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The Museum of Spanish Pharmacy – A Journey through History

ABSTRACT

The Museum of Spanish Pharmacy is a university museum with more than sixty-five years of history located in the Faculty of Pharmacy at the Complutense University of Madrid. It forms part of the university's extensive historic-artistic and scientific technical heritage, and is one of the most important museums in terms of age, history and quality of collections housed. Although it was primarily created for teaching purposes, it now also offers guided tours to a diverse public searching for cultural enrichment. It receives more than four thousand visitors a year, who learn about the history of the pharmaceutical profession, the preparation of medicines, and the decorative arts, an area that has always gone hand in hand with the pharmaceutical trade. In spite of the limitations imposed by a low budget and a small staff, it is an active museum which continues to enlarge, conserve and restore its collection, while becoming ever more widely known through an ongoing participation in temporary exhibitions.

The museum is approximately seven hundred square meters in size and is housed on two floors, as well as having an additional space in two other buildings that make up the present faculty. The five original pharmacies, two dating back to the 18th century and three from the 19th century, are without a doubt the most striking exhibits, and are also supplemented by recreations of an Arabic pharmacy, an iatrochemistry laboratory, and a replica of a 17th century hospital pharmacy. The rest of the collection is made up of exhibits representing very different techniques and uses: paintings, sculptures and numerous display cabinets with 18th century medical material, pharmaceutical advertising, amulets, scientific instruments, mortars, apothecarial tools for preparing pharmaceutical compounds, ceramic and porcelain pharmaceutical jars, flasks and other glass utensils, wooden boxes, medicines, medicine chests and travel pharmacies, and much more, all totalling more than nine thousand objects that illustrate how medicines have been prepared, stored and dispensed throughout history.

Keywords: Museum, pharmacy, history, decorative arts, heritage, university

Introduction

The Museum of Spanish Pharmacy forms part of the extensive historic-artistic and scientific-technical heritage of the Complutense University of Madrid; a heritage which is currently distributed between a total of fifteen collections and fourteen museums housed in the University's various faculties and administrative units.

Of all of these, the Museum of Spanish Pharmacy constitutes one of the most important museums of its kind, not only within the University itself but the world over, due to its size, the heterogenic collection of exhibits, its museography, its age, its history and the transversal reading of its contents. All of this enable one to delve into the history of the pharmaceutical profession from an academic, scientific, technical and social perspective, into the history of medicine and into the evolution of the decorative arts, which have always gone hand in hand with the trade of apothecary. It fits perfectly into the definition of university museum; as such, a space created for the purpose of dissemination, teaching and research.

The history of the museum

The origins of this museum go back more than a hundred years, to when the first professor of the History of Pharmacy at a Spanish university, Rafael Folch Andreu (1881–1960), started the collection in the former building of the Faculty of Pharmacy in Madrid, nowadays the headquarters of the Spanish Royal Pharmaceutical Society.

With positivist thinking and the firm idea of creating a museum on the history of pharmacy, Rafael Folch devoted a large part of his time to collecting scientific and laboratory instruments which were no longer in use, as well as historical artefacts, using money allocated for the non-academic aspects of the degree course. In addition, Rafael was a member of the Building Committee of the new university campus project, sponsored by King Alfonso XIII at the beginning of the 20th century. It was this Committee which drew up the plans for the present-day Faculty of Pharmacy, plans which, thanks to him, set aside a few metres for the location of the museum. Although the new building was finished before the Spanish Civil War, its position on the front line meant it suffered considerable damage and it was not until 1944 that the Faculty was able to take up residence there, and a start could be made on designing the museum.

When Rafael Folch retired in 1948, he was succeeded in his passion and dedication to the creation of the museum by his son, Guillermo Folch (1917–1987). It was he who inaugurated the museum in 1951 and became its first director. With him came the first extension of the museum; basements were added which doubled the three hundred and fifty square meters of the original space. He also carried out the first inventory, which would be added to in the future by the valuable collection of pharmaceutical ceramics which he bequeathed.

