Herodotus' Journal of the Human and Social Sciences	Volume :10 / N°: 03. (2026), p 37-56

The Medical Corps in the Roman Army: Organization and Duties.
الطاقم الطبي في الجيش الروماني: التنظيم والمهام.

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Received 10…/08./2026 *Accepted 11../10./2026*

- **Abstract:**

This study examines the medical corps as a crucial component of the Roman army's military organization, contributing to its continuity and effectiveness under various circumstances. It also highlights the influence of Greek medicine on the formation of Roman medical knowledge and examines how the migration of Greek physicians to Rome contributed to the development of medical treatment and surgery. The study sheds light on the beginnings of professional medical practice within the Roman military institution its gradual development as the Roman Empire expanded and the army's healthcare needs increased. This development was reflected in the establishment of specialized medical facilities known as *valetudinaria*. which represented one of the most prominent features of Roman military medical organization. The study also examines the composition of the medical staff, which included military physicians, assistants, and other healthcare personnel, as well as administrative officials responsible for organizing military medical services, both in peacetime and during military campaigns. Together, these structures contributed to the development of the Roman military institution and enhanced its ability to preserve the health and strength of its soldiers and achieve its military objectives throughout the various regions of the Roman Empire.

Keywords:

Roman Medicine, Military Medicine, Valetudinarium, Military Physicians, Medical Corps .

الملخص:

تتناول هذه الدراسة الطاقم الطبي باعتباره جزءًا مهمًا من التنظيم العسكري في الجيش الروماني، إذ ساهم في استمرارية الجيش وفعاليته في مختلف الظروف، كما تبرز التأثيرات التي مارسها الطب اليوناني في تكوين المعرفة الطبية الرومانية وكيف ساهم انتقال الأطباء اليونانيين إلى روما في تطوير أساليب العلاج والجراحة، وتسلط الدراسة الضوء على بدايات الممارسة الطبية المهنية في المؤسسة العسكرية الرومانية وتطورها تدريجيا مع اتساع رقعة الامبراطورية الرومانية وتزايد الاحتياجات الصحية للجيش، من خلال انشاء مرافق مخصصة للعلاج عرفت باسم الفاليتوديناريوم التي مثلت أبرز مظاهر التنظيم الطبي العسكري، وتبحث الدراسة كذلك في تركيبة الطاقم الطبي الذي ضم الأطباء العسكريين والمساعدين والعاملين في مجال الخدمات الطبية، إلى جانب الموظفين الإداريين المشرفين على تنظيم الخدمة الطبية العسكرية ،سواء في أوقات السلم أو أثناء الحملات العسكرية، وشكلت كل هذه الهياكل مزيجا ساهم في تطور المؤسسة العسكرية الرومانية، وفي قدرتها على المحافظة على جنودها وتحقيق أهدافها العسكرية في مختلف أقاليم الإمبراطورية الرومانية.

الكلمات المفتاحية:الطب الروماني، الطب العسكري، الفاليتوديناريوم، الأطباء العسكريون، الطاقم الطبي

• Introduction

Medicine is one of the most prominent manifestations of the development of human communities. As military organizations evolved within these ancient societies, medical care became an essential element in supporting armies and maintaining their fighting capacity. The Roman army represented an advanced model in this regard, as the Romans recognized the importance of healthcare in ensuring the continuity of military campaigns and the expansion of the Empire. The development of military medicine was closely linked to the advancement of Roman medical knowledge, particularly following the transmission of Greek medical traditions to Rome, which coincided with the large influx of Greek physicians into the city.

The importance of studying the medical staff of the Roman army lies in studying one of the most debated aspects of Roman military organization, particularly because of the limited information available and the lack of consensus among scholars on this subject. The effectiveness of the army did not depend solely on weapons, discipline, training, and logistical support; it also relied on its ability to treat wounded soldiers, care for the sick, and reduce the impact of diseases within military camps and forts. Consequently, the establishment of valetudinaria and the organization of the medical staff provided an important foundation within the Roman military system.

This paper aims to examine the emergence and development of the medical staff within the Roman army, with particular emphasis on its organizational structure. It also seeks to clarify the roles of physicians, assistants, and other personnel involved in military medicine, as well as the role of military hospitals in providing organized medical care.

Based on this, the study addresses the following main research question: How did the medical staff develop within the Roman army, and what organizational structures and functions enabled it to meet the healthcare needs of Roman soldiers? The study proceeds from the hypothesis that the development of military medical organization was closely linked to the development and expansion of the Roman army and to the growing medical needs resulting from the prolonged and widespread deployment of troops throughout the various provinces of the Empire. The organization of the medical staff and the establishment of specialized treatment facilities also contributed to preserving the army’s manpower and thereby enhancing its operational capacity.

Methodologically, the study adopts a historical-analytical approach by combining information drawn from literary, epigraphic, and archaeological sources. It follows a chronological and thematic progression, beginning with the development of Roman medical knowledge under the influence of Greek medicine through the migration of Greek physicians to Rome. It then examines the emergence and organization of military medical services, the establishment of military hospitals, the composition of the medical staff, and the functions performed by each of its members. Through this approach, the study seeks to demonstrate that military medicine constituted a fundamental component of the Roman military system and contributed to preserving the human resources on which the effectiveness and continuity of the Roman army depended.

1. The Origins of Medical Organization in the Roman Army

As was the case with many other arts and sciences, Roman medicine developed by building upon the achievements made by the Greeks in the field of medicine during the Classical and Hellenistic periods. Greek medicine was introduced into Rome and subsequently adapted to suit Roman society and its needs before eventually spreading throughout the Roman Empire. Enter your text here[1].

