translation extended with comments, would be quite useful; but has not presented itself currently. This would be a co-authored attempt, which could not be restricted into the framework of a dissertation. The lack of such book has drawn me towards this

dissertation. I used the Latin, Hungarian and English texts, which could be a guide for further researches.

The timeframe and the syllabus of the topic was given throughout, therefore there was no need for changing the original title of my dissertation (*Epitoma rei militaris: The Medieval Effects of the Roman Warfare*) significantly, apart from some minor clarifications. The usage of more and more sources, particularly the exploration of Niccoló Machiavelli's activity in military science, almost had me add on the extension of the title concentrated around the early modern effects. However, I would have increased the scope of my paper with it very much, because, as mentioned above, 17th century military leaders and thinkers should have been taken into account over Machiavelli, who researched a great number of ancient writings. For instance, Maurice of Nassau, Prince of Orange, William Louis, Count of Nassau-Dillenburg or Gustavus Adolphus Magnus of Sweden. Although Machiavelli slips out from the medieval age, most of his theoretical writings come from the medieval warfare. In addition, many of his papers have already predicted the military changes of the 17-18th centuries. At the same time Machiavelli cannot be neglected for that reason, because long before him, in the middle of the medieval ages, a demand arose to renew the military organisation of the Northern-Italian city-states by following ancient samples. Machiavelli's personality framed these innovative ambitions in theoretical level, and chiefly he considered them feasible in practice. Thus I kept Machiavelli to draw into the enquiry by these reasons, therefore the title was not changed.

II. Methodology and sources

The nature of the scrutinized sources and the way to be followed, it seemed to be the most appropriate way, if I combine the chronological and thematic approaches, allowing each unit to the preservation of all historical periods, and understanding of the coherence between wider cross-correlations of the ages. However, because of this complex approach, several chapters or sub-topics often overlapped, depending on or either the issue or the historical periods. This was partly striking in the work of the Eastern Roman Emperor, Maurice's *Strategikon*, which was examined in the second chapter from the perspective of Eastern Roman art of war, in the seventh chapter in the perspective of the Vegetian references. Similar overlapping studies could be found in the genre called 'mirror of princes' as well, which was elaborated in the third chapter, although the main source of the fourth chapter was also a "mirror". The tematical approach became necessary after realizing the great number of the

sources, because I was rather surprised about how the long-term effect Vegetius had on the different genres of literature. Thus, I divided the medieval age into different periods, and took into consideration the most typical genres of the periods.

Although my dissertation is cannot be regarded as a philological essay, I did try to read sources written in original Latin, which were collated with English and German editions and translations. A small number of sources are available in Hungarian, and I indicated every time, if the source has Hungarian translation. Although this dissertation is mainly based on classical and medieval Latin, the sources are not necessary to dive into linguistic problems, because the content of the source is essential for us, and not for the differences were between the classical and medieval Latin in style, grammar, or form.

From the methodological point of view, my primary goal was to integrate the textual references and correspondences. This was the only possible way to prove that the extracters really did quote Vegetius; most of them mentioned the name of the writer. When it was omitted (such as Maurice, Leo the Wise, Isidore of Seville, Venerabele Bede, Alcuin, Machiavelli), I tried to support the existing connection with the typical Vegetian motifs, toposes, or with the correspondence of the Latin words and expressions. In the case of Isidore of Seville, Venerabele Bede, Alcuin, Machiavelli, this method led me to a clear result, because they quoted a great number of sentences, pars and motifs from Vegetius coherently. The value of the parallels met with obstacles in the case of Emperor Maurice, because his textual matches appeared in maxims, which are in addition few in number. The demonstration became more difficult, when Maurice omitted plenty of Vegetian proposals, considered current proposals from the "body of the text", and they were rather built "only" into the "collections of maxims". The philological way of verification was also problematic, because Maurice wrote in Greek and not in Latin. In the light of these considerations the *Strategikon* and the *Taktika* from Leo the Wise was taken in an appendix at the end of the dissertation.

