



Physicians and Surgeons

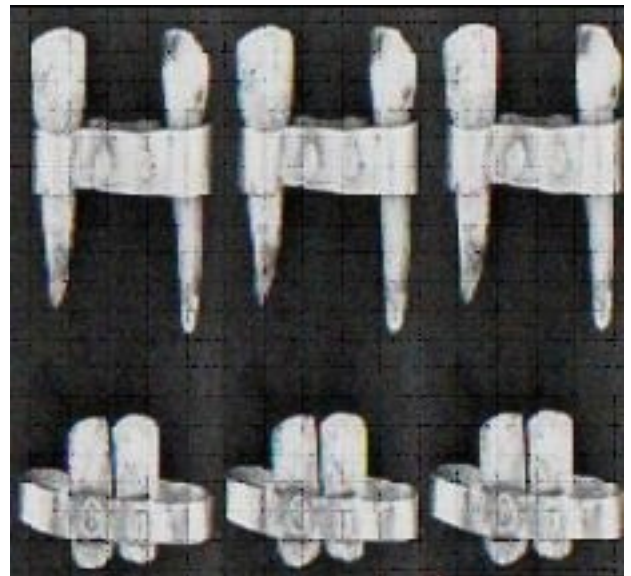
The professions of physician and surgeon in ancient Rome were not limited to the upper classes. Quite often they were freedmen or foreigners, especially Greeks. The great Greek physician Galen, who came to Rome in A.D. 164 even mentions women and slaves who were physicians. The need for these people was recognized by Julius Caesar, who granted citizenship to all Greek physicians who settled in Rome. During the imperial period these physicians were well paid, and many doctors who were employed by the emperors lived in luxurious estates. There were no universities for the training of medical professionals; instead, physicians often took on pupils to accompany them.

Left is a fresco found in Pompeii, depicting a surgeon operating on a warrior who is thought to be Aeneas.

Dentists

From Galen we learn that in Rome dentistry was considered to be a specialized field of medicine. Romans knew from the Greeks a technique for the treatment of cavities; holes in teeth were scraped out with a metal scraper and filled with a powder from the terebinth tree. If a tooth caused extreme pain it could be removed with a special set of forceps (see "Celsus and Tooth Removal" below). Teeth which had been extracted or had fallen out could be replaced with false teeth. These were made most often out of bone or gold and were fastened to adjacent more stable teeth. Toothpastes were sometimes prescribed for the cleaning of teeth, some of which used soot, burnt stag horn, or salts of ammonia as a cleaning agents.

Right is a photograph of ancient Roman dentures.



Celsus and Tooth Removal

From Celsus *De Medicina* 7.12

"Teeth sometimes become loose, either from weakness of the roots, or from disease drying up the gums. In either case the cautery should be applied so as to touch the gums lightly... The tooth is to be shaken. And this is to be done until it is quite moveable: for it is very dangerous to extract a tooth that is tight, and sometimes the jaw is dislocated... Then the forceps are to pull the tooth out straight upwards."

Undertakers

Undertakers in ancient Rome most often were freedmen, but their business seems to have been a lucrative one. They were hired by wealthy Roman aristocracy for the funerals of their family members, or occasionally by the state for the funerals of outstanding citizens. The undertaker would provide the necessary implements for the funeral, as well as the personnel (often slaves), such as corpse bearers, musicians, and specialists for the burning of corpses. Though undertakers were often wealthy, the profession was considered to be of a low rank. For this reason those who were engaged in this business were excluded from public office.