

Insights into
Portuguese
Medical History

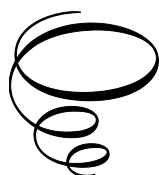
Insights into Portuguese Medical History:

*From the Birth of the Art
of Asclepius*

Edited by

Maria do Sameiro Barroso,
Christopher John Duffin
and João Alcindo Martins e Silva

**Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing**



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This book first published 2022

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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ISBN (10): 1-5275-8831-9

ISBN (13): 978-1-5275-8831-8

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INTRODUCTION

The rich history of Portuguese medicine, ranging from Neolithic trepanned skulls to the country's unique contribution to the Age of Discovery by introducing the medical knowledge of Eastern *materia medica* into European medicine, has mainly been studied by Portuguese researchers. The 46th Congress of the International Society for the History of Medicine (Lisbon 3-6 September 2018) initiated a resurgence of interest in Portuguese medical history by both Portuguese and foreign researchers; the results of this new wave of research deserve the wider circulation that high-quality publications in English can bring about. The volume *Medical Heritage of the National Palace of Mafra*, published by Cambridge Scholars Publishing in 2021, paved the way for new insightful research. The current volume aims to bring together new studies by combining a Portuguese and international authorship, including medical doctors, geologists, archaeologists, anthropologists, historians and pharmacists, focusing on Portuguese medical history.

This book encompasses historical, epigraphic and archaeological research, exploring the rich mosaic of Portuguese medical history from Roman times up to the twentieth century, finishing with an outstanding medical doctor who was also an archaeologist and Director of the Lisbon National Museum of Archaeology.

The title, referring back to Asclepius, the Greek god of medicine, evokes the Greek influence embodied by the presence of Greek pottery, primarily vases discovered in archaeological excavations (Rocha Pereira, 2010). A tombstone dedicated to Asclepius, supposedly fashioned by a Greek freedman and found in Bracara Augusta, one of the most flourishing cities in the Iberian Peninsula during Roman times, establishes the thread traced in this book from Greek Medicine to that of present day Portugal.

In these times of new pandemics, an urgent reconsideration of the analogous experiences of the past has resulted in a meaningful reassessment and revitalization of the present. This mosaic of Portuguese medical history begins with an essay about the goddess *Salus* by **José d'Encarnação**, exploring the ancestral framework of religious beliefs and seeking appeals for godly cures in Roman funerary epigrams, highlighting the social and political concerns expressed in early times.

Further developing the relationship between archaeology and medicine in the Roman period in Portugal, **Maria do Sameiro Barroso** presents an innovative study of medical surgical instruments from Bracara Augusta. Framed within an archaeological context, this study sketches an overview of prevailing medical and surgical practice in the glamorous Roman settlement located in the present day city of Braga, and devised in the sixteenth century by Archbishop D. Diogo de Sousa, the patron of the Archaeological Museum. A second, complementary chapter on the Bühler-Brockhaus Collection completes an insightful overview of the materials used in ancient medical practice. Rare tools whose original functions challenge interpretation have been subjected to modern study techniques such as radiological investigation.

In an essay exploring ancient medical-religious traditions, **Christopher Duffin** presents an in-depth study of the medicinal use of emeralds—precious stones given special consideration by the Portuguese/Goan physician, Garcia de Orta (c. 1501-1568). Continuing his pioneering work on the use of geological materials in medicine, he provides yet another valuable contribution in an aspect of the history of the *materia medica* which, until now, has received very little attention in the literature.

Returning to the topic of pandemics, **Carlos Lemos and Daniel Nunes** explore Art History as a source providing a novel window into the study of ancient epidemics, focusing on the outbreaks of epidemic diseases and plagues.

Maria do Sameiro Barroso presents paintings and a sculpture of the earliest representations of spectacles in Portuguese Art History and a previously unpublished collection of the earliest spectacles found in Portugal following an overview of the use of magnifying beryls used as visual aids and the discovery and development of the earliest spectacles.

The socioeconomic disruption and, above all, the high mortality rate caused by the second pandemic of bubonic plague in Portugal were a constant source of concern for the monarchs who reigned from the fifteenth to the nineteenth century. In two detailed and comprehensive chapters, **J. Martins e Silva** considers how plague and other transmissible diseases were excluded from entry via Lisbon harbour and other Portuguese ports by the development of new norms and sanitary regulations exemplified by the lazaretto, health stations and the sanitary park.

