



Sextus Julius Frontinus

STRATEGEMATA

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Strategemata

The Manual of Military Tactics

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Book I

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Since I alone of those interested in military science have undertaken to reduce its rules to system,² and since I seem to have fulfilled that purpose, so far as pains on my part could accomplish it, I still feel under obligation, in order to complete the task I have begun, to summarize in convenient sketches the adroit operations of generals, which the Greeks embrace under the one name *strategemata*. For in this way commanders will be furnished with specimens of wisdom and foresight, which will serve to foster their own power of conceiving and executing like deeds. There will result the added advantage that a general will not fear the issue of his own stratagem, if he compares it with experiments already successfully made.

I neither ignore nor deny the fact that historians have included in the compass of their works this feature also, nor that authors have already recorded in some fashion all famous examples. But I ought, I think, out of consideration for busy men, to have regard to brevity. For it is a tedious business to hunt out separate examples scattered over the vast body of history; and those who have made selections of notable deeds have overwhelmed the reader by the very mass of material. My effort will be devoted to the task of setting forth, as if in response to questions, and as occasion shall demand, the illustration applicable to the case in point. For having examined the categories, I have in advance mapped out my campaign, so to speak, for the presentation

of illustrative examples. Moreover, in order that these may be sifted and properly classified according to the variety of subject-matter, I have divided them into three books. In the first are illustrations of stratagems for use before the battle begins; in the second, those that relate to the battle itself and tend to effect the complete subjugation of the enemy; the third contains stratagems connected with sieges and the raising of sieges. Under these successive classes I have grouped the illustrations appropriate to each.

It is not without justice that I shall claim indulgence for this work, and I beg that no one will charge me with negligence, if he finds that I have passed over some illustration. For who could prove equal to the task of examining all the records which have come down to us in both languages! And so I have purposely allowed myself to skip many things. That I have not done this without reason, those will realize who read the books of others treating of the same subjects; but it will be easy for the reader to supply those examples under each category. For since this work, like my preceding ones, has been undertaken for the benefit of others, rather than for the sake of my own renown, I shall feel that I am being aided, rather than criticized, by those who will make additions to it.

If there prove to be any persons who take an interest in these books, let them remember to discriminate between "strategy" and "stratagems," which are by nature extremely similar. For everything achieved by a commander, be it characterized by foresight, advantage, enterprise, or resolution, will belong under the head of "strategy," while those things which fall under some special type of these will

be "stratagems." The essential characteristic of the latter, resting, as it does, on skill and cleverness, is effective quite as much when the enemy is to be evaded as when he is to be crushed. Since in this field certain striking results have been produced by speeches, I have set down examples of these also, as well as of deeds.

Types of stratagems for the guidance of a commander in matters to be attended to before battle:

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I. On Concealing One's Plans

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1 Marcus Porcius Cato believed that, when opportunity offered, the Spanish cities which he had subdued would

revolt, relying upon the protection of their walls. He therefore wrote to each of the cities, ordering them to destroy their fortifications, and threatening war unless they obeyed forthwith. He ordered these letters to be delivered to all cities on the same day. Each city supposed that it alone had received the commands; had they known that the same orders had been sent to all, they could have joined forces and refused obedience.³

2 Himilco, the Carthaginian general, desiring to land in Sicily by surprise, made no public announcement as to the destination of his voyage, but gave all the captains sealed letters, in which were instructions what port to make, with further directions that no one should read these, unless separated from the flag-ship by a violent storm.⁴

3 When Gaius Laelius went as envoy to Syphax, he took with him as spies certain tribunes and centurions whom he represented to be slaves and attendants. One of these, Lucius Statorius, who had been rather frequently in the same camp, and whom certain of the enemy seemed to recognize, Laelius caned as a slave, in order to conceal the man's rank.⁵

4 Tarquin the Proud,⁶ having decided that the leading citizens of Gabii should be put to death, and not wishing to confide this purpose to anyone, gave no response to the messenger sent to him by his son, but merely cut off the tallest poppy heads with his cane, as he happened to walk about in the garden. The messenger, returning without an answer, reported to the young Tarquin what he had seen his father doing. The son thereupon understood that the same thing was to be done to the prominent citizens of Gabii.⁷

