

## NOTES AND DISCUSSIONS

### THE DATE OF VEGETIUS

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**F**LAVIUS VEGETIUS RENATUS dedicated his handbook *De re militari* to a Roman emperor. Since Vegetius uses the phrase *usque ad tempus divi Gratiani* (1.20), while a subscription in some manuscripts notes that the text was revised in Constantinople in the consulate of Valentinian for the seventh time and Avienus (pages 165–166 Lang), the work must have been written between 383 and 450. The date of composition within that period, and the identity of the emperor invoked, have long been matters of controversy or uncertainty. More than a hundred years ago, Otto Seeck identified the emperor addressed as Valentinian III and firmly dated the work between 430 and 435,<sup>1</sup> with the subsequent approbation of Karl Lang, who twice edited *De re militari* for Teubner, and whose first edition had identified the emperor as Theodosius I (379–395).<sup>2</sup> Seeck's authority, though powerful,<sup>3</sup> did not secure universal assent, and Christoph Schoener soon impugned his conclusions.<sup>4</sup> Disagreement still continues. On the one hand, works of reference such as Pauly-Wissowa, the *Oxford Classical Dictionary* and the *Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire* adopt a date in the later fourth century,<sup>5</sup> and S. Mazzarino and V. Sirago have marshalled some partially new arguments in its favour.<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, A. H. M. Jones in 1964 assumed the later date when describing the Roman army of the fourth and fifth centuries,<sup>7</sup> and more recently Walter Goffart has restated and amplified Seeck's arguments, setting Vegetius firmly in a fifth-century context.<sup>8</sup> Lest the length and confident tone of Goffart's exposition win too easy credence, it may be

<sup>1</sup>O. Seeck, "Die Zeit des Vegetius," *Hermes* 11 (1876), 61–83.

<sup>2</sup>K. Lang, *Flavi Vegeti Renati Epitoma Rei Militaris*<sup>2</sup> (Leipzig 1885) viii ff.

<sup>3</sup>Dedication to Valentinian III was accepted by R. Grosse, *Römische Militärgeschichte von Gallienus bis zum Beginn der byzantinischen Themenverfassung* (Berlin 1920) 24; 259 ff.

<sup>4</sup>Chr. Schoener, *Studien zu Vegetius* (Prog. Erlangen 1888) 34 ff.; cf. Schanz-Hosius, *Gesch. d. röm. Litt.* 4.1<sup>2</sup> (1914) 194 ff.

<sup>5</sup>A. R. Neumann, *RE* Supp. 10 (1965) 992 ff.; G. R. Watson, *OCD*<sup>2</sup> (1970) 1111; *PLRE* 1 (1971) 763.

<sup>6</sup>S. Mazzarino (in collaboration with G. Gianelli), *Trattato di storia romana* (Rome 1957) 2.542 f.; V. A. Sirago, *Galla Placidia e la Trasformazione politica dell'Occidente* (Louvain 1961) 465 ff.

<sup>7</sup>A. H. M. Jones, *The Later Roman Empire* (Oxford 1964) 642.

<sup>8</sup>W. Goffart, "The Date and Purpose of Vegetius' *De re militari*," *Traditio* 33 (1977) 65–100 hereafter "Goffart"). He stigmatizes most arguments for the earlier date as "based only on careless interpretations of Vegetius' language."

apposite to repeat three arguments in favour of an early date which remain compelling, even though Goffart rejects the first two and ignores the third. Moreover, though at a lower level of cogency, other features in Vegetius' text render the identification of the emperor addressed as Theodosius far more appropriate than an identification as Valentinian III.

First, manuscripts of one of the two classes into which Lang divides the primary witnesses to the text of *De re militari* state that Vegetius dedicated the work *ad Theodosium imperatorem* (pages xi; 3; 5; 32; 63; 125; 166).<sup>9</sup> There is no call to disallow this evidence on the grounds (in any event debatable) that this class of manuscripts "contains many deliberate corrections" in the text.<sup>10</sup> On the contrary, the fact that these manuscripts lack the subscription noting a revision of the text in 450 (which the other class has) *prima facie* implies that the bifurcation of the manuscript tradition had already occurred before 450: one class of manuscripts preserves the subscription which Fl. Eutropius added to its ancestor at Constantinople in 450, the other the annotation of a scribe or editor that Vegetius' addressee was Theodosius. This scribe or editor probably belongs to the first half of the fifth century—at which date he either was or may have been in a position to know which emperor Vegetius addressed. If the name is correct, a fourth-century date follows: no one will seriously wish to claim that Vegetius addressed his work to Theodosius II, a pious recluse who ruled only the eastern half of the Roman Empire.<sup>11</sup>

Second, the emperor is not only credited with "continual victories and triumphs," but saluted as *domitor omnium gentium barbararum* in a context which presupposes that he has himself defeated barbarians on the field of battle:

*quid enim audacius quam domino ac principi generis humani, domitori omnium gentium barbararum, aliquid de usu ac disciplina insinuare bellorum, nisi forte iussisset fieri quod ipse gessisset?* (2 pr.)

