It is certainly no accident that literature and war were closely bound in Western culture right from the outset. The *Iliad* (c. eighth century BC) first forged this very strong bond that was destined not only to make war a motif or theme within texts, but as we will see below, also gave knowledge about war its own textual and rhetorical tradition. The tradition of the art of war was in fact a literary tradition: the transmission of knowledge concerning all aspects of war was entrusted to writing and, as such, did not necessarily reflect or attempt to reproduce the reality of the battlefield. For this reason, an analysis of thinking on war as an ethical and technical phenomenon must constantly be combined with an assessment of the literary nature of its transmission, not matter how unusual that may seem today.

We can look at war, and at the knowledge which it generates, as a balance between theory and practice, i.e. between a set of abstract rules and technical logistic applications, but also between an eternally valid historical *exemplum*, which is repeated immutably and cyclically, and a unique unrepeatable event to which tradition assigned the name *fortuna*, almost as if the disturbing elements of the unforeseen, the unrepeatable and what was unfolding could be written off through this definition. Although ancient historiographers, from Thucydides to Polybius, Caesar and Ammianus Marcellinus, at times described the gap between the capacity to foresee – informed by a practical knowledge of the facts of war (*techne* / *ars*) – and the eruption of the unforeseen (*tyche* / *casus*), the Renaissance was undoubtedly the age in which this conceptual tension was developed so fully as to become emblematic of it. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that the ‘art of war’ in the strict sense of the term, i.e. the literary genre of the military treatise, fully developed in this period and not earlier. Over and above the theoretical aspects of the issue, which we have just outlined, it must be said that a vast output of military treatises make even more explicit a widespread interest in matters of war already found in other genres, especially epic chivalric poetry. In a major study, Frédérique Verrier reconstructs the history of ‘military humanism’, seen as a counter-tendency or alternative system of values to the previously dominant chivalric code, by then the long-standing legacy of a mediaeval culture no longer felt to be relevant. The new configuration of military activity had a prominent role in popularising the cult of Classical Antiquity. Ancient generals became ethical and strategic models almost to be used to resist material-type changes – for example, the introduction of gunpowder and firearms – which, wholly in keeping with the development of technical and scientific thought, were transforming the appearance and the structure of battles, albeit in reality much slower than has often been claimed. As Verrier points out, the emphasis on human factors in relation to technical factors and the changed social standing of the soldier, no longer a descendant from noble houses but still equally valorous, highlighted the exemplary dialectic of *virtù* and *fortuna*, widely found not only in chivalric poetry, but also in historiography, biography, correspondences and, of course, military treatises. Humanism permeated Italian military culture and the ancient models were used as an arm against codes of conduct fashionable in the Middle Ages and embodied by the high-ranking knight, who was now contrasted by the figure of the soldier. This was the result of a process of intellectualisation which had taken place through the recourse to *exempla* provided by the Classical texts. Moreover, unlike the other con-
Machines of warfare, in Vitruvius, Architectura, edited by Giovanni Giocondo, Venice 1511, Book x, fols 107v-108r (Vicenza, Biblioteca Cisa Andrea Palladio)
temporary Romance literatures, mediaeval Italian poetry did not produce chivalric poems. In fact war was only adopted as a literary theme from Humanism onwards, when the soldier became a man of letters, and arms were combined in a proverbial and inseparable combination with letters due to the gradual adoption of ancient literary models. Palladio’s illustrations of Caesar and Polybius, to which this book is devoted, must be seen in the context of Renaissance Humanism and the rediscovery of the ancients but also of the individual. As Guido Beltramini comments, Palladio’s illustrations vividly narrate the battles, making them dramatic and theatrical (this was arguably through the influence of Giangiorgio Trissino who, in L’Italia liberata da’ Goti, made ‘visible’ some of Aelian’s military precepts), thus freeing the illustration from the arid pen work which was a constant feature in diagrams included in the sixteenth-century works on the art of war.6