Jewish physicians and their often tragic experiences with the court of the Portuguese Inquisition provide some of the most interesting chapters in Portuguese medical history. Jacob de Castro Sarmiento (1690-1762), one of the most outstanding Portuguese physicians who fled to London and succeeded in becoming a Fellow of the Royal Society, is the subject of a

biographical study by **Christopher J. Duffin**. Sarmiento's works included an account of variolation for smallpox, the introduction of Newtonian science in Portugal and a 'secret' recipe of a quinine-containing *Água de Inglaterra* ('Water of England').

Francisco Curate and **Telmo António** present another Jewish physician, Gaspar Lopes Henriques de Chaves (1729-1796), who managed to stay in Portugal and left valuable manuscripts reflecting his everyday activities. The authors investigate his unpublished collections of medical case histories as major sources of knowledge revealing medical practice and the physician's relationships with patients, providing a valuable contribution to the study of medicine in late eighteenth century Portugal.

Pharmacy studies are represented in this book by the chapter contributed by **João Rui Pita, Maria Guilherme Semedo and Ana Leonor Pereira** on the Portuguese physician Bernardino António Gomes (1768-1823), who isolated cinchonine from cinchona bark, engaging the French scientists Pelletier and Caventou in the study. Gomes stimulated the isolation of quinine, the alkaloid which was the mainstay in malarial treatment until the mid-twentieth century.

In a study of modern viral pandemics, **António Trabulo** recalls the catastrophe triggered by the Pneumonic Influenza (Spanish flu) of 1918-1919, focusing on the experiences and implications of the disease in Portugal, evoking Amadeo de Souza Cardoso (1887-1918), one of the most illustrious Portuguese contemporary artists, taken away by the virus.

The exciting topic of female physicians in the History of Medicine is the subject considered by **Dana Baran**, who presents an overview of the life of Maria Ropala Cickersky (1881-1973), the first female forensic physician in South-Eastern Europe and one of the earliest worldwide. Her personality and scientific work did not go unnoticed in Portugal. In 1936, the Portuguese assistant professor Carlos Ribeiro da Silva Lopes, from the Porto Faculty of Medicine and Institute of Forensic Medicine, emphasised a leading paper on the subject by Maria Ropala.

The volume is completed by the contribution of **Carolina Moreira** who considers Fernando de Almeida (1903-1969), a Portuguese gynaecologist and obstetrician, professor of the Lisbon Faculty of Medicine of Lisbon, who made a significant contribution to Neurology and research in collaboration with Egas Moniz (1874-1955), in the discovery of cerebral angiography. Fernando de Almeida also graduated in Historical and Philosophical Sciences, embarking on a highly successful new career in History and Archaeology, leading to his appointment as Director of the Lisbon National Museum of Archaeology, a post which he held from 1967-

1972, proving that a medical doctor can extend his cultural interests far beyond Medicine.

In short, this volume shows that the History of Medicine represents a confluence of multiple arts and sciences. The practice of Medicine is as complex as the human soul. Since ancient times, science has sought to elucidate the secrets of the human body through the dedication, shrewdness and wit that allowed the establishment of a system of medical reasoning based on empirical observation. *Tradition of Medicine*, also referred to as *On Ancient Medicine*, one of the earliest *Hippocratic writings* dating from the end of the fifth century BC, is surprising for its topicality:

Medicine has for long possessed the qualities necessary to make a science. These are a starting point and a known method according to which many valuable discoveries have been made over a long period of time. By such a method, too, the rest of the science will be discovered if anyone who is clever enough is versed in the observation of the past and makes the starting point of his researches (Hippocrates, *Tradition in Medicine* in Lloyd 1894, 71).

Science and empathy stand as two leading characteristics. The ability to understand and share the feelings and emotions of other people, particularly during times of ill-health is the most fundamental, vital essence original to the development of Medicine, as stated by Sir William Osler (1849 –1919), one of the most brilliant physicians, sometimes known as ‘The Father of Modern Medicine’: *Medicine arose out of the primal sympathy of man with man: out of the desire to help those in sorrow, need and sickness* (Osler 1921, 6).

Citing Hippocrates (460-370 BC), Sir William Osler views the history of empathy as a complementary discipline of clinical medicine: *Where there is love of humanity there will be love of the profession* (Osler 1921, 62). Ultimately, cultivating an understanding of the past, the history of empathy is at the core of the History of Medicine.