A decree issued on July 7th 1944 entrusted the management of the museum to the Chair of History of Pharmacy and, as a result, the post of director of the museum would always be occupied by the person who obtained the fellowship. This was the case with

Guillermo Folch and as is the case in the present day with the museum's current director, Francisco Javier Puerto Sarmiento. Thanks to his work and that of the curator, Eugenia Mazuecos, the museum acquired its first statutes in 1989, the inventory was computerised, guided tours were introduced for cultural groups and an era of continual dissemination and growth began for the collection, by means of the incorporation of important donations, the most significant of these in the recent years being the donation of two original 19th century pharmacies.

The collection

This paper will now move on to describing the exhibits themselves and discussing their importance in the history of pharmacy.

The exhibits consist essentially of items used in the work of preparing, storing and dispensing medicines throughout history, because if illness has always existed, than the desire to cure illness has always existed alongside it.

At the Museum of Spanish Pharmacy, thanks to the five original pharmacies and the three recreations, one can observe the evolution of the pharmacy from the 14th century up to the beginning of the 20th century. Thus, pharmacies progressed from being itinerant stalls to being housed in small commercial premises and, from the 15th century onwards, grew in size to adapt to new knowledge and techniques, to the point where the pharmacy where the medicines were dispensed and the back room where they were prepared became two distinct spaces.

Here is a highlight of the museum collection:

The Arabic pharmacy

At the end of the Third Congress of Spanish Hospitals in 1953, the recreation of an Arabic pharmacy (Fig. I) from 15th century Toledo was installed in the museum. Various sources were used as the basis for the design of this exhibit, including a cupboard belonging to the pharmacy of a Templar castle in Toledo which is conserved at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. In addition, copies were made of the Manises ceramic jars which can be found at the Don Juan Valencia Institute in Madrid. This recreation acts as a tribute to Arabic culture in general, which greatly to the development of the world of medicine and pharmacy: great connoisseurs of the therapeutic properties of plants, pioneers in the use of ovens and in the practice of alchemy, inventors of syrups, which integrated sugar into the preparation of medicines, and creators of the apothecarial trade in around 1000 after Christ in medieval Islam, when the medical profession decided to focus on diagnosis and delegate the preparation of medicines to this new profession. (The first regulations concerning Pharmacy appeared in Melfi Constituciones edicted by Frederico II Hohenstauffen in 1231 and were enlarged ten years later in 1240–1241 in Novae Constituciones, introducing the first regulations governing the apothecarial profession and separated it legally from medical practice.)

The alchemy laboratory

In the 1940s, Rafael Folch and Mr. Garrigues, the architect of the faculty, worked on this architectural recreation, complete with original 18th century glass artefacts (Fig. II) from the pharmacy of Santo Domingo de Silos and Joseph Proust's chemistry laboratory, also drawing on a variety of sources depicting alchemy laboratories. They were quite accurate, for if one were to compare their replica with the laboratory discovered in Prague in 2002, which has been intact since the 17th century, it follows the same pattern: a vaulted basement, ovens, flasks for storing the formulas, utensils for the various processes, etc.

A visit to the alchemy laboratory does not fail to have an impact with its stuffed animals, press, retorts and stills. This conceptual recreation, a format so little used in museums nowadays, transports us back to the end of the 16th century, to the working environment of those men who sought to improve upon Nature and transform existing material for a wide range of purposes: the transmutation of metals into gold, the search for the philosopher's stone, for the elixir of eternal youth and for medicine by means of novel processes. It is like immersing oneself in the origins of chemistry, in the time when chemical medicines were incorporated into the therapeutic arsenal by means of alchemy.

The pharmacy of the Tavera Hospital

This is a replica of the 17th century pharmacy at Saint John the Baptist Hospital, or Tavera Hospital, in Toledo. This reproduction was commissioned by Aurelio Gamir to promote his pharmaceutical laboratories at the 1929 Ibero-American Expo in Seville. At the end of the Expo, he donated the replica to the university and it was stored in the old Faculty of Pharmacy until 1944, when it was installed in the newly created museum.

