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Vegetius, *De re militari* or *Epitoma rei militaris*
In Latin, decorated manuscript on paper
Germany, ca. 1400-1440

viii (paper) + 100 (93 + 7 blank leaves) + vii (paper) folios, modern foliation 1-100, includes seven blank leaves following the text (collation i¹² [-1, cancelled] ii¹² [1, f. 12, and 10-12, ff. 21-23, single, misbound, 10, f. 21, originally followed f. 12] iii-vi¹² vii¹² [-12, cancelled, 9 and 10, now f. 80, pasted together] viii¹² [blank leaves]), no catch words or signatures, on paper, (watermark, Ox-head, not in Briquet, Piccard, online archive, nos. 67317, Sasbach 1433, and 67853, Heidelberg 1410), written in a cursive gothic bookhand in twenty-five to twenty-eight long lines (justification 147 x 95-94 mm.), ruled in ink with full-length vertical bounding lines, and with the top and bottom lines full-across, double rule between the bounding lines added for the running titles, red rubrics and running titles, chapters numbered in red arabic numerals, guide letters for initials within the initials, two-line alternating red and blue initials, opening initial, f. 1, six-line blue initials with red pen decoration, the opening folios slightly darkened, but overall in excellent, almost pristine, condition. Bound in an attractive sixteenth- or seventeenth-century blind-stamped brown leather binding over wooden boards, sharply beveled on the inside, with a slightly rounded-back, four raised bands, and two brass clasps, fastening back to front, front and back covers blind-rolled with two complex borders of vines, fleur-de-lis and other motifs, surrounding a rectangular central panel with interlace and palmettes (roll used for central panel is very similar to roll reproduced in Elly Cockx-Indestege, "L'Atelier de reliure du Collège des Jésuites à Bruxelles, 1630-1685," in *Mélanges d'histoire de la reliure offerts à Georges Colin*, ed. Claude Sorgeloos [Brussels, 1998], p. 175, roll R11, identified on bindings from 1643-1671; see also the bindings from Frankfurt and Worms from the second half of the sixteenth century reproduced in Ilse Schunke, *Die Einbände der Palatina in der Vatikanischen Bibliothek* [Città del Vaticano, 1962], vol. 1, pl. XXIII, Pal. V 1786, and pl. XXI, Pal V 1287), bounded by sets of three heavy rules, edges stained green, front and back covers in excellent condition, with the tooling crisp and attractive, some wear and cracking along the edges of the spine. Dimensions 202 x 146 mm.

This treatise on warfare written in the late fourth century by Vegetius was widely copied in the Middle Ages and translated into French, Italian, English, German, and Spanish. From Antiquity to modern times, it enjoyed great popularity. The present fifteenth-century copy is noteworthy not only for its excellent condition, but also for the careful contemporary corrections to the text; it is besides one of the very few not studied by the modern editor, M. Reeve. Although numerous medieval copies of the text survive, only four are recorded in American libraries, and worldwide very few copies are in private collections.

PROVENANCE

1. Written in Germany in the first half of the fifteenth century, based on the evidence of the watermark and the script.
2. In the collection of Count Wolkenstein-Trostburg in the South Tyrol by the seventeenth century: inside front cover, engraved armorial seventeenth-century bookplate: "Paris, Graff zu Wolkenstein et Trostburg," and printed label, "2."
3. Nineteenth-century stamp, ff. 1 and 80, of the Reichsgräfl. Abensperg-Traun'sches Familienarchiv; a previous catalogue has suggested that it may have been owned by the Austrian field marshal Otto Ferdinand, Count Traun (1677-1748), and his descendants (see New York, Sotheby's, 13 December 2002, lot 56).
4. Recorded in numerous recent sales (Schoenberg Database 761, 1382, 18067, 29344, 29707, 35948, 57146, 93327, 97823): London, Sotheby's, June 25, 1985, lot 68; Dorling, Cat. 114, lot 17, November 28, 1985; Dorling, Cat. 125, lot 18, June 11, 1987; Bassenge, Cat. 57, lot 1045, May 22, 1991.

TEXT

ff. 1-80, *Primus liber electionem edocet iuniorum ex quibus locis uel quales milites probandi sint Secuntur capitula in librum primum. Romanos omnes gentes sola armorum Capitulum 1. [f. 2, text] Antiquis temporibus mos fuit bonarum atrium . . . quia artis amplius in hiis frequentior usus inuenit quam uetus doctrina monstraverat. Flavi vegetii liber quartus explicit. [added:] Vegetius de re militari. [f. 80v, originally blank, now with a fragment of the following folio glued to it; ff. 81-93, blank].*

The *De re militari* or *Epitoma rei militaris*, was likely written in the late fourth century, certainly sometime between 378 and 450, by Flavius Publius Vegetius Renatus, a high-ranking member of the Roman civil service. The empire at that time was under ever increasing pressure from invading armies; the treatise was Vegetius's call for strategic and tactical reform of the army in hopes of defeating the invading Germanic tribes at the Empire's frontiers.