But who were the authors and which ancient texts were most popular and ‘rewritten’ in Renaissance works on the art of war? Before answering this question, we must clear up a possible misunderstanding. Although in Antiquity war provided an inexhaustible source of subject matter for literature right from Homer, we cannot really speak of the ‘art of war’ as a literary genre for Greek and Roman Antiquity, even though historical studies created a corpus of military writers or tacticians a posteriori, presenting them as part of a consolidated unitary tradition. As Giusto Traina points out, often authors who could hardly exactly be called tacticians exercised a great influence on the construction of the Western art of war.7 We thus have the ancient historiographers, Thucydides, Polybius or Caesar, without whose works it would be impossible to reflect on war in the West, but also Vitruvius (first century BC) the author of De architectura.8 Book x of this a remarkably popular work in the Renaissance is dedicated to the problems of military mechanics and Daniele Barbaro’s Italian translation and commentary of the treatise appeared in 1556 with illustrations by Palladio. There are all sorts of other writers, mainly only known to the specialist today, who were also very popular in the Middle Ages and Renaissance, such as Onasander (first century AD), the author of Strategikos, in which he provides a description of the physical and ethical qualities of an ideal commander, and Polyaenus (second century AD). Both authors were translated into the vernacular in Venice and published by Giolito. A number of works on polemology were also handed down and they undoubtedly contributed to a systematic approach to knowledge about war, which was only formalised later. If we wish to retrace the line of ancient authors on warfare, we would obviously have to start from the man who, for us, was the first, or one of the first, in the series, Aelian (Aeneas Tacticus, fourth century BC). All that has survived of his vast output is what traditionally has arguably wrongly been called Poliorketika, which does not actually deal with poliorketika, i.e. siegecraft, but ways of resisting a siege inside a city.9 Around the same time Xenophon wrote Hipparchikos (‘The Cavalry General’), which contains instructions for generals on various aspects of leading an army. Aelian and Xenophon lived in a cultural climate dominated by the Sophists, who wished to organise knowledge in an encyclopaedic approach beginning from a precise presupposition: every form of knowledge and every art, like every virtue, can be acquired through study and practice, and this was even true of valour and courage, the primary
how paradoxical it may seem – no institution devoted to the professional training of generals, who may have resorted to some ‘teach yourself’ writings which, according to Brian Campbell, given their eminently literary nature, could hardly have been taken seriously as an effective aid for battles or in preparing for them. In fact it is difficult to speak of a ‘Roman art of war’, since it was constructed a posteriori by a tradition which saw Roman generals and their glorious military campaigns as the model for all future wars. On one hand, the literature of the Roman de re militari, not only in its surviving form but even as documented through references to lost works, is surprisingly tenuous. In six centuries of history we can only find five works. And this is solely thanks to Vegetius, who cites them as sources. Moreover, these few works do not even seem to be related to each other and belong to various fields, from military law to encyclopaedism, castrametation and military mechanics.

On the other hand, the main contributions to the creation of a Roman model of war came from historians, especially Polybius, Caesar and Livy. Ancient military knowledge thus developed in close correlation to historical or historiographic enquiry, from which the ‘art of war’ drew its greatest strength: the descriptions of exempla, i.e. battles of the past, were the best source of knowledge to be referred to when addressing the subject of contemporary wars. The genre thus developed in the age of the Renaissance on the basis of this elementary method, which brings together, on one hand, the relationship with the ancient world and history and, on the other, also the humanistic, literary and, in a certain sense, anti-technical aspect. But only apparently elementary, this method actually conceals a great cultural complexity. Roman history was taken as a model but what is empha-
reception of the ‘ancient art of war’ were Aelian and Vegetius. In their books they had both formulated models of writing *de re militari*, which were destined to become paradigms for Western thinking on war. They provided the basis for the discourse, in the terms described at the beginning of this essay, giving the art of war a key position in culture and removing it from the dominion of chance and the unforeseen, and therefore of ineffable actions which could not be truly coded in rules. Aelian wrote his *Tacticæ theorіa* in the first decade of the second century AD, and probably dedicated it to Trajan. This was theory, an exemplary abstract position, based on a wide-ranging, perfect knowledge of the Greek-Roman literary tradition, with no historical references, practical details or descriptions of battles or specific places. Aelian describes an ideal army based on universal abstract parameters, applicable to all possible wars, and he admits in the preface that he had no first-hand experience of the battlefield. His aim was rather to treat military matters as a Greek theoretician and to provide a clear and stylistically elegant survey, accompanied by some diagrams, which have survived in a codex of 1330, now in the Biblioteca Marciana, Venice. These features are what made his book a bible for the culture of Western war, a manual for military schools and also a solid reference work for those proposing reforms. Especially on the grounds of its typical process of abstraction, Aelian’s book immediately became the ideal type of military text. Indeed it was already heavily borrowed from by Arrian in his *Techne taktike*, written under the rule of Hadrian in the thirties of the second century AD, and then became the favourite model of the Byzantine military tradition, represented mainly by the emperors Mauritius, author of *Strategikon*
ORDINANZA DELLA LEGION ROMANA.
Tratta da Polibio.