5 Gaius Caesar, distrusting the loyalty of the Egyptians, and wishing to give the appearance of indifference, indulged in riotous banqueting, while devoting himself to an inspection of the city⁸ and its defences, pretending to be captivated by the charm of the place and to be succumbing to the customs and life of the Egyptians. Having made ready his reserves while he thus dissembled, he seized Egypt.⁹

6 When Ventidius was waging war against the Parthian king Pacorus, knowing that a certain Pharnaesus from the province of Cyrrhestica, one of those pretending to be allies, was revealing to the Parthians all the preparations of his own army, he turned the treachery of the barbarian to his own advantage; for he pretended to be afraid that those things would happen which he was particularly desirous should happen, and pretended to desire those things to happen which he really dreaded. And so, fearful that the Parthians would cross the Euphrates before he could be reinforced by the legions which were stationed beyond the Taurus Mountains in Cappadocia, he earnestly endeavoured to make this traitor, according to his usual perfidy, advise the Parthians to lead their army across through Zeugma, where the route is shortest, and where the Euphrates flows in a deep channel; for he declared that, if the Parthians came by that road, he could avail himself of the protection of the hills for eluding their archers; but that he feared disaster if they should advance by the lower road through the open plains.¹⁰ Influenced by this information, the barbarians led their army by a circuitous route over the lower road, and spent above forty days in preparing materials and in constructing a bridge¹¹ across the river at a

point where the banks were quite widely separated and where the building of the bridge, therefore, involved more work. Ventidius utilized this interval for reuniting his forces, and having assembled these, three days before the Parthians arrived, he opened battle, conquered Pacorus, and killed him.¹²

7 Mithridates, when he was blockaded by Pompey and planned to retreat the next day, wishing to conceal his purpose, made foraging expeditions over a wide territory, and even to the valleys adjacent to the enemy. For the purpose of further averting suspicion, he also arranged conferences for a subsequent date with several of his foes; and ordered numerous fires to be lighted throughout the camp. Then, in the second watch, he led out his forces directly past the camp of the enemy.¹³

8 When the Emperor Caesar Domitianus Augustus Germanicus wished to crush the Germans, who were in arms, realizing that they would make greater preparations for war if they foresaw the arrival of so eminent a commander as himself, he concealed the reason for his departure from Rome under the pretext of taking a census of the Gallic provinces. Under cover of this he plunged into sudden warfare, crushed the ferocity of these savage tribes, and thus acted for the good of the provinces.¹⁴

9 When it was essential that Hasdrubal and his troops should be destroyed before they joined Hannibal, the brother of Hasdrubal, Claudius Nero, lacking confidence in the troops under his own command, was therefore eager to unite his forces with those of his colleague, Livius Salinator, to whom the direction of the campaign had been

committed. Desiring, however, that his departure should be unobserved by Hannibal, whose camp was opposite his, he chose ten thousand of his bravest soldiers, and gave orders to the lieutenants whom he left that the usual number of patrols and sentries be posted, the same number of fires lighted, and the usual appearance of the camp be maintained, in order that Hannibal might not become suspicious and venture to attack the few troops left behind. Then, when he joined his colleague in Umbria after secret marches, he forbade the enlargement of the camp, lest he give some sign of his arrival to the Carthaginian commander, who would be likely to refuse battle if he knew the forces of the consuls had been united. Accordingly, attacking the enemy unawares with his reinforced troops, he won the day and returned to Hannibal in advance of any news of his exploit. Thus by the same plan he stole a march on one of the two shrewdest Carthaginian generals and crushed the other.¹⁵