This is surely more than the conventional attribution of titles like *victor* and *triumphator* to an emperor who may never have commanded troops in person (e.g., *ILS* 794–798: Arcadius, Honorius, and even Theodosius II as an infant).<sup>12</sup> The noun *domitor* has a strong and vivid meaning, where the verbal force is never lost.<sup>13</sup> Vegetius tactfully acknowledges that the

<sup>9</sup>All statements about the mss are based on Lang's preface and apparatus criticus, with C. E. Finch, *TAPA* 93 (1962) 22 ff.

<sup>10</sup>Goffart 71. On the textual character of this class of manuscripts, see A. Andersson, *Studia Vegetiana* (Diss. Uppsala 1938) 1 ff.

<sup>11</sup>Despite Teuffel-Kroll-Skutsch, *Gesch. d. röm. Lit.*<sup>6</sup> (1913) 3.314.

<sup>12</sup>As Goffart (79) argues, with appeal to Lang (above, n. 2) vii.

<sup>13</sup>*TLL* 5. 1942. It is conspicuously rare among epigraphical examples of imperial titles and honours; significantly, however, Julian was saluted as *domitor hostium* (*CIL* 8.2387), Theoderic the Ostrogoth as *domitor gentium* (*ILS* 827).

emperor has already done what he is about to recommend: had he been addressing an emperor who had never trodden the field of battle, he would surely have chosen a different commonplace to excuse or justify his undertaking.

Third, the description of Huns and Alans as a single race (3.26: *Hun-norum Alanorumque natio*) and the collocation of Goths, Alans, and Huns (1.20: *exemplo Gothorum et Alanorum Hunnorumque*). This combination points to the reign of Theodosius.<sup>14</sup> It was an army of Goths combined with Alans and some Huns which defeated the eastern emperor Valens at Hadrianople on 9 August 378 and then menaced Constantinople (Ammianus 31.4.1 ff., esp. 16.3). It is the Goths, Huns, and Alans whom Pacatus in 389 names as the foreign enemies whom Theodosius subdued on the Danube in the early years of his reign (*Pan.Lat.* 2 [12].11.4; 32.4). And a chronicle records that a victory over Goths, Alans, and Huns was announced in Constantinople on 17 November 379 (*Chr.min.* 1.243). The collocation of these three barbarian races does not recur a generation later. It seems very probable that any Alans who remained north of the lower Danube after 378 were absorbed and assimilated by the Huns within twenty or thirty years.<sup>15</sup> Vegetius' references to the foes of Theodosius suit a date in the 380's far better than a date ca. 430.

The antiquarianism which pervades Vegetius' handbook admirably suits Theodosius as its addressee, for he had an especial interest in Republican history (*Epitome* 48.11–12). Equally appropriate are allusions to the emperor's virtues and attainments:

3.10: By the art of war *propagantur provinciae, conservatur imperium*. An inscription of Canusium alludes to Theodosius' achievements in closely similar language: *cuius virtute felicitate iustitia et propagatus terrarum orbis et retentus* (ILS 780).

4, pr. *A pietate tua innumerabiles urbes ita iugi labore perfectae sunt, ut non tam humana manu conditae quam divino nutu videantur natae. cunctos imperatores felicitate moderatione castimonia, exemplis indulgentiae, studiorum amore praecedis*. All good emperors found cities, show mercy, and respect literature. However, while the founding and refounding of cities by Theodosius can be documented,<sup>16</sup> the disturbed conditions of the western provinces during the fifth century afforded Valentinian III little opportunity to continue the tradition.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, the phrase "examples

<sup>14</sup>Sirago (above, n. 6) 468 ff.

<sup>15</sup>Cf. B. S. Bachrach, *A History of the Alans in the West* (Minnesota Monographs in the Humanities 7, 1973) 26 ff.

<sup>16</sup>Most obviously Theodosiopolis in Mesopotamia in 383 (F. H. Weissbach, *RE* 5A [1934] 1922 f.).

<sup>17</sup>Goffart (85 f.) identifies the *innumerae urbes* as fortified citadels in Italy.

of mercy" may have a specific, as well as a general reference. Themistius (*Orat.* 19, esp. 230a ff.) and Libanius (*Orat.* 1.241) comment on the leniency with which Theodosius in 385/6 punished the perpetrators of a conspiracy against his life.

A final argument may be deduced from the passage where Vegetius argues that proper training enabled Rome to overcome Hannibal despite her many defeats and large losses (1.28). The Roman disaster at Hadrianople on 9 August 378 was at once compared to that of Cannae, with men hoping for ultimate success like the Romans of six centuries before (Ammianus 31.13.19). Vegetius' *De re militari* finds its most appropriate historical niche as part of the debate which the disaster of 378 initiated.<sup>18</sup> As a Christian (2.5; 3.35; 40), Vegetius was committed to optimism: he attributed Roman weakness, not to the abandonment of the old gods, but to the abandonment of ancient methods of fighting.

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

<sup>18</sup>On the intellectual and literary reactions, cf. J. Straub, *Regeneratio Imperii. Aufsätze über Roms Kaisertum und Reich im Spiegel der heidnischen und Christlichen Publizistik* (Darmstadt 1972) 195 ff.; T. D. Barnes, *The Sources of the Historia Augusta* (Brussels [Collection Latomus 155] 1978) 120 f.