Any discussion of strategy and tactics ought to begin with Clausewitz’s definitions of the two: tactics teaches the use of armed forces in the engagement; strategy, the use of engagements for the object of the war. Here we will examine Henry II’s strategy through his various campaigns, including his invasions of hostile territories, use of armies for offensive and defensive land warfare, the employment of ships as support vessels for military operations, and the financing of campaigns. The king’s tactics, his decisions about how to deploy his assets at moments of direct confrontation with his enemies, are best illustrated through study of his battles and sieges. While his tactical choices remained rather constant over his long reign, his strategic vision changed as he advanced in age, and he became less belligerent and more interested in settling disputes through diplomacy. Much of Henry’s historical legacy is unfairly constructed by way of this diplomacy and statesmanship of his later reign. A thorough revision of his military career is therefore necessary.

**High Medieval Strategy and Henry II**

In the Middle Ages there were only a small number of full-scale battles fought by any one particular general, especially between 1066 and the Hundred Years War. Considering the warlike nature of the medieval *ordo* of ‘those who fight,’ this is often surprising to the non-specialist. Military strategy in the period centered instead on defensive logistical warfare. Medieval generals sought the submission of foes through attrition: ravaging the countryside, capturing or destroying supplies, besieging enemy castles, and reducing the enemy’s ability to wage war. Some scholars have attributed this logistical strategy

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2. The standard case studies for our period are J. Gillingham, “William the Bastard at War” and “Science of Warfare,” in *ANW*, 143–60 and 194–207, respectively.
to the De re militari of the early-fifth century Roman author Flavius Vegetius Renatus, whose military manual enjoyed great popularity in the high and late Middle Ages.\(^3\) The number of extant manuscripts is a testament to the popularity of the De re militari: there are more surviving copies of Vegetius dated pre-1300 than the works of Julius Caesar, Livy, Valerius Maximus, and Pliny the Elder.\(^4\) Vegetius advises Roman commanders to employ logistical warfare while engaging in open battle only when there was a clear probability of decisive victory. Medieval armies were particularly suited to such styles of warfare because their preservation was paramount. In an age before recruitment, conscription, and standing national armies, the loss of even a single battle could be a crippling setback. Logistical warfare enabled a commander to acquire provisions and booty with which to feed and pay his army while simultaneously reducing an enemy’s resources.

There is no direct evidence that Henry II ever read Vegetius, although circumstantial clues suggest that he did. His father Geoffrey le Bel may have owned a copy.\(^5\) Perhaps young Henry’s tutor William of Conches plundered Geoffrey’s library for authors such as Vegetius while instructing the boy in Latin, but De re militari did not become a textbook for military training until the fourteenth century. Before then, it would have been supplemental reading at best, perhaps treated as a cousin of the sciences.\(^6\) John of Salisbury copied sections


\(^5\) The accounts are found in Historia Gaufredi duces Normannorum et comitis Andegavorum, 218; and Chronicon Sancti Sergii Andegavensis, 146–8. These are accepted as accurate by K. Norgate, England under the Angevin Kings, 2 vols. (New York, 1887), I: 386; Contamine, War in the Middle Ages, 211; and Warren, Henry II, 38. For the dissenting view see B. S. Bachrach, “The Practical Use of Vegetius’ De re militari during the Early Middle Ages,” The Historian 47 (1985): 240–4 and 250.

\(^6\) Orme, Childhood to Chivalry, 185–9; idem, Education and Society, 173–4. Instead, Henry probably learned through chanson de geste, Arthurian romances, or other such works. For the place of military manuals and independent thematic texts in the period, see J. S. Beddie, “The Ancient Classics in the Medieval Library,” Speculum 5 (1930): 14–15; B. Stock, The Implications of Literacy: Written Language and Models of