The pharmacy was large in order to treat both the patients of the hospital and the extensive religious community. This replica allows one to see how it contrasted with secular pharmacies, which were much smaller. In it, one can also observe the different types of containers used for medicinal material: boxes of wood for plant material, tinted glass containers for liquids, as well as ceramic pots and jars. It is especially worth noting the polychrome cabinet with its multitude of drawers for storing drugs, precious stones, and toxins, i.e. the substances most valuable, most dangerous and most difficult to obtain: quinine, guaiacum, cantharidin, etc. In its central and most secret area, in the area known as the "apothecary's eye" one can find small drawers marked with a human skull, a ruby, a garnet and other symbols. As this cabinet was not in an area of high visibility, it would be equivalent to where, in the present day, narcotic drugs are kept in chemist's shops.

The Gibert pharmacy

As soon as one enters the museum they will see one of its most valued jewels, an original 18th century Baroque-style pharmacy, acquired by Rafael Folch in the Catalan town of Torredembarra in 1945. This is the pharmacy of Antoni Gibert (1788) (Fig. III), which was sold by one of his descendants one hundred and fifty years later, as no one in the family wished to continue running the business.

This civilian pharmacy conserves the shop front, the counters, the shelves and the access to the back room. The containers used for storing the medicine have not been conserved but it has been adorned with the Bañolas-style collection of ceramic jars belonging to another 18th century Catalan apothecary, this one a woman, named Ferrer de Puigcerdá.

This interesting exhibit helps to understand the distribution of the spaces: the pharmacy in the foreground where medicine was dispensed; behind that the area where the medicine was stored; and at the very rear the back room, a space reserved for the preparation of prescription or off-the-shelf medicines and also for the evening gatherings of the local sages. One can also observe several lattices in the upper part of the pharmacy that communicated with the apothecary's living quarters, as they were obliged by law to live next to the store.

The ornamentation, the beauty of this pharmacy, the almost religious reference in the display window to Hygiea, with the serpent coiled around the chalice, and the representations of Hippocrates and Galen, demonstrate that apothecaries felt the need to claim a certain status in their profession. The apothecary should be considered as a craftsman or woman who has received practical training within their trade guild. It was not until 1806 that the first College of Pharmacy was established in Spain and 1845 when the first faculty was created.

The Astorga pharmacy

In the basement one can find the pharmacy of the Cathedral Hospital of Saint John the Baptist in Astorga (León) (Fig. IV). It was discovered by Guillermo Folch in the Sigüenza Cathedral in 1953.

This is an extraordinary set of 18th century furniture made up of four pieces of Baroque polychrome furniture decorated with cherubs and plant motifs. Three of the pieces have drawers and each draw is endowed with a unique frontal decoration. It is interesting to note that there is absolutely no relationship whatsoever between the label on the drawer and the frontal decoration. There is only one direct reference to the world of the pharmacy: this is a drawer which depicts an Arabic apothecary with a mortar. The majority of the drawers depict exotic animals: elephant, rhinoceros, seal, tiger, camel, lion, etc. However, one can also find animals common to the peninsula such as the bull, the deer, the dog and the donkey. There are quite a few scenes of animals fighting, but also of cities and landscapes.

The pharmacy in the 19th century: Maeso pharmacy, Sangarcía pharmacy and Bellogín pharmacy

In order to address the 19th century, the museum preserves three original pharmacies located at different sites: in the basement of the museum is the neo-gothic Maeso pharmacy (Fig. V) from Madrid, acquired in 1983; at the entrance to the faculty one can find the Segovian pharmacy from the village of Sangarcía, donated by its last owner, Antonio Núñez Vela; and finally, in the faculty's extension building, one can see the Bellogín pharmacy from Valladolid; the latter two are the most recent additions to the museum.