III. The academic achievements of the dissertation

The classical heritage was an integral part of the military and political thinking in the medieval ages, including Vegetius too. It is well proven by the fact that the "Epitome" was cited by the successor states from the very beginning. Sherwood claims with good reason that from the first surviving manuscript called Vaticanus Reginensis 2077 s. VII. and from Venerabele Bede's references that 'till the 9th century the interest toward Vegetius was given

out in the nature-related motifs. It seems to me, however, that this statement needs some more details. In the Western part of Europe Isidore of Seville was the first author who studied Vegetius, and from the 7th century not only by nature-related, but the "Epitome" was turned over by military aspects too. Of course, this affect should not be overestimated. If there was really a connection between Maurice (by him Leo the Wise) and Vegetius, then only a few maxims, which were not promising practical benefits, whilst Isidore of Seville reclined upon Vegetius by four military terminologies. That is, both of them touched on their source marginally as compared with later extractors. However, the emphasis is more on the writer's thoughts could have been built into a military handbook and an encyclopedia. Thus mixing of diverse genres has been started at this time, which were typical on the Vegetian extractors in the middle ages.

Venerable Bede slightly struck out from the early extractors, whose links reflect clear Vegetian effects, however, the lack of contemporary Anglo-Saxon manuscripts and leaving Vegetius' name implies that the writer did not know from whom he cited, or deliberately ignored the name of his source. The academic community is still divided on the issue, but unified in that Vegetius's roll cannot be considered significant, despite the fact Bede cited him three times in his works. These links do not show on the author's personal interests, and preference to interpret the motifs of the Bible and the nature, but that Vegetius played a roll in two Bible-interpretations and a gesta about English history, which supports the versatility of his writing.

The frame of the usability of the "Epitome" expanded significantly in the 9th century. The nature of the educational and reformist atmosphere within Roman writer's work served not only as a model, but also as an authentic precedent for Carolingian rulers about the Christian Roman Empire. The most suitable medium to transmit the sample was the Bible-interpretation, the florilegium and mainly that "mirror of prince", which remained the most reliable genre to bequeath the Vegetian tradition until the end of the medieval age. Alcuin, Sedulius Scottus, Frechulf of Lisieux and Hrabanus Maurus highlighted those instructions of the "Epitome", through the hand they could make legitimate Roman origins of the empire and the Carolingian emperors. On the other hand they could shape the 'picture of the king', which ultimately depended on the prosperity of the whole state. Among them, particularly in the case of Sedulius Scottus' unsystematic references, the attention could be divert to that the author not only by personal interest, but grasped the sentences from the "Epitome" consciously, particularly those, which tried to shape the 'picture of the king' according to the state theory.

The 9th centurian intensive exploitation of the "Epitome" can be explained by more practical reasons. The weakening of royal power, the internal fragmentation and external attacks have led these clerical writers to search for such soldiers same with the Vegetian idea, who convey an impression of a solid, trained and effective army, and who take up arms effectively to defend the interest of the church and the state. Eminently, Frechulf of Lisieux and Hrabanus Maurus aspired to submit to the prince the military theory and practice of the Roman Empire slipped into a "Christian coat", calling attention to the fact that Vegetius's book could be a remedy to the more and more current military problems. The Church could explain the origins of the formed chivalry with Vegetius's Christian-Roman soldiers, perfectly matched to the Carolingian political thinking, and not least to those crusaders' sense of mission, who were marching to the Holy Land. The interpretation of the medieval chivalry with Roman origins, which came forward sharply for example in the field engineering, in the military law or in the culture of French chivalry, has begun now.

Continuing the Carolingian legacy, not even the references made in the 12-13th centuries set aside the didactic and moralistic motifs. Yet the novelty was in that, Vegetius served as a useful basis for the source of longer and much more complex scientific works. The function of the "Epitome" was also expanded: the Roman writer witnessed the social and moral crisis of the Empire, which provided a grip on John of Salisbury to deal with the roll of the army in the state. The image of the state indicated with Roman origins by the very unique organologic motifs reflects both Salisbury's criticism against the court, and his vision about the ideal social system. The writer considered the Vegetian *exercitus* as the hand of the state, and the fact that his ideal soldiers are not even well-trained and effective, but excelled in morality, as Vegetius had emphasized. Besides, the author improved the motif of the Carolingian clerics about the ideal soldiers under the auspices of his own Christian-chivalrous idea.