1.1 Greek Influences on Roman Medicine

Early Romans believed that diseases and wounds affected human beings only through the will of the gods. They therefore regarded the hidden power of incantations and magical formulas as the most effective means of treating them. Physicians had no role in this therapeutic system, which relied on the medicinal properties of herbs and plants[2]. The prevailing belief was that healing resulted entirely from the treatment itself, and consequently, there was no perceived need for the person administering the treatment to possess any specialized knowledge or skill. Within the family, responsibility for overseeing treatment rested with the "pater familias"[3], who either administered the treatment himself or ensured that the person acting on his behalf used the appropriate ingredients, words, and prescribed rituals[4]. A small number of remedies, carefully preserved within families and passed down from one generation to another, constituted the entirety of the medical knowledge available to these communities, which were characterized by a strong social structure[5].

Beginning in the fourth century BC, however, Greek medicine gradually began to penetrate Roman society[6]. Roman nationalism, their strong attachment to tradition, their disdain for foreigners, and their distrust of the Greeks had long kept them distant from influences originating in Greece, where physicians and philosophers were flourishing[7]. Some major developments in the political history of the Greco-Roman world, such as the transformation of Greece into a Roman province during the second century BC, encouraged the Romans to adopt and develop many elements of Greek culture. Medical knowledge was transmitted through manuscripts, physicians, and centers for the professional training of future doctors, although these changes did not occur immediately[8].

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[1] - Hanson Ann., « Roman Medicine. », In Potter David S. (Edited by), A companion to the Roman Empire, Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2006, p. 492.

[2] - Jacob O., « Le service de santé dans les armées romaines. », L'antiquité classique, Tome 2, Fasc. 2, 1933, p. 317.

[3] - King H. Dasen V., La médecine dans l'Antiquité grecque et romaine, Éditions BHMS, Lausanne, 2008, p. 39.

[4] - Jackson Ralph., Doctors and diseases in the Rom an Empire, British Museum Press, 1995, p. 11.
[5] - Jacob O., op. cit., p. 317.
[6] - Cilliers L. & Retief FP. « Medical practice in Graeco-Roman antiquity. », Curationis, 29, 2, 2006, p. 37.
[7] - Jacob O., op. cit., p. 318.
[8] - Aparaschivei D., « Physicians and Medicine in the Roman Army of Moesia Inferior. ». Dacia, t. LVI. Bucarest, 2012, p. 100.

Although most Romans eventually accepted Greek physicians with relative ease, some prominent figures strongly resisted them and opposed their presence in Rome. Cato (234–149 BC), for example, is reported to have said:

"*The Greeks are a worthless and stubborn people… If they bring us their literature, they will corrupt everything, and it will be even worse if they send us their physicians, for they have conspired among themselves to kill all foreigners with their medicines."*[9]

Plinius (23–79 AD) cited this statement by Cato, who regarded the growing Greek influence as a threat to Roman traditions. Although Cato was not a physician, he took pride in his ability to supervise the health of members of his household, whether family members or slaves, using magical formulas and plant- and animal-based remedies. He represented a continuation of ancient Italian folk medicine, in which the gods, particularly the gods associated with agriculture and fertility, were venerated, alongside numerous protective spirits believed to safeguard human beings throughout the various stages of life[10].

As for Cicero (106–43 BC), he regarded physicians as belonging to a socially inferior class, although he greatly admired his own Greek physician. Nevertheless, Greek physicians continued to dominate the medical profession in Rome[11] even during the Imperial period. Most physicians in Rome remained of Greek origin; while some possessed Roman citizenship, the majority were slaves or freedmen. With the exception of prominent figures such as Claudius Galen (c. 129–c. 216 AD)[12], the medical profession did not enjoy high social status in Roman society. Physicians were classified among the craftsmen and organized themselves into professional associations that functioned much like brotherhoods, taking responsibility for organizing banquets and funeral ceremonies for their members[13].

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[9] - Pliny. Natural History. Volume VIII. By W. H. S. Jones, Harvard University Press, London, 1938, XXIX, 7, 14.
[10] - Jackson R., op.cit., p. 10.
[11] - Cilliers L. & Retief FP., op. cit., p. 41 ; Nutton V., From Democedes to Harvey: Studies in the History of Medicine, Variorum Reprints, p. 37.
[12] - Claudius Galen is considered one of the most scientifically trained physicians of the ancient world, having received an exceptional education that was available only to a small number of members of the wealthy elite. He was born in the city of Pergamon (Pergame), which had become part of the Roman Empire from the middle of the second century BC. Owing to the great wealth enjoyed by his family, he was given the opportunity to study under the most renowned teachers of medicine. Galen arrived in Rome in AD 162 and, within a short period, became the physician of almost all members of the Roman elite. However, he left Rome in AD 165, claiming that his colleagues, motivated by jealousy of his success, were seeking to damage his reputation and prevent him from treating his patients. His sudden departure may not have been due solely to these reasons; it may also have been an attempt to avoid the smallpox epidemic that swept through Rome shortly thereafter. When he returned to Rome in AD 169, he was appointed physician to the Emperor Marcus Aurelius and members of his family. Among the duties entrusted to him at the imperial court was the preparation of the *Theriaca*, a medicine believed to be a universal remedy capable of curing various diseases. It consisted of seventy-seven ingredients, including the extract of the opium poppy, and the *Theriaca* was also used as a preventive medicine, taken to reduce the risk of contracting diseases before they occurred. See King H. & Dasen V., La médecine dans l'Antiquité grecque et romaine, Éditions BHMS, Lausanne, 2008, p. 47- 48.
[13] - Ibid., p. 41.

Literary sources also mention a number of medical specialists, including physicians specializing in diseases of the eyes[14], disorders of the ears, gynecological diseases, hernias, and anal diseases. There were also specialists in surgical procedures such as trepanation and lithotomy[15.]