The *Epitoma rei militaris* was the most influential and widely read military treatise during the Middle Ages. Walter Goffart has called it "the bible of warfare throughout the Middle Ages—the soldier's equivalent of the Rule of Saint Benedict." It has been said that King Henry II of England, and his son, Richard the Lionhearted, carried copies of the treatise with them on their campaigns. Rabanus Maurus, John of Salisbury and Aegidius Colonna (Giles of Rome), all included long passages from Vegetius in their own works. The popularity of the text continued into the Renaissance (Machiavelli used it in his writings), and indeed, into the nineteenth century. George Washington apparently carried with him into battle an annotated copy of the English translation (perhaps that of Lieutenant John Clarke translated in 1767 and reprinted in 1996).

The text consists of five books. The first book treats the selection, training, and discipline of recruits. The second book deals with the organization and officers of the legion, the ancient system of promotion, and how to form the legion for battle. The third book deals with tactics and strategy and it was this portion of Vegetius that influenced war in the Middle Ages so greatly. The

fourth and fifth books, both very brief, deal with the attack and defense of fortified places and with naval operations.). The text of the present manuscript is divided into four books, each prefaced by a list of chapters, beginning on f. 1, 15v, 32v, and 62v. There are some differences in the chapters included here and those chosen by the modern editor: book one, chapter fourteen is included in chapter thirteen; the chapter list of book three includes additional chapters following chapters 20 and 22 of the edition, following the tradition of the textual family ϵ ; note that in the text of book three, only the second of these divisions is followed. The text has been carefully corrected throughout in a contemporary hand, which supplies omissions, as well as alters incorrect readings. F. 21rv is now bound out of order; the correct order follows: ff. 1-12v, 21rv, 13-20v, 22-end. Further study of the corrections would be useful to our understanding of how Vegetius was read, perhaps in humanist circles, in the fifteenth century.

The text was extremely popular throughout the Middle Ages, and circulated both in Latin and in many vernacular translations, including English, French, and Bulgarian before the beginning of printing. It survives in over two hundred complete Latin manuscripts dating from the ninth through the fifteenth centuries, as well as in fifty-one excerpts (cf. Shrader, 1979, pp. 280-305, not listing this manuscript, and the recent edition by Reeve, 2004, citing the present manuscript, which he had not seen). The first printed edition was made in Utrecht in 1473. It was followed in quick succession by editions in Cologne, Paris and Rome. It was first published in English by Caxton, from an English manuscript copy, in 1489. The most recent edition is by Reeve (2004), but many other editions, translations, and commentaries precede it. Reeve knew of this manuscript, listing it as Sotheby's, 25 June, 1985, lot 68, but he had not seen it (see also Reeve, 2000, p. 251, citing this manuscript). A complete study of the text of the present manuscript and its annotations remains for future scholars.

Although this text survives in numerous medieval copies, only four are recorded in American libraries (Ann Arbor, Michigan, University of Michigan, William L Clements Library, Hubert S. Smith Collection, MS 1; Boston, Boston Public Library, M 22, New York, Morgan Library, MS M. 364, and Yale, Beinecke Library, Marston MS 102), and, worldwide, only a very few copies are in private collections.

Vegetius's work is filled with maxims that have become a part of our everyday life: "He, therefore, who aspires to peace should prepare for war." "The ancients preferred discipline to numbers." "In the midst of peace, war is looked upon as an object too distant to merit consideration." "Few men are born brave, many become so through care and force of discipline." "Valor is superior to numbers." Coming from Vegetius, "Sic vis pacem parabellum" (If you want peace, prepare for war), is still widely used in contemporary rhetoric by presidents, prime ministers, politicians, and officers in Europe and North America.

LITERATURE

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ONLINE RESOURCES

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"Vegetius, Flavius Renatus" in the *Perseus Digital Library*:
<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/cgi-bin/vor?lookup=vegetius>

The Military Institutions of the Romans (English translation)
<http://www.pvv.ntnu.no/~madsb/home/war/vegetius/>

Epitoma rei militaris (Latin edition)
<http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/vegetius.html>

Watermarks:
<http://www.piccard-online.de/start.php>