The Roman writer's decisive roll to be acted the part of medieval scientific literature adds that not only John of Salisbury, but also Vince of Beauvais considered the "Epitome" as the only source of the art of warfare. It can be concluded from the structure of the *Speculum Maius*, that in the writer's view the military science was an existed discipline strictly connected to the history of humanity, which was an indispensable discipline and corolated with other sciences. Vince of Beauvais, who has derived military science also from Vegetius, could be also set in the line of those authors, who traced back the chivalrous warfare to Roman origins.

In the second half of the 13th century, the rediscovery of Aristotle's corpus was highly promoted the theological and political thinking of this era. As a result of this, preserving the

traditional didactic and moralistic goals, accompanied with new theoretical and practical content, the genre of 'mirror of princes' has returned, which took account of Vegetius' word in an all hitherto broader spectrum than ever. Thomas Aquinas, Ptolemy of Lucca and Aegidius Romanus could shape the ideal 'picture of the king' by the Aristotelian philosophy: the owner of the main power should be suitable, wise and humble, who must keep in mind the interest of the source of power, namely people. As long as the ruler and the community were assembled by the Aristotelian model, until this took place, Aegidius Romanus tried to breathe the relationship between the ruler and the army into a solid shape with the help of Vegetius. Aegidius' innovation lay in the fact that, in contrast of John of Salisbury he did not only want to define the roll of the army in the society, but wanted to put on a new basis the relationships between state, army and society, acquired with the whole spirit of the "Epitome". In this very confusing and unworkable theory only Vegetius' message was the most traceable: state must lean on a well-organized and effective army, which will prevent internal riots and reflects the external attacks. The *De regimine principum*, although accused with a number of contradictions, still was the first 'mirror of prince', which tried to establish the complete Vegetian warfare by the practical suggestions and motifs (recruitment, training, tactics, siege warfare etc.)

However, Aegidius Romanus' 'mirror of prince' based on Vegetius was just a prelude of that huge interest, which became evident on the Roman writer in the late middle ages. The development of science, the invention of printing, national translations, and the changes in the military arts, especially in military technology and military law resulted together the renaissance of ancient military science and the unparalleled popularity of the "Epitome". Crucial importance to be considered also that the notaries of the military theory were either in battle noise hardened, professional soldiers (Kyeser, Bueil, the author of the *Pulcher tractatus*), or such scientists and writers (Valturius, Bonet, Pizan, Biondo, Machiavelli), who developed their military knowledge on a serious level. Almost without exception, all of them felt the changes of military warfare, and realized that the condition of the investigation of military art on a scientific way, bases not only on the knowledge of contemporary issues, but on the thorough knowledge of the earlier literature. Questions generated by current dilemmas, and the given answers from the Roman literature reflects on the interlockings of the two ages: Roman siege weapons and those improvements in the military technology; effects of *ius gentium* in military law by Legnano and Bonet; liberation of France and the reform of Pan-European knightly warfare by Roman patterns at Pizan and Bueil. And the Italian humanists, who had faced specific problems, and found so unique solutions, are not exception either:

Roman militia-system based on professional foundations; reactivation of heavy infantry tactics; the battle has a decision roll. It was especially important to deal with the above mentioned authors, because they were no longer motivated by state theory, moralizing, or the scholastic philosophy, but the everyday practice, the personal experiences and the objectivity of the ancient sources. Military science could get out from the several centuries fetter of Church, and stepped on its independent path, whose first stop will be Machiavelli; the last stop will be the military leaders of the Low Countries.