To practice medicine within the Roman Empire, physicians generally needed only a license from the local governor. Julius Caesar (100–44 BC) welcomed Greek physicians, granted them Roman citizenship, and exempted them from taxation. These privileges continued under later emperors such as Augustus (27 BC–AD 14), Vespasianus (AD 69–79), and Hadrianus (AD 117–138). During the middle of the second century AD, however, Emperor Antoninus Pius (AD 138–161), for financial reasons, restricted the number of physicians who were exempt from taxation in the provinces[16]. There is limited information concerning the organization of medical practice, but it appears to have followed the Greek model to a considerable extent. Wealthy patients were treated in their homes, whereas poorer patients visited physicians in their clinics, whether these were located in their homes, in medical shops (*medica taberna*) in the streets or marketplaces, or even in public baths. Drug sellers and other practitioners also worked in such establishments[17].

During the second century AD, women also practiced medicine in the Roman Empire. Evidence for this comes from a funerary inscription discovered in Spain and erected by the husband of the physician Julia Saturnina, whom he described as "the best physician and the most devout of women."[18] Nevertheless, it is difficult to determine whether female physician (*medica*) possessed the same authority and skills as male physicians (*medicus*). It is possible that women were primarily restricted to treating women, children, and slaves, and that married couples who practiced medicine divided their patients between them. A terracotta plaque discovered at Ostia and dating to the second half of the second century AD was found decorating the tomb of the midwife Scribonia Attica. The plaque depicts the midwife seated on a small chair in front of a woman in labor as she attends to her through the stages of childbirth. Her husband, M. Ulpius Amerimnus, was a physician and surgeon[19].

1.2. The Beginning of Military Medical Services

The earliest studies dealing with the application of professional medical practice within the military institution date back to the nineteenth century. These studies generally concluded that the Roman army did not possess an organized medical service. This view, however, came under criticism from the beginning of the twentieth century, when researchers concluded that the army

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[14] - An archaeological discovery at Rheims, France, revealed what is believed to be the medical kit of a Roman oculist dating to the late second or early third century AD. The grave contained standard Roman surgical and pharmaceutical instruments, along with specialized ophthalmic tools, including handled needles, a stamp for preparing eye ointments (collyria), and preserved ointment sticks. The find indicates that the physician specialized in the treatment of eye diseases through both medicinal ointments and surgical procedures, using remedies prepared according to established Roman pharmacological recipes. See Jackson Ralph., op.cit., p. 83.

[15] - Jackson Ralph., op.cit., p. 113- 126.

[16] - Cilliers L. & Retief FP., op. cit., p. 41.

[17] - Ibid.p. 42.

[18] - (CIL. II. 492) Cited in King H. & Dasen V., op. cit., La médecine dans l'Antiquité grecque et romaine. Éditions BHMS. Lausanne. p. 46. ; Allam, M. R. K. (2007). « The Roman Physicians in The Light of Some Private Funerary Inscriptions ». *Bulletin of the Center Papyrological Studies*, 24(1),2007, p. 110- 111.

[19] - King H. & Dasen V., op. cit., p. 46.

had trained physicians capable of treating soldiers' wounds. From the late 1960s onward, scholarly research on the subject increased, contributing to the development of new interpretations concerning the organization of military medical services based on evidence from literary sources and archaeological discoveries[20].

The literary sources dealing with Rome's early military history and its prolonged wars to subdue the Italian Peninsula provide only limited references to the medical aspects of the Roman army. Medical care was extremely limited, and during the Republican period, there were few arrangements for caring for the wounded[21]. Roman military healthcare remained primitive and restricted, there was no organized medical service or physicians specifically assigned to treat ordinary soldiers[22]. Instead, soldiers treated themselves using rudimentary methods, relying on their own remedies and personal experience to care for themselves inside their shared tents[23] or to dress the wounds of their comrades as quickly as possible so that they could return to the battlefield[24].

Depending on the circumstances of the war, commanders could later send wounded soldiers back to their homeland, distribute them among families responsible for their care, or accommodate them in friendly towns or forts[25]. The situation became particularly critical when the number of wounded was large or when a battle ended in a Roman defeat[26]. The fate of wounded soldiers could then become extremely precarious, and many soldiers died who might have survived had appropriate medical care been available. During the Battle of Sutrium in 309 BC, the writer Titus Livius (59 BC–AD 17) reported that, after the fighting ended, the number of wounded who died exceeded the number of men killed during the battle itself[27]. During Crassus' campaign against the Parthians in 53 BC, Parthian arrows with hooked heads inflicted deep and painful wounds on Roman soldiers. Many of the wounded eventually died in severe agony, twisting on the ground without daring to remove the arrows from their bodies[28].

As the Romans came into closer contact with the Hellenistic world, Roman commanders adopted a practice already known among Hellenistic leaders: taking a personal physician with them on military campaigns. Officers and soldiers from the aristocratic classes also had areas in their tents reserved for rest and recovery, where they could seek shelter when exhausted or injured. These

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[20] - Aparaschivei D., « Physicians and Medicine in the Roman Army of Moesia Inferior. », Dacia, t. LVI, Bucarest , 2012, p. 101.
[21] - Scarborough J., « Roman Medicine And The Legions: a reconsideration », Medical History, 12, 3, 1968, p.255.
[22] - Ibid.
[23] - Jacob O., op. cit., p. 318.
[24] - Scarborough J., op. cit., p.255.
[25] - Jacob O., op. cit., p. 318.
[26] - Scarborough J., op. cit., p.255.
[27] - Tite-Live, Œuvres de Tite-Live (Histoire romaine), Traduction en Français, sous La direction de M. Nisard, J.J. Dubochet, Paris, 1850, IX, 32, 12.
[28] - Plutarch, *Life of Crassus*, chapters 24.5 , 25.5. Cited from Jacob O., op. cit., p. 320.

spaces, however, should not be regarded as specialized medical facilities; rather, they were mobile facilities intended for rest and temporary recovery[29].