10 Themistocles, urging upon his fellow-citizens the speedy construction of the walls which, at the command of the Lacedaemonians, they had demolished, informed the envoys sent from Sparta to remonstrate about this matter, that he himself would come, to put an end to this suspicion. Accordingly he came to Sparta. There, by feigning illness, he secured a considerable delay. But after he realized that his subterfuge was suspected, he declared that the rumour which had come to the Spartans was false, and asked them to send some of their leading men, whose word they would take about the building operations of the Athenians. Then he wrote secretly to the Athenians, telling them to detain those

who had come to them, until, upon the restoration of the walls, he could admit to the Spartans that Athens was fortified, and could inform them that their leaders could not return until he himself had been sent back. These terms the Spartans readily fulfilled, that they might not atone for the death of one by that of many.¹⁶

11 Lucius Furius, having led his army into an unfavourable position, determined to conceal his anxiety, lest the others take alarm. By gradually changing his course, as though planning to attack the enemy after a wider circuit, he finally reversed his line of march, and led his army safely back, without its knowing what was going on.

12 When Metellus Pius was in Spain and was asked what he was going to do the next day, he replied: "If my tunic could tell, I would burn it."¹⁷

13 When Marcus Licinius Crassus was asked at what time he was going to break camp, he replied: "Are you afraid you'll not hear the trumpet?"¹⁸

II. On Finding Out the Enemy's Plans

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1 Scipio Africanus, seizing the opportunity of sending an embassy to Syphax, commanded specially chosen tribunes and centurions to go with Laelius, disguised as slaves and entrusted with the task of spying out the strength of the king. These men, in order to examine more freely the situation of the camp, purposely let loose a horse and chased it around the greatest part of the fortifications, pretending it was running away. After they had reported the

results of their observations, the destruction of the camp by fire¹⁹ brought the war to a close.²⁰

2 During the war with Etruria, when shrewd methods of reconnoitering were still unknown to Roman leaders, Quintus Fabius Maximus commanded his brother, Fabius Caeso, who spoke the Etruscan language fluently, to put on Etruscan dress and to penetrate into the Ciminian Forest, where our soldiers had never before ventured. He showed such discretion and energy in executing these commands, that after traversing the forest and observing that the Umbrians of Camerium were not hostile to the Romans, he brought them into an alliance.²¹

3 When the Carthaginians saw that the power of Alexander was so great that it menaced even Africa, they ordered one of their citizens, a resolute man named Hamilcar Rhodinus, to go to the king, pretending to be an exile, and to make every effort to gain his friendship. When Rhodinus had succeeded in this, he disclosed to his fellow-citizens the king's plans.²²

4 The same Carthaginian sent men to tarry a long time at Rome, in the rôle of ambassadors, and thus to secure information of our plans.

5 When Marcus Cato was in Spain, being unable otherwise to arrive at a knowledge of the enemy's plans, he ordered three hundred soldiers to make a simultaneous attack on an enemy post, to seize one of their men, and to bring him unharmed to camp. The prisoner, under torture, revealed all the secrets of his side.²³

6 During the war with the Cimbrians and Teutons, the consul Gaius Marius, wishing to test the loyalty of the Gauls

and Ligurians, sent them a letter, commanding them in the first part of the letter not to open the inner part,²⁴ which was specially sealed, before a certain date. Afterwards, before the appointed time had arrived, he demanded the same letter back, and finding all seals broken, he knew that acts of hostility were afoot.²⁵

[There is also another method of securing intelligence, by which the generals themselves, without calling in any outside help, by their own unaided efforts take precautions, as, for instance:]

7 In the Etruscan war, the consul Aemilius Paulus was on the point of sending his army down into the plain near the town of Vetulonia, when he saw afar off a flock of birds rise in somewhat startled flight from a forest, and realized that some treachery was lurking there, both because the birds had risen in alarm and at the same time in great numbers. He therefore sent some scouts ahead and discovered that ten thousand Boii were lying in wait at that point to meet the Roman army. These he overwhelmed by sending his legions against them at a different point from that at which they were expected.²⁶