Maria do Sameiro Barroso
Christopher J. Duffin

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CHAPTER 1

SALUS IN WEST ROMAN LUSITANIA

JOSE D'ENCARNAÇÃO

Abstract

After a general consideration of the concept of *Salus*, in its sense of physical and mental health (also meaning well-being and prosperity), I analyzed 15 Roman epigraphic documents containing the term. The informative content of each is synthesized to fit the word context. A shrine expressly offered to goddess *Salus* and other deities, conveying requests or thanksgiving, expresses this potentiality of divine spirits, regardless of specific characteristics, also benefiting from their great capacity to protect men in all aspects of their existence. Besides mentioning divinity, the epigraphic texts indicate the dedicator and the reason to have an inscription recorded. It is concluded that the (physical or spiritual) health concern covers all sectors of a population with no distinctions of gender or social class: men, women, slaves, and senators. On the other hand, it turns out that not only the goddess *Salus* is invoked since requests are also made to other Roman and even *indigenous deities*. The testimonies were found in urban and rural settings, although an expected urban political connotation is manifested.¹

Key words: *Salus*, *pro salute*, Roman Lusitania.

¹ List of Text Abbreviations

CIL II = HÜBNER (Emilio), *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum – II*. Berlin: Berlin Academy of Sciences, 1869 e 1892.

HEp = Hispania Epigraphica, edited by Universidade Complutense de Madrid. Indica-se, geralmente, o número, a data da publicação e o número da inscrição.

HEpOL = online version of *Hispania Epigraphica*, edited by Universidade Complutense de Madrid, available at <http://eda-bea.es/>

IRCP = Encarnação, José d', *Inscrições Romanas do Conventus Pacensis*, Coimbra, 2013 [<http://hdl.handle.net/10316/578>]. [The number indicates the inscription number on the catalogue].

Resumo

Após uma consideração geral acerca do conceito de *Salus*, na sua acepção de saúde física e mental (bem-estar, prosperidade), analisam-se 15 documentos epigráficos romanos em que surge a palavra *Salus*. Sintetiza-se o conteúdo informativo de cada um, para se enquadrar o contexto em que o vocábulo surge: há o altar expressamente oferecido à deusa *Salus* e há os que veiculam pedidos ou acção de graças a outras divindades, o que prova essa virtualidade dos númenes de, independentemente de características específicas, usufruírem também dessa enorme capacidade de protegerem o Homem em todos os aspectos da sua existência. Os textos epigráficos – na medida em que, além da menção da divindade, indicam quem foi o dedicante e a razão por que teve a iniciativa de mandar gravar uma inscrição – permitiram concluir que essa preocupação pela saúde (física ou espiritual) abrange todos os sectores da uma população, sem distinções de género ou de classe social: homens, mulheres, escravos, senadores... Por outro lado, verifica-se que não apenas a deusa *Salus* é invocada, porque os pedidos são feitos também a outras divindades romanas e, até, a divindades indígenas. Além disso, os testemunhos encontram-se tanto em ambiente urbano como em ambiente rural, embora se adivinhe para o urbano uma sintomática conotação política...

Palavras-chave: *Salus, pro salute*, Lusitânia romana.

Introduction

When visiting the cathedral of Sienna on May 10, 1991, I was impressed by a pile of motorcycle helmets by the side of a chapel. The name of the patron saint - perhaps Saint Rafael – was thereby honoured by those who miraculously escaped and recovered from a severe accident.

The statue of Dr Sousa Martins (1843-1879), an outstanding medical doctor and thaumaturge at Campo dos Mártires da Pátria, in Lisbon, with its base overflowing with expressions of thanks for favours granted (naturally in the medicinal domain), also impressed me profoundly. Likewise, dozens of chapels in Portugal are filled with wax votive reproductions of human organs, indicating that, at that place, someone made a promise and received grace during a bout of serious illness. Ex-votos were also expressed in naive tables of miracles in which people resorted to charismatic temples in suffering or healing events, recounted by words and matching designs (on this subject, see Ribeiro et al. 1998).