The first mention of a military physician in Roman literary sources appears in Cicero in the middle of the first century BC. He referred to a soldier who requested a physician to dress his wound, providing direct evidence of the presence of physicians within the army[30]. During the same period, Roman commanders, including consuls and officers, began taking their personal physicians with them on military campaigns. Nevertheless, the Roman army had not yet established an official military medical service[31].

Soldiers continued to treat one another during the first century AD. At the end of the civil war between the emperors Otho (AD 69) and Vitellius (AD 69), Tacitus (c. AD 56–c. 120) reported that, after peace had been established, some soldiers found wounded brothers in their tents, while others found injured relatives and devoted themselves to caring for them[32]. This suggests that certain individuals within the army became known for their ability to provide first aid to the wounded, although they were not part of an official medical service.

2. Military Hospitals (*Valetudinaria*)

At the beginning of the Imperial period, the status of physicians improved considerably, and Romans no longer viewed them with the same degree of contempt as in earlier periods. Physicians gradually moved from serving commanders in a personal capacity to becoming integrated into the state's official administrative and military institutions[33], this development paved the way for the emergence of an organized military medical service within the Imperial army, encompassing the infantry, cavalry, and navy. As Roman expansion continued and military campaigns extended beyond the Italian Peninsula, armies became increasingly distant from civilian physicians living in towns and cities. It therefore became difficult to rely on civilian medical practitioners to treat soldiers. Military leaders, particularly the Emperor Augustus[34], recognized the need to integrate medical personnel directly into the army[35].

The emperor Augustus formed a professional military medical corps at Rome. Realizing that the physicians were key in an empire and especially in an army, he gave all physicians that joined his new army medical corps honourable titles, land grants and significant retirements benefits. During his reign, all army physicians were required to attend the new army medical school, and after that in the third century A. D. both civilian and army physicians were required to pass the medical

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[29] - Scarborough J., op. cit., p.255.
[30] - Aparaschivei D., op. cit., p. 103. ; Jacob O.,« Le service de santé dans les armées romaines. », L'antiquité classique, Tome 2, fasc. 2, 1933, p. 324.
[31] - Jacob O., op. cit. , p. 329.
[32]- Tacitus, The Histories of Tacitus, an english translation By George Gilbert Ramsay, John Murray, London, 1915, II, 45.
[33] - Jacob O., op. cit. , p. 328.
[34] - Bader P. b, « The Identity, Legal Status and Origin of the RomanArmy's Medical Staff in the Imperial Age. », in: 'Greek' and 'Roman' in Latin Medical Texts. Studies in Cultural Change and Exchange in Ancient Medicine, Brill, 2014, p. 43.
[35] - The first medic mentioned in an inscription is Sextius Titius Alexander, who was employed with the 5th Praetorian cohort in 82 AD. See Aparaschivei D., op. cit., p. 103.

school[36]. This was not simply a medical measure; it formed part of a broader imperial military policy based on the creation of a permanent army and the permanent stationing of legions along the frontiers after the completion of conquest and settlement operations. The economic prosperity of the Empire also made it possible to finance major public construction projects, including military medical institutions, which became an essential component of the organizational structure of the Roman army. These institutions were known as *valetudinarium*. They were hospitals specifically established to care for soldiers whose health had deteriorated (*valetudo*)[37], known as *valetudinarii*. Archaeological and epigraphic evidence confirms the existence of an organized medical service intended to care for sick and wounded soldiers in Roman legions. This service consisted of large hospitals managed by members of the legion. These institutions were placed under the protection of the god of medicine, Aesculapius, and his daughter Hygeia, who represented health and well-being[38]. At Novaesium, located in Neuss, Germany, a small temple dedicated to these two deities was situated in the inner courtyard of the valetudinarium[39].

The remains of what is considered the oldest military hospital were discovered at the fort of Aliso near Haltern in Westphalia. It is believed to have been constructed as early as AD 9, during the reign of Emperor Augustus. The Romans employed a traditional rectangular design in which rooms were arranged symmetrically on either side of a central corridor[40]. At the military fortress of Novaesium, archaeologists discovered a large building measuring approximately 90 x 50 meters. It was identified as a valetudinarium, mainly because several surgical instruments, including scalpels and medical probes, were found in one of its rooms[41]. The basic plan of the Novaesium hospital consisted of a central courtyard surrounded by colonnaded corridors. Three sides were lined with two rows of double rooms intended for patients, arranged on either side of connecting corridors, while the fourth side contained a large reception hall. A similar structure dating to the first century AD was uncovered at Vindonissa (Windisch, Switzerland). Excavations revealed a large hall at the entrance and another in the inner courtyard, possibly intended for meetings and dining. Behind the colonnade were several small rooms apparently allocated to administration and nursing or care staff. Two corridors extended from the central passage and provided access to the central courtyard. Patient rooms were arranged along both sides of this central passage, surrounding the building, and could only be accessed through a small vestibule or chamber located between every two rooms[42]. This architectural design was repeated, with minor variations, in several military forts belonging to Roman legions, including Bonna (Bonn, Germany), Lauriacum (Lorch,

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[36]- Allam, M. R. K., « The Roman Physicians in The Light of Some Private Funerary Inscriptions ». Bulletin of the Center Papyrological Studies, 24. 1,2007, p. 105.

[37] - Risse Guenter B., « Collective Care of Soldiers and Slaves: Roman Valetudinaria. », Mending Bodies, Saving Souls: A History of Hospitals, Oxford University Press, 1999, p. 42.

[38]- Campbell Duncan B., « Did the Roman army have a medical corps? Evidence for Medics ,amongst the milites », Ancient Warfare magazine, Vol. VI, Issue 4, 2012, p. 51.

[39]- Bader P. a, « La médecine militaire. ». in V. Dasen (dir.). La médecine à l'époque romaine. Quoi de neuf, docteur?, Lyon, Département du Rhône, 2011, p. 27.

[40] - Risse Guenter B., op. cit., p. 18

[41] - The earliest archaeological discoveries were made between 1887 and 1900. See Campbell Duncan B., op. cit. , p. 49.

