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# NOTES ON MEDICAL PRACTICE IN SOUTHERN DALMATIA (TESTIMONIES FROM THE EASTERN ADRIATIC COAST AND ITS HINTERLAND)

Gligor M. SAMARDŽIĆ<sup>1</sup>

University of Priština in Kosovska Mitrovica

Faculty of Philosophy

Department of History

Kosovska Mitrovica (Serbia)

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<sup>1</sup> gligor.samardzic@pr.ac.rs;  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7166-2042>

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## NOTES ON MEDICAL PRACTICE IN SOUTHERN DALMATIA (TESTIMONIES FROM THE EASTERN ADRIATIC COAST AND ITS HINTERLAND)<sup>2</sup>

*Keywords:*  
epigraphic evidence;  
archaeological finds;  
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province.

*Abstract.* This paper presents testimonies of ancient medical practices in the southern part of the province of Dalmatia. Epigraphic records and archaeological discoveries reveal the presence of physicians and their healthcare practices among the population of southern Dalmatia during Roman rule. Evidence from inscriptions that detail patient care from that era, alongside a limited number of physical artefacts related to medical practice, supports the existence of this tradition. These discoveries hold great historical significance, providing clearer insight and understanding of medical practices in ancient southern Dalmatia.

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Previous research into the history of medical practice in the southern part of the province of Dalmatia during the Roman era is limited, making the discovered artefacts exceedingly important. Epigraphic and archaeological finds (CIL III 2123; CIL III 3834; CIL III 10954; CIL III 12925; CIL III 14727; AL BiH III 168–169; Radimsky, 1894, p. 101; Samardžić, 2015, p. 92; Крунић, 1992, pp. 9–10; Ivčević, 1999, pp. 101–102) reveal the types of treatments and medicinal resources that were accessible to the inhabitants of southern Dalmatia in ancient times. Indeed, even before the Roman conquest of the Illyrian lands south of Narona (later known as the southern part of the province of Dalmatia) in the early 1st century CE, small groups of Italic settlers were already present along the eastern coast of the Adriatic Sea (Samardžić, 2015, pp. 143–170). Numismatic finds suggest that, even in the pre-Roman period, trade relations between the Romans and the Illyrians south of Narona were well established (Kraljević, 1976, pp. 165–167; Kraljević, 1978, pp. 155–160; Самарџић & Стаменковић, 2013, pp. 515–526). This is indirectly confirmed by the active trade in medicinal herbs between the Illyrian population and those living on the Apennine Peninsula (Theoph. IV 5, 2; Plin. HN XIII 2, 4; XXI 40; Zderas, 1900, pp. 94–105; Mócsy, 1959, pp. 94–105; Bojanovski, 1988, pp. 65–74; Stipčević, 1991, p. 68; Samardžić, 2015, pp. 143–170, 171–278, 321–333). From the earliest times, different parts of medicinal plants were used to make medicinal substances. It is believed that Roman medicine and pharmaceuticals in the province of Dalmatia were closely linked to the local tradition (Nikolanci, 1980, pp. 155–160; Kriletić, 2020, pp. 3, 21). As previously mentioned, the Illyrians were knowledgeable about numerous medicinal herbs, such as iris, gentian, verbena, and knotgrass, which they used to treat various diseases and also exported (Radimsky, 1894, p. 101; Gabričević, 1955, pp. 359–362; Gregl, 1982, pp. 175–210; Cambi, 1987, pp. 5–21; Stipčević, 1991, p. 68; Vučevac-Bajt, 2012, p. 82; Busuladžić, 2015, pp. 171–172; Kriletić, 2020, p. 21).

The beginning of the development of medicine in the Roman Empire is associated with its achievements in Greece, as it was introduced to Rome as a clearly defined science through Greek physicians, who had drawn their knowledge

from Mesopotamia and Ancient Egypt (Stanojević, 1962, pp. 26–29; Glesinger, 1978, pp. 37–61; Cekić, 2002, pp. 1–6; Nutton, 2004, pp. 40, 60, 115; Magner, 2005, p. 116; Mesihović, 2015, p. 970). It is believed that healing encompassed efforts to remove or mitigate health conditions resulting from both observable and invisible factors through the use of medicines and instruments (Plin. NH XX 198–203, XXV 94, XXV 164; Крунић, 1992, pp. 9–10; Ivčević, 1999, pp. 101–102; Vučevac-Bajt, 2012, pp. 69–78; Busuladžić, 2015, pp. 169–174; Harris, 2018, p. 55; Андријашевић, 2020, p. 68).

