

DATA REGARDING MEDICAL SUPPORT OF THE MEDIEVAL ROMANIAN STATES' ARMIES

Lt.Col.Med. Ionuț RĂDULESCU, PhD Student*

In the paradigm of the famous assertion by Winston Churchill, quoted as "The farther back you can look, the farther forward you are likely to see". I considered necessary, useful and relevant, a short synthetic analysis regarding the workings of the sanitary service in medieval Romanian state armies. I judge that the errors, mistakes and the successes in the medical field, of the great battles and past military campaigns can serve as history lessons as well as life and practice lessons to the new generations of military doctors.

Keywords: Medieval times; wars; armed conflicts; medics; surgeons; barbers; conjure men; military medical support; medical chariot; provisional military hospitals.

In the first historic mentions of conjure men on the territory of the Romanian Countries the notion and name of "surgeon" was associated with the respective conjure man¹. However this occupation began to gradually decrease in spreading, in favor of the often disloyal competition, presented by the barbers and surgeons of that time².

A number of historiographers of the Romanian military medicine claimed that on the territory of the Romanian Countries there were establishments similar to military hospitals even as early as the 15th century. In this sense, Aron Pumnul, the great linguist, philologist and literary historian, professor of Mihai Eminescu, recorded in 1865, in his work "A Quick Glance on Two Hundred Sixty-Seven of Properties or So Called Monastery Estates" a legend according to which Stephen the Great built in 1487, at Pătrăuți, a shelter (hospital) for "the cripple of the many wars he fought". This, however, was not confirmed by any other historic source of the time.

Likewise, in the summary of the accounts of patriarch Macarie of Antiochie's travels through the Romanian Countries, drawn up by his archdeacon, Paul of Alep, and best known from the English translation by F.C. Balfour, there was a mention of a true military hospital called, "military hospital depot", which had existed during the reign of Vasile Lupu (1634-1653), in the village Pravicea from Moldova³. A thorough subsequent technical

analysis of a translation from Arabic into English invalidated this hypothesis, the information in fact, textually referring to a fief of sipahi, members of a Turkish cavalry corps⁴.

From contemporary written sources we can find out that conjure men, surgeons and barbers had an important role in the healing of the sick and wounded and would accompany armies during military clashes as they would follow in the cases of some wounds firstly, to remove the object protruding into the fighter's body. Sometimes, the wounds that presented hemorrhaging were treated with calcined alum, copper sulphate etc. A universally accepted principle was that of delaying the scaring through the prolonging or provoking suppuration on the wound's surface, the substances applied locally in these cases being: turpentine, Saint John's wart oil, egg yolk or other plant based ointments, honey, salve and other anti-putrid substances.

In the case of wounds caused by firearms, the surgeon would first seek to remove the bullet. On the other hand, wounds associated with blood loss would be treated with anti-hemorrhagic substances, amongst which we could mention: calcined alum, copper sulphate, lead acetate etc. Wounds to the joints made in battle were treated with "astringent or desiccative"⁵ substances. They had vessel-constrictive, contractive or drying properties and could reduce secretions and when applied on the wound would absorb the puss. Another type of substance used was "hot sambucur oil"⁶.

For the first time in the Romanian Countries, the barbers, a particular category of people with healing abilities, appeared at Brașov, towards the

**Joint Logistic Command*
e-mail: drionut2002@yahoo.com

end of the 15th century, and later on, in the course of the 16th century, they took the places of the conjure man, bringing with them a new perspective on the rudimentary medicine of the time⁷.

Another class of people with medical abilities was constituted by the surgeons who were similar to barbers and conjure men, with the distinction that they sometimes had certifications obtained in foreign countries or documents that proved their training in the field from the guild of barber-surgeons. They were often called upon to tend to the health of rulers⁸.

Regarding the appearance of the first doctors with academic medical education in the field, on the territory on the Romanian and Moldavian countries, it must be highlighted that the title in question was first mentioned only in 1540, in the frame of a Slavonic text attributed to Radu Paisie, ruler of Wallachia in 1535-1545, where the phrase "dohtor"⁹ was used.

From a numeric standpoint, we should point out the fact that barber-surgeons and surgeons met a rapid growth in the feudal age, most of them being foreigners that arrived in The Romanian Countries. They would practice their craft in an open space, for everybody to see and besides their practical training they also possessed a certain body of knowledge, practicing their craft in the cities as well as in the countryside. And so in "The Moldavian Codex" from 1646, to the Great Wallachian one from 1652 or in "Hieroglyphic history" by Dimitrie Cantemir, we find information referring to conjure men, barbers, surgeons and their abilities. However, unfortunately, a number of facts referring to the conjure men of those times have remained entirely unresolved by history.

In the light of what was mentioned above, we can conclude that in the territory of the Romanian Countries, the medicine of the early feudal age was a purely empirical one, many times reduced to chants and spells, to the random and senseless administering of drinks and herbal salves, to anointments and stretching of different parts of the body, following groundless techniques passed down by word of mouth from one person to another. Subsequently, similar practices were used by the orthodox priests from these lands, creating the so called "ieratic medicine".