[42] - Risse Guenter B.,o op. cit., p. 18. ; Bader P. a, op.cit., p . 27.

Austria), Novae (Svishtov, Bulgaria), and the double fort of Vetera (Xanten, Germany), where numerous surgical instruments were discovered[43] - See figure 01- The design appears to have served several practical purposes. It may have reduced noise and prevented dust from entering the hospital, while also creating an additional barrier to limit the spread of infection when patients needed to be isolated. The spatial division into separate units also facilitated the monitoring of patients and the exercise of social control, both of which were important aspects of life in the army and its hospitals. Patients were probably closely supervised by members of the medical staff or by guards stationed in the corridors. This suggests that the Roman Empire attached considerable importance to the healthcare and safety of sick soldiers within military camps[44].



Figure 01: Medical tools probably found at Xanten Vetera (Germany), now in the Museum of Pre-History and Early History, Berlin.

Campbell Duncan B., op. cit., p. 50.

Hygiene and sanitation were regularly practiced in all military encampments, especially hospitals. Roman physicians took steps to reduce sepsis and separated sick and wounded soldiers in the hospital wards to minimize contagious from spreading among patients. In the event of epidemics, isolation wards were set up in tents near the hospital. Roman army camps were situated near streams or rivers, away from marshes, swamps and standing water. The hospital bath area was attached to a gymnasium for exercises or massages. A complex system of drains and sewers emptied into streams, rivers. Drinking water for soldiers and animals were taken from water upstream or separate from the waterway used for latrines. Wooden seats for latrines which were dug to a depth of ten feet were situated over the main sewer running round three sides of the building to discourage disease-carrying insects[45].

When there was a large influx of wounded and sick soldiers, or in preparation for a military offensive, cities and territories in the rear received convalescent soldiers in order to free up space in the hospitals for new arrivals. Wagons were also provided for the transportation of the wounded, as reported by Velleius Paterculus, a Roman historian and general who lived in the first century AD

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[43] - Campbell Duncan B., op. cit., pp. 49-50.
[44] - Risse Guenter B. op. cit., p. 18.
[45] - Belfiglio V. J., « Control of epidemics in the Roman army: 27 B.C. - A.D. 476 » International Journal of Community Medicine and Public Health, Vol 4, Issue 5, 2017, p.1389.

and served under the emperors Augustus and Tiberius (AD 14–37), and who is said to have personally benefited from this type of wounded transport[46].

Archaeological studies have also explored the possibility that military hospitals existed within Roman auxiliary forts. Some buildings have been considered hospitals because their architectural layouts resembled that of the Novaesium hospital. Buildings at forts such as Housesteads and Wallsend, for example, have been interpreted as hospitals because they contained central courtyards surrounded by rooms. This interpretation, however, remains controversial because of the absence of direct archaeological evidence, such as inscriptions or other material evidence demonstrating the presence of medical personnel or medical activity. Some similar structures, such as those discovered at Fendoch in Scotland, may in fact have been storage facilities or workshops, which weakens the hypothesis that they were hospitals. At one auxiliary fort at Stojnik in Serbia, however, an inscription dating to around AD 179 explicitly mentions the existence of a valetudinarium belonging to an auxiliary unit, although the location of the building itself has not been archaeologically identified[47].

Permanent teams of physicians served in legionary and auxiliary hospitals. They were supported by assistants, and over time physicians specialized in several fields. Veterinary physicians also cared for horses and other animals[48]. Excavations conducted at legionary and auxiliary forts have uncovered large quantities of medical instruments. At Vindonissa alone, hundreds of such instruments were discovered[49]. Other military sites have likewise yielded medical instruments, including Aquincum (Budapest, Hungary), where approximately twelve medical instruments were found[50]. These discoveries indicate that such sites either contained military hospitals or, at the very least, had medical personnel responsible for caring for wounded and sick soldiers.

3. The Medical Staff

The military institution of the Roman Empire paid considerable attention to the health of its soldiers in order to preserve the army's effectiveness and efficiency. Military life exposed soldiers to numerous dangers. In addition to injuries sustained in battle, they were vulnerable to diseases and epidemics. There was therefore a growing need for a specialized medical staff capable of providing healthcare within the army, both during peacetime and military campaigns. This staff did not consist solely of physicians and surgeons. It included several categories of personnel who performed different functions and who are mentioned in inscriptions and literary sources under a variety of titles, including *optiones valetudinarii*, *capsarii*, and *medici*[51].

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[46]- Baudouin R., « Histoire de la chirurgie de guerre durant l'Antiquité. », Histoire de la Médecine, n.1, 2019, p. 25.
[47]- Campbell Duncan B., op.cit., p. 50.
[48]- Cilliers L. & Retief FP., op. cit., p. 37.
[49]- Campbell Duncan B., op. cit., p. 50.
[50]- Ibid.
[51]- Aparaschivei D., op. cit., p. 103.

3.1. Physicians

The physician was known by the title *medicus*, a term probably derived from the Latin verb *medeor*, meaning "to treat" or "to heal."[52] In epigraphic sources, the word *medicus* was often accompanied by terms indicating the physician's affiliation with a particular military unit, such as *medicus alae*, *medicus cohortis*, *medicus legionis*, or *medicus duplicarius*. Other titles indicated a particular specialization, such as *medicus chirurgus* and *medicus clinicus*, while other designations, including *medicus castrorum*, *medicus ordinarius*, and *medicus castrensis*[53], remain difficult to interpret precisely. Some physicians also referred to themselves as *medicus miles*, meaning "soldier physician." One physician, for example, described himself as *medicus legionis ordinarius*, or "ordinary physician of the legion." In another case, a physician referred to himself as *medicus miles legionis*, "soldier physician of the legion." This suggests that distinctions may have existed among different ranks or categories of medical personnel. As with many aspects of Roman military organization, however, the issue remains the subject of scholarly debate. The problem is further complicated by the fact that some individuals used the title *medicus* without specifying the nature of their service, making it difficult to determine whether they were civilian physicians attached to the army or permanent military physicians[54].