Quegli che stanno al squadrone & tra loro sono puri, sono i Velites.
Il primo ordine di' squadrone, sono le dieci cohorti degli hastati di 120 l'una.
1. Sono le 10 cohorti dei Principi di 120 l'una.
2. Sono le 10 cohorti dei Triarii di 60 l'una.
3. Due bande da i lati delle ordinarie sono due ale di cavalleria di 30 l'una.

MODO DEL MARCHIARE DE' ROMANI.
Tratto da Polibio.

1. Funi e bandi ordinati.
2. Casali e bandi ordinati.
3. Detto corso di loci.
4. Bagaglie di gli astanti con la cavalleria dal lato.
5. Hastati della prima legione.
6. Principi della detta.
7. Triarii della detta.
8. Velites della detta.
10. 11. Cavalleria che segue le bagaglie.
13. Principi della detta.
15. Velites della detta.
16. Bagaglie della detta con la cavalleria dal lato.
17. Bagaglie de' loci che seguono.
18. 19. Cavalleria de' loci.
20. Il corno sinistro de' loci.
4. Hannibal crosses the Rhone; figure vi of Book xx in Francesco Patrizi, De paralleli militari, Rome 1595 (Venice, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana) legend (p. 367): A: River Rhone / B: Hannibal’s army about to cross it / C: Barbarians beyond the river to prevent the crossing / D: Hannibal with part of the army / E: Island where Hannibal stopped / F: Rafts made by Hannibal / G: Hannibal crosses the river upstream from the island / H: Fortified place where he rested / I: Hannibal moves against the Barbarians beyond the river / K: Vessels on which Hannibal ferried the cavalry, with the swimming horses pulled by the stern / L: Boats on which the infantry crossed, downstream from the vessels [with the cavalry] / M: Barbarians attack the said cavalry / N: Smoke raised by Hannibal as a signal / O: Hannibal with all his men ready to cross / P: Hannibal attacks the Barbarians’ tents, setting fire to them / Q: With the other part, he attacks the Gauls from the rear / R: Part of the Gauls which rush to help the tents / S: Gauls save themselves by fleeing / T: Hannibal orders the rest to cross, and sets up tents on the bank.

5. Hannibal’s elephants crossing; figure vii of Book xx in Francesco Patrizi, De paralleli militari, Rome 1595 (Venice, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana) legend (p. 367): A: Two rafts, fifty feet wide, tied together and pushed into the river / B: The other two, two hundred feet long, at the bank, tied to trunks / C: The third two, much larger / D: Row boats which tow the two largest ones / E: Soil which covers them all / F: Elephants which cross in the first ones and then in the last ones / G: Two elephants, carried to the other side / H: Other elephants which fall into the river but manage to arrive all the same.