Later, the establishment of Romanian feudal states led to the improvement, to some extent, of

the population's health, with higher life expectancy, and the feeding of the population became easier with the prioritized cultivation of wheat instead of barley and millet and through the raising of small domestic animals (sheep, pig). All of these elements lead to an increase in birth rate. Despite all of these, the health of the population continued to be seriously threatened by infectious and contagious diseases such as: plague, tuberculosis, scabies, erysipelas, furunculosis, tach and leprosy. The most important of the aforementioned disease was the plague, which affected this territory for almost 500 years, the spread of epidemics being favored by wars, population movements, traveling, invasions or trade.

The first documented mentioning regarding the emergence of plague on the territory of The Romanian Countries dated back to 1438, when the disease appeared at Braşov, then following through the territory of Moldovia, to later spread in all three Romanian states in 1476-1480. In those times, the only known defense was fleeing from the path of the disease. As such, in 1588 the Moldavian ruler, Petre the Lamé, left in hurry the country's capital to move away from the path of the terrible disease, together with the entire staff of his court for four months¹⁰.

The first objective and rational measures of combating the plague on today's territory of Romania were taken only around the middle of the 18th century when, beginning with the year 1728, in Transylvania and Banat quarantine zones were established¹¹. In Wallachia and in Moldovia it was not possible to take quarantine measures and close the borders because sanitary protection between states would have been interpreted as an act of treason. Despite this situation, the authorities were compelled to take measures in the face of the havoc caused by the great plague epidemic of the 18th century.

In the historic writings of the time, it was confirmed that in that period special hospitals were built for combating this disease, among which we can mention: St. Visarion and St. Pantelimon hospitals in the Bucharest of 1735, or the Hermitage from Iaşilor Hillock in Moldovia, place in which the diseased were quarantined in 1734.

In the time of the Russian-Turkish war of 1769, the plague epidemics became more severe. The Russian military doctor Gustav Orraeus described

at large the evolution of this epidemics at Iași, in 1770, his record being the first medical document in regards to the disease, which at the time, spread across the whole of Moldovia, with particular emphasis on the way the disease could move through the movements of the troops¹².

The plague of those years was very often accompanied by epidemic typhus, disease that moved to the Romanian Countries from Ukraine and initially reported in Transylvania. They were often mixed up, especially because they would appear simultaneously, after the end of wars and were followed by similar signs and symptoms, manifesting in high fever and high mortality rates.

The 18th century brought important developments in the field, such as long term hiring of court doctors and the significant increase in the number of healers that were settling in the cities. In reality, firstly the ruler and members of his family benefited from qualified medical assistance and then boyars, high priests, and rich merchants and shopkeepers. Only after medical care had been provided to these privileged groups, would the aforementioned healers care for the health of the rest of the ailing population. Most notably in time of war, beside the care for the ruler, his house hold and their suite, they would also provide medical support for the fighters of the country's armies¹³. Usually a doctor employed at a royal court, after fulfilling his duty, would not leave the country before going through some of the more populated cities and regions, both for the benefit of the people as well as for his own material gain.

A famous doctor, often called to court either in Bucharest or Târgoviște during half a century of service, was Paulus Kyr, who tended for the rulers Radu Paisie, Pătrașcu Vodă, Vintilă Vodă and Petru Cercel. Other rulers as Matei Basarab, Vasile Lupu, Grigore Ghica, Radu the Great, Neagoe Basarab, Ștefăniță Vodă, Radu from Afumați or Petru the Lamé also had foreign doctors, hired at their ruling courts.

From archives of the ruling house kept at Alba Iulia, it was shown the first known military doctor who served in a Romanian army while practicing groundbreaking military surgery was Marco Vraci, from Michael the Brave's¹⁴ army. Referring to the battle of Brașov on the 1st of July 1603, Radu Șerban's army avenged the murder of Michael the Brave by defeating Bathory's troops. The columnist

Mihail Seybriger states that "the wounded in battle were taken to the barber"¹⁵.

Likewise, the Greek doctor Ioan Comnen, originally from the Greek island of Lesbos, would always accompany vaivode Constantin Brâncoveanu's army. He would ride in a "medical chariot"¹⁶, which was a luxurious carriage with spring suspensions, pulled by a number of horses, which is considered the precursor of today's military ambulance.

Historic sources of 1630 talk about Brecht von Brechtenberg, a doctor who came from Alsaceto the Transylvanian region, which offered a series of medical services to rulers of Wallachia and Moldavia¹⁷.

In the last part of the 17th century, in Wallachia there could be mentioned somewhat of an interest in the sanitary organization, including also the field of the ruler's army. There were several public serving doctors payed from the countries treasury to solve the population's medical needs, while the ruler had at his court doctors paid from his own fund, also known as "the royal pantry".

The ruler's army was permanently accompanied by doctors traveling by "army wagons", veritable rolling ambulances of the day, which would be set up in some villages and would act as "hospitals". Here the surgeon would take care of the wounded soldiers, only when the ruler or the higher staff would not need him. The rest of the wounded or ill would be left in the care of the female population in the settlements through which the armies would pass.