In Rome, prior to the arrival of the Greeks, there was no recognized profession of physician, nor was medicine considered a distinct science or craft. Starting in the 3rd century BCE, Greek physicians began arriving in Rome, but they were not granted the status they deserved due to significant resistance to the adoption and introduction of medicine in Rome. However, over time, these Greek physicians shared their knowledge with the Romans, leading to the gradual development of medicine as a science (Leksikografski zavod, 1970, p. 360; Eijk, 2005, p. 7). As the Roman Republic drew to a close, physicians started to receive Roman citizenship, significantly improving their social status. With the onset of the Empire, schools were founded not only to treat individuals but also to educate aspiring young doctors. The Romans improved their healthcare system considerably through the construction of thermae, aqueducts, sewer systems, and similar facilities, highlighting the importance and activities of physicians (Vitr. I 2, 7; Donati, 1931/1939, p. 143; Pareti, 1967, pp. 126–131; Petro, 1980, p. 6; Ivčević, 1999, pp. 103–104; Busuladžić, 2015, pp. 169–174).

Greek medical knowledge proliferated across the Mediterranean region. During the early stages of the development of medicine on the Apennine Peninsula, it was Greek practitioners who served as physicians. Notably, Rome's first recognized physician was Archagathus, who came from Greece (Africa, 1968, p. 71; Giunio & Alihodžić, 2010, p. 19; Busuladžić, 2015, pp. 169–174; Kriletić, 2020, p. 13). The first local physicians in Rome were freedmen who later gained Roman citizenship, contributing to the advancement of medicine and medical practice. The presence of Greek physicians (*medici*) is also confirmed by tombstones. Their presence is also evidenced by inscriptions found on stone monuments in the southern province of Dalmatia, among other records (Samama, 2003, p. 182, no. 079; Martinović, 2008, pp. 56–57).

Among the archaeological evidence illustrating the dissemination of Greek medical knowledge across the Mediterranean, a significant find comes from the southern part of the province of Dalmatia. This discovery focuses on a monument that has been unveiled but not yet documented, distinguished by an inscription. It was discovered at a location near the city of Kotor, specifically within the Dobrota settlement, in 1931. This discovery was brought to our attention by J. Martinović (2008). The artefact is a tombstone, discovered approximately half a kilometer north of the fortifications of Kotor, buried one meter deep, with

dimensions of 0.50 x 0.40 meters. The engraved message suggests an urban settlement whose residents were cared for by a physician. The inscription ΛΟΥΚΙΟΣ ΛΟΥΣΚ - - - / ΕΥΚΛΡΠΙΟΣ ΑΡΧΙΑ - - - / ΚΛΕΙΝΙΚΟΣ ΓΕΝ/ΝΑΙΟΣ. Λούκιος Λούσκ[ος] Εύκαρπος ἀρχι[ατρὸς] κλεινικὸς γενναῖος ἐργ[άσατο] (Samama, 2003, p. 182, no. 079) refers to a town physician who visited and tended to the sick. The reconstruction is based on the adjective κλεινικός, which researchers used to designate a physician who made house calls (Samama, 2003, p. 183). During house visits to wealthy patients, the physician was probably reimbursed for travel expenses and fees. Researchers wonder whether there is evidence of a municipal medical service associated with this physician responsible for house visits (Samama, 2003, p. 183). Martinović (2008, pp. 56–57) dated this inscription to the 1st–2nd century (Samama, 2003, p. 182, no. 079).

In addition to epigraphic evidence, the role of medicine and healing practices among the ancient populations of southern Dalmatia can also be discerned through the findings or presence of medical-surgical instruments, notable for their craftsmanship and the materials used. In the Roman period, a diverse assortment of instruments was known, including probes, knives, saws, tools used for tooth extraction, forceps, needles, tweezers, and spoons, among others. Evidence from archaeological excavations in southern Dalmatia corroborates these details (Radimsky, 1894, p. 101; Čremošnik, 1976, pp. 125–128; Atanacković-Salčić, 1979, pp. 14–17; Ivčević, 1999, pp. 103–104).

During the exploration of the necropolis at Carine in Stolac (Diluntum), a medical box containing a set of medical instruments made of bronze and iron was discovered in one of the stone graves. In the context of grave goods, this find suggests that a physician from an urban settlement was buried with his professional tools after his death. The advanced aqueduct system, along with the presence of thermae, Italic families, and physicians, indicates that there was a significant health and bathing complex in the area, complete with warm baths. This points to considerable urban development and a focus on wellness during that period, greatly contributing to the urbanization of the area, where the proximity of the Bregava River played a crucial role (Atanacković-Salčić, 1979, pp. 14–17). Similarly, a bronze spoon from the Roman era was discovered during explorations at the Grude site in Trebinje. This small bronze spoon features a wide, tapering handle and a round bowl. It measures 6 cm in length and 1 cm in width (Atanacković-Salčić, 1979, pp. 28–34). Of similar importance is another bronze spoon, embellished with silver plating, which has yet to be officially documented. This spoon, measuring 12 cm in length and 2.3 cm in width, was unexpectedly found by M. Čorlija in 1958 while tilling a field at the site of Kućetine in the village of Kačanj, located northwest of Bileća. The spoon presumably dates to the Roman era as well (inv. no. 4 A(K), Museum of Herzegovina, Trebinje). Smaller spoons were commonly used in pharmaceuticals and