8 In like manner, Tisamenus, the son of Orestes, hearing that a ridge, a natural stronghold, was held by the enemy, sent men ahead to ascertain the facts; and upon their reporting that his impression was without foundation, he began his march. But when he saw a large number of birds all at once fly from the suspected ridge and not settle down at all, he came to the conclusion that the enemy's troops were hiding there; and so, leading his army by a detour, he escaped those lying in wait for him.²⁷

9 Hasdrubal, brother of Hannibal, knew that the armies of Livius and Nero had united (although by avoiding two separate camps they strove to conceal this fact), because he observed horses rather lean from travel and men somewhat sunburned, as naturally results from marching.²⁸

III. On Determining the Character of the War

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1 Whenever Alexander of Macedon had a strong army, he chose the sort of warfare in which he could fight in open battle.

2 Gaius Caesar, in the Civil War, having an army of veterans and knowing that the enemy had only raw recruits, always strove to fight in open battle.

3 Fabius Maximus, when engaged in war with Hannibal, who was inflated by his success in battle, decided to avoid any dangerous hazards and to devote himself solely to the protection of Italy. By this policy he earned the name of *Cunctator* ("The Delayer") and the reputation of a consummate general.²⁹

4 The Byzantines in their war with Philip, avoiding all risks of battle, and abandoning even the defence of their territory, retired within the walls of their city and succeeded in causing Philip to withdraw, since he could not endure the delay of a siege.³⁰

5 Hasdrubal, the son of Gisco, in the Second Punic War, distributed his vanquished army among the cities of Spain when Publius Scipio pressed hard upon him. As a result,

Scipio, in order not to scatter his forces by laying siege to several towns, withdrew his army into winter quarters.³¹

6 Themistocles, when Xerxes was approaching, thinking the strength of the Athenians unequal to a land battle, to the defence of their territory, or to the support of a siege, advised them to remove their wives and children to Troezen and other towns, to abandon the city, and to transfer the scene of the war to the water.³²

7 Pericles did the same thing in the same state, in the war with the Spartans.³³

8 While Hannibal was lingering in Italy, Scipio sent an army into Africa, and so forced the Carthaginians to recall Hannibal. In this way he transferred the war from his own country to that of the enemy.³⁴

9 When the Spartans had fortified Decelea, a stronghold of the Athenians, and were making frequent raids there, the Athenians sent a fleet to harass the Peloponnesus, and thus secured the recall of the army of Spartans stationed at Decelea.³⁵

10 When the Germans, in accordance with their usual custom, kept emerging from woodland-pastures and unsuspected hiding-places to attack our men, and then finding a safe refuge in the depths of the forest, the Emperor Caesar Domitianus Augustus, by advancing the frontier of the empire along a stretch of one hundred and twenty miles, not only changed the nature of the war, but brought his enemies beneath his sway, by uncovering their hiding-places.³⁶

IV. On Leading an Army through Places Infested by the Enemy

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1 When the consul Aemilius Paulus was leading his army along a narrow road near the coast in Lucania, and the fleet of the Tarentines, lying in wait for him, had attacked his troops by means of scorpions,³⁷ he placed prisoners as a screen to his line of march. Not wishing to harm these, the enemy ceased their attacks.³⁸

2 Agesilaus, the Spartan, when returning from Phrygia laden with booty, was hard pressed by the enemy, who took advantage of their position to harass his line of march. He therefore placed a file of captives on each flank of his army. Since these were spared by the enemy, the Spartans found time to pass.³⁹

3 The same Agesilaus, when the Thebans held a pass through which he had to march, turned his course, as if he were hastening to Thebes. Then, when the Thebans withdrew in alarm to protect their walls, Agesilaus resumed his march and arrived at his goal without opposition.⁴⁰

4 When Nicostratus, king of the Aetolians, was at war with the Epirotes, and could enter their territory only by narrow defiles, he appeared at one point, as if intending to break through at that place. Then, when the whole body of Epirotes rushed thither to prevent this, he left a few of his men to produce the impression that his army was still there, while he himself, with the rest of his troops, entered at another place, where he was not expected.