Religion lies at the connection between the human and the divine, in the spiritual realm, whether we believe or not in the existence of another dimension. It would be challenging to penetrate people's "arcana" if these

external signs as testimonies to people's experiences did not come to us. As a result, through the analysis of inscriptions that have come down to our time, perspectives will be rehearsed to understand better the role of *Salus* in the daily lives of those living two thousand years ago in the territory of western Roman Lusitania.

Firstly, I will consider the concept of *Salus* in a list of inscriptions selected as sources of information for this essay, ultimately trying to assess the meaning of these perspectives.

Salus

Joseph-Antoine Hild (1845-1914) was responsible for preparing an article on *Salus* for the classic *Dictionnaire des Antiquités Grecques et Romaines* (Hild in Daremberg & Salio 1969, 1056-1059). He begins by saying that, as with other “personified influences” in general, *Salus* has no relation to the health of an individual: its role assumes a predominantly political-social nature, promoting state welfare in peace and war.

It was common to believe that the State could only be “healthy” if the people were also healthy. As Hild warns, *Salus* could stand as equivalent to *Fortuna* (the goddess and personification of good luck) in her primary meaning, her invocation being reserved for critical life circumstances. Hence, in Portuguese, the Latin word *Salus* may have a double meaning, concerning both health and salvation! Holding drinking glasses, we toast “To our health!”; more informally, we exclaim “Let there be health!”. Moreover, in the latter case, we end up including both people and organizations (state, government), promoting general and individual health.

Concerning the intimate nature of the Roman *Salus*, the Portuguese classicist Maria Helena da Rocha Pereira (1925-2017) notes that the Roman religion was “particularly fit to welcome personified abstractions among its gods” such as *Salus*. Moreover, she mentions the famous explanation of Cicero (106-43 BCE):

Again, there are the temples of Wealth, Safety, Concord, Liberty and Victory, all of which things, being so powerful as necessarily to imply divine governance, were themselves designated as gods. (Cicero, On the Nature of Gods, Book II, Chapter 23, Paragraph 61, translated by Rackham 1933, 183).

She also cites a confirmatory sentence by the classical philologist Viktor Pöschl (1910-1997):

They are divine powers that condition the action of man and, as divine powers, they are immutable and subtracted from the realm of what is changeable (Pereira 2002, 350).

Epigraphic testimonials

I will consider how these thoughts were expressed in the daily lives of the Romans from the western area of *Lusitania* (corresponding to the current area south of the Douro River in Portugal), by considering the epigraphic testimonies registering the word *Salus*, excluding monuments that otherwise fit into this salutary atmosphere either because of their text or because the invoked deity is likely to be endowed with these qualities.

Let us illustrate this idea with an inscription found at Elvas' ring (IRCP 572, HEp 14 2008 n° 451). Its current whereabouts are unknown; we know it exists since the Portuguese Renaissance humanist André de Resende (1498-1573) mentioned it, like the English knight John Breval (1680? - 1738), who visited Portugal and Spain in 1726 and became interested in the Roman inscriptions which he came across (Canto 2004, 265-364). The inscription reads as follows:

PROSERPINAЕ / SERVATRICI / C(*aius*) · VETTIVS · SIL/VANVS ·
 PRO · EV/NOIDE · PLAVTIL/LA · CONIVGE · SIBI / RESTITVTA /
 V(*otum*) · S(*uum*) · A(*nimo*) · L(*ibens*) · P(*osuit*)

(To Liberating Proserpine – Caius Vettius Silvanus on behalf of Eunoide Plautilla, the spouse who was returned to him, put his vote of his own free will).

The inscription tells that Gaius Vettius Silvanus fulfilled his vow and willingly dedicated this headstone to Proserpine Servatrix. This epithet denotes not only passive protection, but it also accentuates an active “concern” over divine intervention in maintaining and preserving well-being. However, what particularly interests us in this context is why he made the dedication: *pro eunoide Plautilla coniuge sibi restituta*. Alicia Maria Canto’s proposal of not reading in *eunois* an anthroponym but the Greek adjective that means “benevolent” or “sympathetic” (Canto 2004, 333-334) seems plausible. This highlights what comes next: that his wife, Plautilla, came back to him. We are quite accustomed to the fact that both old and current advertising campaigns favour ambiguity in order better to achieve their goals. In this case, what is meant by the phrase *back to him*? In a figurative sense, could it mean that someone who was deemed lost due to a fatal illness was saved and came back to the husband’s arms by divine