(sixth century) and Leo vi (ninth tenth century), whose Tactica was translated into Italian by Filippo Pigafetta in Venice in 1586. Aelian, together with Vegetius, was the basis of the Heeresaform, the reform of the armies introduced by the princes of Orange at the end of the sixteenth century in Holland, which included the creation of the first Kriegsschule in Europe at Sigen in 1617.22 The editio princeps, which contained diagrams and other images, was printed in Venice in 1552 by Francesco Robortello, who worked on two manuscripts, one now in the Biblioteca Marciana (Codex Venetus Marcianus 516), and the other, now lost but which was also in the Marciana at the time.23 But, arguably, to an even greater extent than Aelian, Vegetius demonstrates more clearly the completely literary nature of the ‘art of war’. Little is known about Vegetius. Most historians believe he was active under Theodosius the Great, i.e. in the late fourth century, but recently a date in the fifth century has been suggested.24 Besides the historical or philological dispute, the issue of the date is made more interesting by the fact that Vegetius dedicated his work to an emperor, whom he addressed directly, but without mentioning his name. It might be thought that, by omitting some details which would have given his work precise historical connotations, he wished to make his message more universal than would have been the case for a work more closely associated with a specific historical period. Like Aelian, and all other writers on the subject in all ages, Vegetius was not a professional soldier. Neither did he have any first-hand knowledge of the battlefield but is thought to have been a high functionary at court (the manuscripts refer to him as illustris vir comes).25 But this is less significant for our purposes than his intentions in the writing the work. The four books of the Epitoma rei militaris, literally a ‘Compendium of military art’ sets out to offer a concrete practical solution to the situation of decay and abandonment afflicting the armies and their organisation in the late ancient world. But what measures does Vegetius call for to implement a military reform? Nothing other than re-exhuming the rules of past, when Rome rose to rule the world. As we stressed, in this case Vegetius does not wish to be a historian and even less a political interpreter of contemporary military misfortunes. His point of view is specifically military and his subject matter is always within the confines of the discipline: recruitment and formation of the army, construction of encampments and practical drills in the first book; formations and working of the legion according to the antiqua consuetudo in the second; military campaigns and combat techniques on land in the third; fortifications and naval warfare in the fourth. There are some allusions to historical events, but they are so random that scholars rarely fully agree in identifying them. Although there are also some technical-type descriptions in the treatment, the work is undoubtedly focused on the commander (dux) and his role, and is certainly not concerned with instructing soldiers in specific practices.26 Vegetius writes:

So the general who has bestowed on him the insignia of great power, and to whose loyalty and strength are entrusted the wealth of landowners, the protection of cities, the lives of soldiers and the glory of the State, should be anxious for the welfare not just of his entire army, but for each and every common soldier also (3.10.4).27

It is worth dwelling briefly on Vegetius’ arguments...
in his book. As we will see, they exercised an enormous influence on the Western art of war, especially during the Renaissance. His aim was to reintroduce to the contemporary military system the ancient rules applied in Rome during the first stage of the empire. This project was to be implemented through writing, which acquires a key role in the process of transmitting knowledge about war. Even the title (Epitoma) is a reminder of the very close relationship the author wishes to have with the past, and especially with ancient sources. Critics have previously dealt at length with the reconstruction of these sources and their role within the individual books in the compendium, but what interests us here is above all the method followed by Vegetius in the process of assembling his material. In fact he does not re-elaborate the various deeds separately but presents them together in a synchronic way, annulling time differences to give them the value of rules, whose validity is only due to the fact that they had come from a written – today we would say literary – tradition. The arguments are mainly based on moralistic-type thinking. The art of war had fallen into decay and was no longer used because of the oblivion during a long period of peace, when soldiers were no longer recruited and not enough attention was paid to training armies and their technical preparation. Vegetius comments:

However, a sense of security born of long peace has diverted mankind partly to the enjoyment of private leisure, partly to civilian careers. Thus attention to military training obviously was at first discharged rather neglectfully, then omitted, until finally consigned long since to oblivion (1, 28, 6–7).