There was no independent medical corps within the Roman army. Instead, physicians were incorporated into individual military units of different types. Conservative estimates suggest that there was approximately one physician for each unit consisting of around 500 soldiers, such as a *cohors*, *ala*, or *numerus*, or for each warship carrying approximately 200–250 personnel[55]. Risse, however, stated that a legion of approximately 6400 soldiers was served by twenty physicians, while auxiliary units had five physicians[56].

Military physicians appear to have enjoyed particular privileges within the Roman army. They were classified among the *immunes*, a category of soldiers exempted from heavy labor and routine duties because of the specialized nature of their work. This category also included the assistant responsible for the military hospital *optio valetudinarii*, medical bag carriers or orderlies *capsarii*, personnel responsible for caring for the sick, and a number of military clerks *librarii*. This classification appears in a list attributed to Publius Tarrutienus Paternus, commander of the Imperial Guard under Emperor Marcus Aurelius[57]. Military medical practice was also financially attractive because enlisted physicians received a regular salary. They did not need to worry about maintaining a permanent clientele, since there were always wounded or sick soldiers and others recovering from illness or injury. At the same time, military physicians were required to possess a high level of knowledge and skill. Practitioners had to be capable of performing complex surgical procedures, often resulting from severe injuries, including setting fractures, reducing dislocations, performing

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[52] - Campbell Duncan B., op.cit., p. 47.
[53] - Aparaschivei D., op. cit., p. 104.
[54] - Campbell Duncan B., op.cit., p. 47.
[55] - Rance P., « Health, Wounds, and Medicine in the Late Roman Army (250–600 CE). ». In : Lee L. Brice (Edited by), New Approches to Greek and Roman Warfare, John Wiley & Sons, Hoboken, 2020, p. 176 ; Baudouin R. (2019), « Histoire de la chirurgie de guerre durant l'Antiquité. », Histoire de la Médecine, 2019, n.1, p. 25.
[56]- Risse Guenter B., op. cit., p. 21.
[57]- Campbell Duncan B., op.cit., p. 47.

trepanation, and amputating limbs. They were also responsible for the daily care of soldiers suffering from diseases, epidemics, or physical ailments[58].

One of the physician's duties was also to examine soldiers applying for military service. The physicians examined the face, eyes, pulse, body temperature, respiration, feces, sputum, and urine, in addition to assessing the range and function of joint movement and conducting other tests. If the applicant passed the physical examination, he appeared before a board of officers, which included one or more physicians. The Selection Board questioned the applicant in order to assess his physical, mental, and moral fitness[59].

In order to establish an effective medical service, the army had to recruit qualified medical personnel. It appears that three main methods were used to achieve this. The first was the temporary recruitment of civilian physicians[60] by incorporating them into military units under long-term contracts. These physicians then became regular soldiers and acquired the same legal status as other members of their unit. Funerary inscriptions provide evidence of physicians in their twenties who served for relatively short periods, ranging from seventeen days to five years. This suggests that they had received medical training before joining the army[61]. The second method involved contracting civilian physicians for a specified period. These individuals did not become soldiers in the strict legal sense but were paid according to an employment contract whose duration and conditions varied according to each case and according to the needs and circumstances of the army. This method was used when necessary, particularly when the number of military medical personnel was insufficient. Another recruitment method involved training ordinary soldiers in medical practice within the military hospital at the camp. They were trained by qualified medical personnel serving in the army. In this way, physicians were prepared who combined the status of *medicus* with that of *miles*, that is, physician and soldier at the same time[62]. These different recruitment mechanisms responded to the army's changing needs in terms of troop numbers and geographical deployment[63].

After completing their years of military service, which varied from one individual to another, some military physicians were able to remain in the army because their assistance and experience were highly valued despite their advancing age. They could continue treating the wounded and sick and could also train soldiers who aspired to become physicians. Those who chose to leave the army continued to practice medicine in civilian life, having acquired numerous techniques and skills during their years of service. Their training was probably not significantly different from that of civilian physicians. It is likely that a physician who worked in the house of a surgeon (*chirurgo del*

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[58] - Bader P. b, op. cit., p p. 53- 54.
[59] - Belfiglio V. J., op. cit., p.1389.
[60] - Green T. L. , A comparative study of Roman military medical care from the beginning of the Republic until the end of the Principate 509 BC-AD 284, PhD thesis for obtaining a PhD degree in Philosophy, The Department of Ancient History and Archaeology: Macquarie University, Australia, 2025, p.119.
[61] - Bader P. b, op. cit., p. 45.
[62] - Ibid., p. 46.
[63] - Rance P., op. cit., p. 176.

domus) in the city of Rimini, named Eutyches according to a graffito, had received his training in the army. His military experience would have provided him with extensive knowledge of surgery and bone treatment, as suggested by the large number of medical instruments discovered at the site[64]. Moreover, a funerary inscription from Viterbo describes the professional career of Marcus Ulpius [Tele]sporus, who initially served as a physician in a cavalry unit belonging to an auxiliary cohort in Upper Germania (Germania Superior), and later in Mauretania Tingitana. He eventually concluded his medical career in civilian life in the city of Ferentium, near Rome[65].

Epigraphic evidence also confirms the existence of specialized physicians alongside those who performed the functions of general practitioners. Gaius Terentius Symphorus, for example, bore the title *medicus chirurgus*, meaning "surgeon physician," while Tiberius Claudius Iulianus was identified as *medicus clinicus*, that is, a clinical physician responsible for treating patients confined to their beds in the hospital[66]. There was also a *medicus ocularius*, a physician specializing in diseases of the eyes[67]. There was also a specialized group of physicians known as *vulnerarii*, who were responsible for treating wounds and injuries sustained in combat[68].