Constantin Brâncoveanu had a notable preoccupation for the organization of the military sanitary service, in this sense standing as proof an entry in the royal treasury's registry of 1697, for 30 thalers "for a medical chariot bought for Iacov" and for 33 thalers "for a medical chariot made for Ianache the Doftor"¹⁸.

Similarly, we find out that Ianache the Doftor accompanied the reigning army in military campaigns with a "medical chariot" and an "army wagon", receiving 100 thalers as "army expenses", together with another doctor, Iacob Pylarino, originally from the Greek island Kefalonia and known as the one who discovered the first cure to smallpox¹⁹.

In the aforementioned doctors' "medical chariots" therapeutic medical substances could be

found, rudimentary sanitary instruments while the "army carriages" probably transported the conjure men and barbers of the company, as well as the sick and wounded who after being given first aid would be left in the care of the inhabitants from the villages they passed through.

Noteworthy is the fact that from Brâncoveanu's two doctors only Ianache received money from the ruler's treasury for his sanitary servicing of the army, while Iacov was paid from the "royal pantry" and would primarily take care of for the ruler and his family's health.

Later, in the first half of the 18th century, the existing hospitals had a very low capacity of at most forty beds – St. Spiridon hospital from Iași, proved to be too small during times of epidemics and wars. Therefore, temporary hospitals would open when needed.

During the last decades of the 18th century, plague and typhoid epidemics, social diseases as syphilis and tuberculosis, as well as large scale military clashes heavily affected the health of the population as well as that of the soldiers. Consequently, the Romanian Countries were forced to draw up sanitary protection measures. As a way of social and judicial reflection of the economic situation aspect, we should mention that the most important anti-epidemic measure was the setup of quarantine zones.

From this period, there were also accounts referring to the numerous field military hospitals installed by the Russian and Austrian armies in The Romanian Countries during the wars against the Ottoman Empire. As such, during the Russian-Turkish campaigns of 1768 and 1774, "a temporary Russian military hospital was born in Bucharest"²⁰. Similarly, during the Russian-Austrian-Turkish war of 1792, the Austrian troops that entered Wallachia under the lead of prince Coburg set up provisional military lazarettos in Bucharest, one of which was placed at St. Sava Monastery²¹.

In February 1803, Constantin Ipsilanti, phanariot ruler of the Romanian Countries, took up the first army restructuring measures, along which arose the idea of setting up the first permanent military hospital in Bucharest. Thus, on the 18th of April 1803, the ruler wrote to his Vel Spătar, being the supreme commander of the countries armies, to rent a house where the sick Trenck's Pandurs could be cared for. This infirmary was established

in May 1803, in a house rented by the ruler in the Mihai Vodă District, area situated close to today's University Square in Bucharest. The medical aid in this establishment was coordinated by the "arhiatros" Emanoil Persiano, a kind of sanitary inspector at that time, as well as by a military surgeon named Droslovici²².

Later, in the autumn of 1803, a Romanian military doctor's presence was mentioned in Ipsilanti's army called Caloian or Kilian, and in the same year, the doctor Constantin Lambrino was "tasked at Craiova with caring for the sick soldiers"²³.

During the time of the Russian-Turkish war of 1806-1812, Bucharest was considered the center of medical aid for the Imperial Russian Armies deployed in the Danube's area. Hence, in the autumn of 1807, the extremely high number of wounded and sick that were coming to Bucharest from the battlefield determined the Russian command to request from the Wallachian Divans new buildings to receive and care for them. Not being able to meet these demands, in the following year, according to the order given by the Russian general Miloradovici – the commander of the Tsar's troops, the sick were even housed at The Royal Court from Spirii Hill. In addition, because of the intensification of military operations in 1809, even the buildings in Dudeștilor District were used for sanitary purposes. However, the main temporary hospital in the city was the one organized and set up in the houses of the ban Manolache Brâncoveanu.

In these conditions, the ruler decided in 1810 to carry out the necessary repairs at the soldiers' hospitals and ordered the construction of a building capable of housing a number of 700 sick and wounded, following which, they would be evacuated from the Royal Court, because of the unfavorable and unsanitary conditions found there²⁴.

In the same period, there were signs of a lazaretto with one hundred beds at Radu Vodă Monastery, as well as the establishment of other two lazarettos, with sixty beds each. In September 1811 six big inns and eleven boyar houses were requisitioned in Bucharest, the divan giving out orders to prepare backups that could house two thousand ill people²⁵.

In the period following 1811, because of the strong intensification in military action, the existing Russian hospitals became insufficient. Thus other

ones were created in Bucharest, Focșani, Brăila, Bucov, Ploiești and Craiova, reaching a point when in Bucharest there were "no less than nine hospitals in which care was provided for the pandurs of the Wallachian armies as well"²⁶.

Conclusions

The medieval era in The Romanian Countries regarding the sanitary service of the army is characterized by a rudimentary, basic medical aid, with a minimum of organizational and operational principles. The personnel involved were usually unqualified or semi-qualified, often allogeneic, and has a temporary and only partially regulated relation with the ruling of the states of those times.

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- 8 *** *Istoria medicinei militare românești*, Medical Publishing House, Bucharest, 1972, p. 78.
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