In my dissertation I tried to point out that Vegetius Rhenanus' *Epitoma rei militaris* how and how far affected the literature of (military) science of the medieval age. On the one hand I have proved that the "Epitome" was more than a military treatise. This book was a thousand-year-spanning historical work, a military handbook, a didactic textbook and a moral collection, which made an invaluable impression not only on the literacy of medieval military science, but even on the European scientific literature. The enumerated samples have proved that, after the fall of the Western Roman Empire the interest on the military theoretical science had remained, but its cultivation has been kept on surviving in a much lower level, at first in religious and ecclesiastical texts, institutions, later on literary and paramilitary scientific works. Our authors saw the realization of the theoretical military science in that *Epitoma rei militaris*, which was being aspired to update continuously, the advices to be replanted into the practice. After the examined sources, it appears that in the first half of the medieval age, roughly 'till the end of the 13th century, the Church influenced decisively the development of the theoretical military science: among the authors have written between 400 and 1300, except Maurice and Leo the Wise, all of them were ecclesiastical. Among those nine authors from the beginning of 14th century only Honore Bonet was linked to the Church. The other eight were scientists, soldiers and/or writers. The genres are compared with each other, the picture unfolds before us too, that the focus on theoretical military science, gradually supplemented by the practical segments of military science, was increased and pluralized from the 14th century too: military treatises (military technology, military law, memoir, general military handbook), topographic handbook and two 'mirror of princes'. Even though the same diversity of genres also had before the 14th century, but they were such writings, which had, set aside a few exceptions (the Eastern-Roman and Bizantian military handbooks), religious and ecclesiastical influence (Bible-interpretations, florilegium, 'mirror of prince', compendium, encyclopedia).

My thesis is only a small piece of that vast work, which is still waiting for the Hungarian researchers. This time only the text of the "Epitome" could be glossed, and the most important

extractors could be reviewed, however sorely is needed an updated translation, or a study about the Hungarian connections. In the perspective of international literature, there's also a lot to do; Richardot has already collected around 60-70 Vegetian medieval extractors, however the processing of them has just been started. Vegetius' Italian popularity would demand of a study that analyzes the references therein recorded. Particularly should be mentioned that still a pristine research field is Vegetius' (in a broader sense the ancient art of war) influence on the modern age. To keep them in mind, the aim of my dissertation was not only to call attention, but also to forward the Hungarian research. I could call in many sources, which nobody dealt with: Maurice, Leo the Wise, Isidore of Seville, Vince of Beauvais, Konrad Kyser, Robertus Valturius, Giovanni da Legnano, Honoré Bonet, Jean de Bueil, Flavio Biondo. A new meaning was revealed on Sedulius Scottus' references, and I could refresh Thomas Aquinas' and Ptolemy of Lucca's Vegetian allusions in many points. My essay undertook analyzing the literature often mentioned Christine de Pizan's and Machiavelli's Vegetian connections.

Publications

Publications related to the thesis topic:

Epitoma rei militaris (néhány megfontolandó tanács a sorozáshoz és a kiképzéshez) - Epitoma rei militaris (Some general advices on draft and training) Hadtudomány folyóirat: http://www.mhht.eu/hadtudomany/2011_e.html (11 pages)

Studies:

A katonai logisztika néhány kérdése - Katonai logisztika a római hadseregben (Certain Issues on Military Logistics - Military Logistics in the Roman Army) Studia militaria, Hadtörténeti tanulmányok. Szerk.: Lisznyai Lajos - Kaló József. Debrecen, 2004, pp. 9-39.

Katonai hírszerzés Iulius Caesar hadseregében (Military Intelligence in Iulius Caesar's Army) Jászkunság, A Magyar Tudományos Akadémia Folyóirata, Jász-Nagykun-Szolnok Megye Tudományos Társaság. Szerkesztette: Örsi Julianna, LI. Évfolyam, 3-4. szám, 2008, pp. 87-110.

Élelmezés Iulius Caesar hadseregében (Nutrition in Iulius Caesar's Army)

Juvenilia II., a 2007-es Országos Tudományos Diákköri Konferencia folyóirata. Szerkesztette: Pete László, Debrecen, 2008, pp. 116-129.

Citizenship in Roman Palestine (társszerző Begona Echabe Pérez)

Citizenshipes and Identities Inclusion, Exclusion, Participation (Ed. Ann Katherine Isaacs), Pisa University Press, 2010, pp. 212-215.

Review

Philip Sabin - Hans Van Wees - Michael Whitby (szerk.): Görög és római hadviselés (Greek and Roman Warfare) Klió - Történelmi szemlésző folyóirat, 20. évfolyam 2011/2, szerk.: Orosz István, Papp Imre, Fodor Mihályné, Reszler Gábor. Debrecen, Klió Alapítvány, 2011, pp. 68-72.