3.2 Physicians Receiving Double Pay (*duplicarii medici*)

All physicians known to have served in the Roman fleet, without exception, bore the title *duplicarii medici*, meaning "physicians receiving double pay." This clearly indicates that their skills and experience were highly valued and that their duties were considered particularly dangerous[69]. Inscriptions often mention the name of the ship on which they served and indicate that they received twice the salary of an ordinary soldier[70]. One such naval physician was Marcus Satrius Longinus, who served as a *duplicarius medicus* aboard the warship *Cupid*, a trireme belonging to the naval base at Misenum on the Bay of Naples[71]. It appears that one medical assistant was assigned to each ship to meet the medical needs of its crew. So far, however, there is no evidence proving the presence of other medical personnel aboard the ships. It is nevertheless possible that each fleet had its own military physician and assistants stationed at the coastal base. One example is the ophthalmologist (*medicus ocularius*) named Axius, whose eye ointment was mentioned by Galen. There is also no evidence that physicians serving in other branches of the armed forces carried the title *duplicarius*. It is possible that physicians differed in rank and organization according to the type of military unit in which they served. The ship's physician, who had to perform his duties alone, may therefore have enjoyed a special status that distinguished him from his counterparts in land-based units[72].

3. 3. Medicus Ordinarius

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[64] - Bader P. b, op. cit., p. 54.
[65] - Bader P. a, op. cit., p . 27.
[66] - Davies R. W., « The medici of the Roman armed forces. », Epigraphische Studien, , Vol. 8, 1969, p. 88.
[67] - Rance P., op. cit., p. 176.
[68] - Baudouin R., « Histoire de la chirurgie de guerre durant l'Antiquité. », Histoire de la Médecine, n. 1, 2019, p. 25.
[69]- Rance P., op. cit., p. 173.
[70]- Campbell Duncan B., op.cit., p. 47.
[71]- Ibid.
[72]- Davies R. W., op. cit., p. 92.

Some physicians were known as *medicus ordinarius*. They may have wished to distinguish themselves from other physicians, although the precise nature of this distinction remains uncertain. Modern scholars have interpreted the term *ordinarius* in different ways. One possibility is that *ordinarius* referred to a physician who served among the regular soldiers (*militat ordine*). This interpretation is supported by the fact that the title *ordinarius medicus* is found both in auxiliary units (*auxilia*) and in the regular legions[73].

However, this description would reduce the *medicus ordinarius* to the status of an ordinary military medical assistant. The main objection to this view is that, when used independently in a military context, *ordinarius* was regarded as synonymous with the military rank of *centurion*. The term was sometimes even used to denote the word *centurio* itself. Gaius Papirius Aelianus, from the Third Augusta Legion (*Legio III Augusta*) at Lambaesis, described himself as an *ordinarius medicus*. He died at the age of eighty-five years, seven months, and fifteen days. It seems unlikely that a medical assistant of a low rank would have remained in the army until such an advanced age, or even that he would have entered military service at such a late stage of life. For this reason, some scholars have argued that the *ordinarius medicus* enjoyed a higher status than the ordinary physician, and may even have held the rank of *centurion*, commanding an *ordo* or a *centuria*. Nevertheless, there is no reliable evidence that the *ordinarius medicus* actually exercised tactical command. Other scholars have suggested that the *ordinarii medici* were surgeons serving in both regular and auxiliary units and that they were freedmen or foreigners. According to this interpretation, the title distinguished them from physicians serving in other branches of the armed forces who possessed Roman citizenship. However, the available evidence contradicts this view. The five known physicians who bore the title *ordinarii medici* were all Roman citizens and were of Roman origin. The exact nature of the position of *ordinarius medicus* therefore remains a matter of debate among scholars. Nevertheless, the available evidence tends to support the view that the *ordinarius medicus* was a military physician of higher status than other members of the medical staff, although he was not necessarily a military commander[74].

4. Medical Assistants

Physicians did not work alone. They relied on a team of medical assistants who helped them perform a variety of tasks. Among these assistants were the *capsarii*, who were given this name because they carried

[73] - Campbell Duncan B., op. cit., p. 47.
[74] - Davies R. W., op. cit., pp. 89- 93.

a box (*capsa*) believed to contain medical supplies such as bandages, dressings, surgical instruments, and other materials[75]. They appear to have performed functions similar to those of military orderlies or nurses and assisted physicians[76] in caring for the wounded[77]. The precise medical meaning of the term, however, remains unclear, and there is no conclusive evidence that the box they carried was actually intended specifically for bandages. Whatever the exact nature of their duties, it is clear that these individuals received specialized training. An inscription discovered at the camp of Lambaesis refers to trainees in the position of *capsarius* who belonged to the same professional association as officials of the military hospital, together with an administrative clerk (*librarius*). This provides further evidence of the administrative and organizational character of medical care within the Roman army. It is also likely that a number of other soldiers were exempted from their normal military duties and assigned to assist the sick and wounded. These individuals were referred to as "those responsible for the sick." All of them worked under the supervision of the physician in charge[78]. Alongside physicians, there were also military medical assistants known as *medicus miles*, literally "soldier physician." The addition of the word *miles* indicates that this assistant was not an officer but belonged to the ranks of ordinary soldiers[79]. Inscriptions also provide a small number of references to *medical orderlies*, who were military nurses or assistants to physicians[80]. A dedicatory inscription erected by members of the military hospital staff at Lambaesis in AD 198 or 199 mentions several members of the medical staff, including *capsariorum discentes*[81], that is, trainees in the position of *capsarius*. Interestingly, all of these personnel received equal financial shares, with the exception of the trainees (*discentes*), whose share amounted to half that of their colleagues. This may indicate that their lower remuneration reflected their status as trainees rather than fully qualified members of the medical staff[82].