can be dated to the period from the end of the 1st century to the 4th century (Jovanović, 1978, pp. 79–80).

Additionally, during the systematic exploration of the Panik site in 1967, a small bronze pair of tweezers (4.7 cm in length) and a needle (11 cm in length) were found in one of the graves (Čremošnik, 1976, pp. 125–128). Čremošnik suggests that these items might have been used for cosmetic purposes, but they were more likely intended for medical use (Samardžić, 2015, pp. 241–242). Namely, a small bronze pair of tweezers (5 cm in length) was discovered in a tumulus in the village of Bijeljani near Divin (the municipality of Bileća), which is strongly believed to have been utilized as a medical instrument (AL BiH III 168–169; Radimsky, 1894, p. 101; Samardžić, 2015, p. 92). During the excavation at the Church of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Ljubinje, a notable discovery was a bronze pair of tweezers dating back to the 2nd–4th century. These tweezers, measuring 6 cm in length and 1 cm in width, are believed to have been used for medical purposes, cosmetics, and pharmaceuticals. They were a common tool in the everyday lives of people in antiquity (Čremošnik, 1976, pp. 125–128; Samardžić, 2015, p. 96).

### *Conclusion*

With the Roman conquest of southern Dalmatia, advancements in healthcare and medical practices began to flourish in the region. A tombstone discovered in the settlement of Dobrota near Kotor indicates that physicians made house visits and treated locals during the earliest periods of antiquity in southern Dalmatia, receiving rewards from wealthy patients for their services.

Further insights into the development and importance of medical practices in southern Dalmatia are provided by archaeological findings, including medical instruments discovered at sites such as Carine and Trebimlje near Stolac. A particularly significant discovery was a wooden box in a stone grave that contained a complete set of medical apparatus. Additionally, bronze items identified as tweezers, spoons, and needles were excavated in villages such as Panik, Kačanj, Bijeljani near Bileća, and Ljubinje in eastern Herzegovina, suggesting their probable use in medical procedures.

The inscription on a tombstone of a doctor from Dobrota, along with the archaeological finds of medical instruments from Crina, Trebimlje, Panik, Bijeljani, Kačanj, and Ljubinje, suggest the presence of a healthcare service with a strong medical and organizational foundation in southern Dalmatia during ancient times.

## Abbreviations

AL BiH	Arheološki leksikon Bosne i Hercegovine, 1–4, Sarajevo, 1988.
AMZ	Arheološki muzej u Zagrebu.
GZM BiH	Glasnik Zemaljskog muzeja u Bosni i Hercegovini, Sarajevo.
VAHD	Vjesnik za arheologiju i historiju dalmatinsku.
CBI	Centar za balkanološka ispitivanja, Sarajevo.
CIL	Corpus Inscriptiones Latinarum, Berolini, 1873–1902.

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Глигор М. САМАРЦИЋ

Универзитет у Приштини са привременим  
седиштем у Косовској Митровици  
Филозофски факултет  
Катедра за историју  
Косовска Митровица (Србија)

## Биљешке о лекарству са југа провинције Далмације (Свједочанства са источне обале Јадрана и његовог залеђа)

### Резиме

У раду се презентују подаци о лијечењу болесника на југу провинције Далмације у античко доба. Епиграфска свједочанства и археолошки налази указују на постојање лекара и њихово лијечење у вријеме римске власти на југу Далмације. О томе нам свједочи надгробни споменик са натписом лекара из Доброте код Котора. Нађени су и скромни материјални остаци који свједоче о тадашњем лијечењу болесника на југу провинције Далмације. Ријеч је о лекарским инструментима из Царина код Стоца, Тредимље, Љубиња, Паника, Бијељана и Качња код Билеће, који указују на постојање здравствене службе на солидном медицинском и организацијском нивоу на југу провинције Далмације. Ова свједочанства имају изузетну историјску вриједност, јер поближе указују на постојање ових занимања у јужној Далмацији у античко доба.

*Кључне ријечи:* епиграфска свједочанства; археолошки налази; лијечење; лекар; југ провинције Далмације.



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