This situation of neglected military structures, however, was not new. Indeed it even is found every now and then in the glorious history of Rome. But the Romans, when they were aware of this downturn, re-established the order of the past through diligent recourse to sources. The results were then translated into practice by the generals themselves:

These skills were formerly maintained in use, as well as in books, but once they were abandoned it was a long time before anyone needed them, because with the flourishing of peacetime pursuits the imperatives of war were far removed. But lest it be thought impossible for an art to be revived whose use has been lost, let us be instructed by precedents. Among the ancients, military science often fell into oblivion, but at first it was recovered from books, and later consolidated by the authority of generals (3, 10, 17–18).

In this passage Vegetius summarises the argument underlying his book and thus points to the justification for his work as a writer. If action is to happen, it requires a model from the past (exemplum), justified by success and destined to repeat its prescriptive power in the future. Mainly found in the historiographic tradition, exempla thus become rules for action in the present with universal technical and strategic criteria. History ceases to be the subject of mere contemplation and intellectual research to become a benchmark, which must be attained by anyone aiming for success. In the Epitoma the repetition and reproduction of the conditions of the past become a subject for technical thinking, confirmed by present action, which is carried out through ars (technical skill) and exercitatio (practice):

For we see no other explanation of the conquest of the world by the Roman people than their drill-at-arms, camp-discipline and military expertise (1, 1, 2).
The logic is circular. The author begins from writing, substantiates actions with exempla, which have also come from a world of books, only to return inexorably to writing. Although the foundation of victory does actually lie in *ars and exercitatio*, the premises are equally important and they are supplied by the *Epitoma*, whose aim is to establish criteria that can always be used: ‘For brave deeds belong to a single age; what is written for the benefit of the State is eternal’ (2, 3, 7).

Behind this claim we can clearly glimpse how technical thinking on war is steeped in literary structures, not only at what we might call the superficial level of the expressive power or style, but also its core of knowledge. Vegetius inherits, justifies and sets up the system of profound interaction between ‘literary’ past and present action, which becomes the axiom of the art of war for the future. In the *Epitoma* we find the language establishing continuity between the written word and the technical action, which will never cease to influence the way of thinking about war in the West. This is why Vegetius’ book must be considered as the first true ‘art of war’, whereby we mean not so much a set of rules and instructions as a literary genre, with its own style, structure and way of arguing, which was to be continually used throughout the ages. This is not the place to go into the book’s wide reception in the Middle Ages. It will be more useful for our purposes to look at how Vegetius’ model worked within the Renaissance art of war, i.e. the literary and cultural context from which Palladio’s work of commenting and illustrating began. As mentioned above, the literary genre of the art of war was a typical product of the humanistic and Renaissance age, as can be easily demonstrated by the striking number of treatises produced in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Italy, very many of which were printed in Venice.

The ancient military tradition, especially as handed down by Greek and Roman historians and tacticians, continued to be the reference model for the treatises: see, for example, *De re militari* by Roberto Valturio (Verona 1472), *Vallo* by Gianbattista Della Valle (printed in Naples and 1521 and then reprinted several times in Venice) or *Milizia terrestre e maritima* (published posthumously in Venice in 1599 with a thematic division in four books similar to that of Vegetius’ *Epitoma*) by Mario Savorgnan, an exemplary figure of ‘military humanism’, since he combined a great knowledge of the classics and the profession of arms. In Veneto circles, we must also mention a book by Valerio Chiericati, which remained in manuscript form; it was of key importance to Palladio, who cites his work. Then of course we have Machiavelli’s *Arte della guerra* and Francesco Patrizi’s *Paralleli militari* and, to end what is inevitably a very simplified list, *De militia Romana libri quinque* (1595) by the neo-Stoic philosopher Justus Lipsius and the *Kriegsbuch* (c. 1600) by Johann der Mittlere von Nassau-Siegen, a founding father of the military reform of the princes of Orange. One fact in particular should not come as a surprise. All of these books and many others written at the same time, like their ancient predecessors, called for a reform of the military structures of their respective ages. In response to the need for a practical transformation of the army, despite the various technical innovations introduced over the centuries and different social, political, economic and cultural contexts, all of these works univocally suggest resorting to the ancient predecessors as a solution. So what we have observed in Vegetius’ work, we can also read in the Byzantine tradition or in Machiavelli, although the latter’s work undoubtedly has a greater philosophical and theoretical complexity, in addition to an unrivalled stylistic and formal depth.
In fact Machiavelli, unlike Vegetius, or his own more direct predecessors, explicitly sets out to give the subject a new form. He does not aim to write a treatise containing a well-ordered series of rules and precepts, but resorts to the dialogue form, more suited to showing the complexity of the discourse on war, and associates the themes with the philosophical tradition of the ancient dialogue, whose greatest exponents were Plato in Greece and Cicerio in Rome. The *Dialogo dell’arte della guerra*, published in Florence in 1521, one of Machiavelli’s greatest works, is the best-known ‘art of war’, celebrated by his contemporaries and by future generations, also through the underground of *damnatio memoriae*, after its author was placed on the Index. In the book Machiavelli stages a meeting between some noblemen and scholars in the Orti Oricellari in Florence. The leading player in the dialogue, the great condottiero Fabrizio Colonna, argues for a radical return to the model of the ancient Roman army as the only way of putting an end to the current crisis afflicting armies. The thematic core of the whole dialogue is already announced in the preface to the work, in which there is a dedication to Lorenzo Strozzi:

> Since I am of the opinion, therefore, from what I have both seen and read, that it would be not impossible to revive the discipline of our ancestors and, in some measure, to retrieve our lost virtù, I have written the following treatise concerning the art of war, as much for the improvement of others desiring to imitate the ancients in warlike exploits, as for my own private satisfaction, and for avoiding the imputation of spending my leisure in idleness. Although treating an art which I never professed may perhaps seem a presumptuous undertaking, I cannot help thinking myself more excusable than some other people who have taken its actual exercise upon themselves. For an error in my writings may easily be corrected without harming anybody, but an error in their practice may ruin a whole state.

The work is introduced as a forum of theoretical discourse on war and its causes, which goes well beyond a description of the practical skills of the professional soldier. As in Vegetius, in Machiavelli we find the formulation of that tension between word and action on which the discursive essence of the genre of the art of war is based. The last remark in the passage just quoted seems to reiterate what can be read in the *Epitoma*:

Secondly, in other matters, as Cato says, mistakes can be corrected afterwards, errors in war do not admit of amendment, because the penalty follows immediately upon the slip (1, 13, 6-7).

The idea of a cyclical past re-exhumed from the ancient books, whose repeatability leaves no room to chance, is the theme of another work which influenced Palladio. At the end of his life, the Neoplatonist philosopher Francesco Patrizi da Cherso wrote two books of *Parallelì militari*, published in Rome in 1594 and 1595. In these works he theorises, under the influence, moreover, of Machiavelli’s thinking, the epistemological continuity between the art of war and the other arts, all of which can be evinced from books. Like Aelian, Vegetius and Machiavelli before him, Patrizi is of the opinion that the man of letters is in a better position than the man of arms to describe the art of war, since he can return to the ancient rules of the Classical authors and interpret them in the most accurate way. Like his predecessors, he declares that in matters of war, as in the other arts, theory is superior to practice.
thus linking up with the Platonic and Neoplatonic tradition. At one point in his work, he claims that each success in war is always preceded and prepared by reading a book. Referring to the most celebrated general of Antiquity, he says: ‘And Eunapius was proven to be right, Alexander the Great would not have been great, had Xenophon not been great.’

Patrizi also tells an anecdote to support his argument which actually features Palladio:

The Vicentine Andrea Palladio, an architect by profession, and Valerio Chiericato who had never seen war in our day, but books by Aelian, and Leo and Caesar, were able to amaze those present. They saw the first disembark the crew and soldiers from a galley in marvellously good order. And then the second had 500 infantrymen do all of Aelian’s military drills in great order and with ease. And I was one of the spectators. And yet they had never been to war, nor were they furnished with great letters.