5 Autophradates, the Persian, upon leading his army into Pisidia, and finding certain passes occupied by the Pisidians, pretended to be thwarted in his plan for crossing, and began to retreat. When the Pisidians were convinced of this, under cover of night he sent a very strong force ahead to seize the same place, and on the following day sent his whole army across.⁴¹

6 When Philip of Macedon was aiming at the conquest of Greece, he heard that the Pass of Thermopylae was occupied by Greek troops. Accordingly, when envoys of the Aetolians came to sue for peace, he detained them, while he himself hastened by forced marches to the Pass, and since the guards had relaxed their vigilance while awaiting the return of the envoys, by his unexpected coming he succeeded in marching through the Pass.⁴²

7 When the Athenian general Iphicrates was engaged in a campaign against the Spartan Anaxibius on the Hellespont near Abydus, he had to lead his army on one occasion through places occupied by enemy patrols, hemmed in on the one side by precipitous mountains, and on the other washed by the sea. For some time he delayed, and then on an unusually cold day, when no one suspected such a move, he selected his most rugged men, rubbed them down with oil and warmed them up with wine, and then ordered them to skirt the very edge of the sea, swimming across the places that were too precipitous to pass. Thus by an unexpected attack from the rear he overwhelmed the guards of the defile.⁴³

8 When Gnaeus Pompey on one occasion was prevented from crossing a river because the enemy's troops were

stationed on the opposite bank, he adopted the device of repeatedly leading his troops out of camp and back again. Then, when the enemy were at last tricked into relaxing their watch on the roads in front of the Roman advance, he made a sudden dash and effected a crossing.⁴⁴

9 When Porus, a king of the Indians, was keeping Alexander of Macedon from leading his troops across the river Hydaspes, the latter commanded his men to make a practice of running toward the water. When by that sort of manoeuvre he had led Porus to guard the opposite bank, he suddenly led his army across at a higher point of the stream.⁴⁵

9a The same Alexander, prevented by the enemy from crossing the river Indus, began to send horsemen into the water at different points and to threaten to effect a crossing. Then, when he had the barbarians keyed up with expectation, he seized an island a little further off, and from there sent troops to the further bank. When the entire force of the enemy rushed away to overwhelm this band, he himself crossed safely by fords left unguarded and reunited all his troops.⁴⁵

10 Xenophon once ordered his men to attempt a crossing in two places, in the face of Armenians who had possession of the opposite bank. Being repulsed at the lower point, he passed to the upper; and when driven back from there also by the enemy's attack, he returned to the lower crossing, but only after ordering a part of his soldiers to remain behind and to cross by the upper passage, so soon as the Armenians should return to protect the lower. The Armenians, supposing that all were proceeding to the lower

point, overlooked those remaining above, who, crossing the upper ford without molestation, defended their comrades as they also passed over.⁴⁶

11 When Appius Claudius, consul in the first Punic War, was unable to transport his soldiers from the neighbourhood of Regium to Messina, because the Carthaginians were guarding the Straits, he caused the rumour to be spread that he could not continue a war which had been undertaken without the endorsement of the people, and turning about he pretended to set sail for Italy. Then, when the Carthaginians dispersed, believing he had gone, Appius turned back and landed in Sicily.⁴⁷

12 When certain Spartan generals had planned to sail to Syracuse, but were afraid of the Carthaginian fleet anchored along the shore, they commanded that the ten Carthaginian ships which they had captured should go ahead as though victors, with their own vessels either lashed to their side or towed behind. Having deceived the Carthaginians by these appearances, the Spartans succeeded in passing by.⁴⁸

13 When Philip was unable to sail through the straits called Stena,⁴⁹ because the Athenian fleet kept guard at a strategic point, he wrote to Antipater that Thrace was in revolt, and that the garrisons which he had left there had been cut off, directing Antipater to leave all other matters and follow him. This letter Philip arranged to have fall into the hands of the enemy. The Athenians, imagining they had secured secret intelligence of the Macedonians, withdrew their fleet, while Philip now passed through the straits with no one to hinder him.⁵⁰