5. The Military Medical Service

The military medical service also included administrative personnel and individuals responsible for supplies.

- **The *castrorum praefectus***, or camp prefect was responsible for physicians, sick soldiers, and expenditure related to medical care within the camp. This official, however, appears to have played primarily a supervisory role and did not directly manage medical services. His deputy, the *valetudinarii optio*, was probably the person actually responsible for administering the

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[75] - Belfiglio V. J., op. cit., p. 1388.
[76]- Bader P. b, op. cit., p. 47.
[77]- Rance P., op. cit., p. 176.
[78] - Duncan Campbell B., op.cit., p. 48.
[79] - Davies R. W., op. cit., p. 87.
[80]- Bader P. b, op. cit., p. 50.
[81]- Ibid., p. 47, citing CIL 8.2553 and CIL 8.18047.
[82] - Davies R. W., op. cit., p. 83.

military hospital, organizing its activities, and supervising all forms of healthcare provided within the camp[83].

- **Military hospital assistant (*optio Valetudinarii*)**. As noted above, Publius Tarrutienus Paternus included the position of valetudinarii optio among the immunes, that is, soldiers exempted from heavy military duties because of the specialized nature of their work. The rank of optio in infantry units belonged to the principales, a category of soldiers who generally received higher pay because of the additional responsibilities assigned to them. Individuals holding this rank commonly managed particular military institutions, such as the military prison, in the capacity of curator, or supervisor and administrator. Accordingly, the valetudinarii optio, meaning the assistant or administrator of the military hospital, primarily performed an administrative function and was not necessarily required to have specialized medical training. Notably, this position is recorded only in the Praetorian Guard and the legions[84].
- ***Librarius.*** The librarius was responsible for managing accounts and keeping records of patients within the military hospital[85].
- ***Pequarii***. The precise function of the pequarius remains unclear. The position, however, appears to have been associated with transport animals, which may have been used to carry wounded soldiers[86].

6. Marsi

The term *marsus* appears in two inscriptions from Lambaesis. One of these inscriptions indicates that its bearer participated in the eastern campaign during the reigns of Caracalla (211–217 AD) and Elagabalus (218–222 AD). Cagnat connected the name with the Marsi tribe of Italy, which was believed to possess special abilities in taming snakes and treating snakebites. As a result, the term marsus also came to be used in the sense of a snake charmer or a practitioner who treated snakebites through incantations and magical formulas. This raises the question of whether, in the Roman army of Africa, whose soldiers may have been more exposed than European armies to scorpion stings and snakebites, there were specialized soldiers responsible for treating such injuries, or whether these individuals simply practiced medicine by treating comrades who had

[83] - Bader P. b, op. cit., p. 47.
[84] - Campbell Duncan B., op.cit., p. 48- 49.
[85] - Bader P. b, op. cit., p. 47.
[86] - Ibid.

been bitten by reptiles. The author considers the latter possibility to be the more likely interpretation, although there is no conclusive evidence to establish it[87]. This interpretation is consistent with recent studies suggesting that the marsi were specialized members of the military medical staff[88].

7. Seplasiarius

The term *seplasiarius* was used in military hospitals and army camps to designate the person responsible for supplying oils, perfumes, and medicines[89]. As for the sources of these medicines, researchers have proposed several possibilities. Some have suggested that soldiers may have purchased medicinal plants and herbs for preventive purposes or for the treatment of diseases and physical ailments. Soldiers stationed in Roman military forts could also cultivate medicinal plants in order to prepare herbal remedies[90]. Excavations conducted at Novaesium during the 1960s uncovered evidence suggesting that medicinal plants were cultivated around the hospital, including centaury, henbane, and St. John's wort. A large collection of medical instruments was also discovered at the site[91].

The Vindolanda Tablets, discovered at the Roman fort of Vindolanda, provide important evidence concerning Roman medical care in military forts during the period in which the fort remained occupied, from AD 85 to 370. The tablets include lists of medicinal preparations that military physicians dispensed to soldiers[92].

Conclusion

The medical staff was one of the essential components of the Roman military organization, and its development was closely linked to the development of the army and the expansion of the Roman Empire. Its organization evolved in response to the healthcare needs created by the prolonged and intensive deployment of soldiers across different regions. Roman military medicine gradually developed from limited therapeutic practices into a more organized and effective medical system. It included military physicians, surgeons, and medical assistants, as well as dedicated facilities for treatment and recovery. The establishment of military hospitals, known as *valetudinaria*, helped

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[87]- Cagnat R., L'armée romaine d'Afrique et L'occupation Militaire de L'Afrique sous Les empereurs, V.1, Imprimerie Nationale, Paris, 1913, p. 192- 193.
[88] - Campbell Duncan B., op.cit., p. 50.
[89] - Bader P. b, op. cit., p. 47.
[90] - Green T. L., op. cit., p. 235.
[91] - Campbell Duncan B., op.cit., p. 49.
[92] - Green T. L., op. cit., p. 147.

organize the care of sick and wounded soldiers and facilitated their evacuation from combat areas, thereby allowing them to return to military service more quickly after recovery.

The medical staff performed a wide range of tasks. Military physicians and their assistants examined recruits before they entered military service, diagnosed illnesses and injuries, provided first aid to the wounded, performed surgical procedures, and monitored patients throughout their recovery. They also had to deal with infectious diseases and epidemics, which posed a serious threat to the army, particularly given the vast extent of the Empire and the diversity of its geographical environments. In doing so, they relied on a range of preventive and therapeutic measures, as well as various herbal medicinal preparations available at the time.

Thus, the development of the medical staff in the Roman army was closely associated with the development of the military institution and the expansion of the Empire. Rome's continuous wars and the widespread deployment of its armies across distant regions created a growing need for a more organized and specialized medical service. This organization made it possible to provide healthcare to soldiers, preserve the army's manpower, and maintain its continuity and fighting capacity.

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