This anecdote describing the surprising versatility of the ancient knowledge of war seems to be a response – as Alfredo Perifano notes – to the famous novella by Matteo Bandello (i-xl), recounting how Machiavelli, the great theoretician of military art, was actually incapable of deploying troops. Patrizi, who lived at the end of the 16th century, emblematically represents the tensions found in military thinking and writing in his own age. On one hand, we have the advocates of the perennial exemplary value of the ancient tradition, of its repeatability, and in some ways of its a-historical nature, and on the other, the engineers and technicians, bearers and representatives of a new kind of knowledge, impatient with the dictates of the men of letters and inspired by the latest scientific discoveries. In the military field, the gap between the two sides was further accentuated by the introduction of firearms, which led to the restructuring of the army, with an emphasis on the role of the infantry to the detriment of the traditional cavalry, which had been one of the most typical features of mediaeval courtly culture. Moreover, this also speeded up the process of the democratisation of the army. As Verrier stresses, the reversal of roles of the cavalry and infantry and the promotion of the artillery are very closely connected phenomena. Firearms were considered ignoble and diabolical by the aristocrats, who did not wish to dismount from their horses and fight like ordinary foot soldiers, which they would have perceived as debasing and humiliating. But the ancient models were not only found in the aristocratic ideology of war. They also informed the new democratic vision, which was more responsive to technical innovations. The Greek and Roman classics on war were thus the basis of the widespread renewal of armies in the late sixteenth century, described with the controversial term ‘the military revolution’. In the seventeenth century the Greek ‘countermarch’, as described by Aelian, would again provide a noble forerunner for new tactical systems stemming from the use of firearms. But the ancient classics on war were not only used to ennoble and give cultural legitimacy to the expansion of the new arms and the related tactics. Above all they offered them a language and a discursive style, thus ensuring they would be part of contemporary cultural debate. Despite some technological innovations having changed the surface, from the mythical world of the Iliad to the introduction of firearms, Clausewitz and the age of nuclear weapons, discourse on war has demonstrated it possess a surprising continuity and an ancient heart made of books rather than arms.
Koselleck mentions that ‘chance (Zufall), from the temporal point of view, is a pure category of the present’, see ‘Der Zufall als Motivationsstütz in der Geschichtsschreibung’, in R. Koselleck, Vergangenheit. Zur Semantik geschichtlicher Zeiten, Frankfurt am Main 1979, pp. 158 ff. Chance cannot be defined either by resorting to the future horizon of expectations nor seeking past models of it, which would thus cease to be chance. Chance basically remains an a-historic future horizon of expectations nor seeking past models of it, which would thus cease to be chance. Chance basically remains a-historic.


14 For an extensive treatment of this author, see M.T. Schettino, Introduzione a Polieno, Pisa 1999.

15 C. Hale, Renaissance War Studies, pp. 440 ff.


22 Cf. Lenoir, La litterature de re militar’, pp. 95 ff.

23 The translation of Vegetius’s text here and passim is from N. P. Milner, Vegetius’ Epitome of Military Science, Liverpool 1993.

24 So far I have taken up some considerations from the introductory essay to a recent Italian edition of Vegetius (Formisano, Vegetius…).


26 For this works, see Hale’s classic studies in Renaissance War Studies, and Verriets, Les armes de Minerve. See also F. L. Taylor, The Art of War in Italy, 1454-1559, Westport, CT 1973.


31 On Pazzini’s thought and work, see the classic study by C. Vasoli, Francesco Patrizi da Cherso, Rome 1989.


35 Perifano, ‘Penser la guerre au xve siècle…’.

36 See P. Rossa, I filosofi e le macchine 1400-1700, Milan 1971.

37 Verriets, Les armes de Minerve, p. 17.

38 The term ‘military revolution’ was coined by M. Roberts (The Military Revolution: 1560-1660, Belfast 1951). He refers in particular to four factors of change (the adaptation of tactics to changes in the army following the introduction of firearms; the new strategic organisation; the growing numbers of soldiers in armies; greater political influence on the formation and maintenance of armies). The concept