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Medical Care for the Roman Army on Trajan's Column

Sources regarding the wars between Dacians and Romans have the tendency of rendering the superiority, discipline and good logistical organization of the Roman army. This war machine included compulsorily the members of the medical corps who were in charge of healing the wounds taken during confrontations and of facilitating the return as soon as possible to the battlefield. The stories regarding, on one side, the existence of an obvious preoccupation for their recovery, and on the other hand, their bravery and endurance are also present in the sources focusing on the Dacian wars. Two fragments of Cassius Dio are relevant: 1.) "And when the bandages gave out, he (Trajan) is said not to have stared even his own clothing, but to have cut it up into strips"<sup>1</sup>; 2.) "It was here that a cavalryman, who had been badly wounded, was carried from the battle in the hope that he could be healed. When he discovered that he was incurable, he dashed from the tent and took his place again in the line, and died, after displaying great feats."<sup>2</sup>

From Trajan's column, the impressive ancient monument of Rome, precious information as for how the recovery of the military personnel took place could not miss.

The scene XL (using Chicorius' numbering) is very interesting in this regard. In historiography there is a vivid debate as for the rank of the respective military man providing care to his comrade. That he was a *medicus ordinarius* or a simple *capsarius*, that he had a high officer's rank or that he was a simple soldier trying to sooth the pain of the one near him, are problems worth re-discussing. We should not forget the most important aspect which pertains to this monument, more precisely its symbolic value, together with its documentary one. We rather believe that the scene was supposed to suggest the idea of the Emperor's care, through the medical corps symbolized by the respective medic, for his soldiers. Essentially, the human side is thus reached, without removing though, the stoical principles which mastered the military preparation already in the Republican period.

Criton, Trajan's personal medic, who accompanied the Emperor during his Dacian campaigns, represent an additional argument for the attention Roman emperors started giving to the medical assistance and for the trust they had in rational medicine.

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<sup>1</sup> Cassius Dio, LXVIII, 8.

<sup>2</sup> Cassius Dio, LXVIII, 14.2