In the 19th century specific medications appeared that gradually replaced the prescription and off-the-shelf formulas. The industrial revolution brought with it the incorporation of chemistry and also pharmaceutical specialities, thus, the handcrafted preparation of medicine became relegated to a minority activity. Many pharmacies closed at the beginning of the 20th century when the pharmaceutical laboratories took over a large part of the production of medicines and this would gradually change the image of pharmacies until they became like the ones known today.

To finish illustrating the 19th century and the early 20th century, the museum possesses an excellent collection of porcelain jars, instruments for preparing new pharmaceutical compounds, commercial catalogues from the suppliers of these objects, an extremely beautiful example of pharmaceutical advertising reflecting the modernist and art deco styles (Fig. VI), and an enormous collection of pharmaceutical specialities, i.e. all the known medical compositions, differentiated with the name of the author or conventional name, arranged in uniform containers and sealed ready for sale in the pharmacy itself or elsewhere.

Other outstanding exhibits

One must not forget the many other exhibits housed in display cabinets that complete the narrative on the history of the pharmacy:

The ceramics room, which contains more than one thousand items from the 14th century onwards, originating from the various pottery workshops of the Iberian Peninsula: Manresa, Manises, Talavera de la Reina and Puente del Arzobispo, Teruel, Seville and Alcora. It also contains a beautiful collection of foreign ceramics from France, Italy, Holland, Portugal and other countries.

- The collection of medicines (Fig. VII): from simple drugs to polypharmacological compounds; from natural medicines to chemical preparations; from artisanal medicines (prescription or off-the-shelf) to their manufactured counterparts. An authentic cabinet of curiosities made up of cantharides, bezoar stones, *terra sigillata* or medicinal clay, unicorn horn, dried mummy flesh, elk hoof, serpent flesh for the preparation of Venice treacle, etc.
- Wooden boxes (Fig. VIII) and mixing bowls, travel pharmacies (Fig. IX) and medicine chests (Fig. X).

- Scientific instruments from pharmaceutical colleges and the first faculty: microscopes, batteries, polarimeters, hygrometers, colorimeters, and many more.
- Specific instruments for preparing pharmaceutical compounds: pill-making devices, coating pans, cups for gilding pills, compression machines, moulds for suppositories, starch capsules, and powder-measuring devices.
- Scales, weighing machines, steelyard balances, hydrostatic scales, handheld precision weighing devices, weights.
- Mortars of all shapes and sizes for crushing and grinding a range of materials.
- Bottles, vials, flasks, laboratory material, syphons for carbonated water, and distilling apparatus.
- Homeopathic medicine kits from the pharmacy of Cesáreo Martín Somolinos in Madrid.
- Dolls used for diagnosis (Fig. XI).
- In addition to all of the above, the museum possess paintings from the early 17th century that depict Saint Cosmos and Saint Damian, the patron saints of medicine and pharmacy, an oil painting of the Immaculate Conception by Jacinto Gómez, decorator of the Royal Pharmacy, and a pair 19th century paintings of alchemy laboratories.
- Visitors can also see, displayed around the museum, commemorative photographs, pharmaceutical qualifications, a Pharmacopeia Matritensis from the 18th century, gospels used in the appointment of doctors, and official documents from the 19th century. However, the majority of the documentary collection (academic qualifications, pharmacopeias and books on therapeutic issues) are conserved in the Historical Library of the Complutense University of Madrid.

The end of the visit

The Museum of Spanish Pharmacy is alive and well. To date, more than nine thousand items have been inventoried and the collection continues to grow, primarily thanks to donations by individual pharmacists.

Its exhibits are frequently requested for use in temporary exhibitions of all kinds. In 2016 for example, museum staff participated in the *A Tempora* exhibition, which celebrated the 400th anniversary of the deaths of Miguel de Cervantes and William Shakespeare. Museum staff are currently participating in the exhibitions to celebrate the Third Centenary of the birth of King Charles III of Spain.

From a management point of view, the museum's activity revolves around the inventoring and cataloguing of the pieces, the dissemination of the collection by means of guided visits, and preventive conservation. Since the 2014 creation of the university's new Regulations Governing Museums and Collections, the management of requests for the loan of items for temporary exhibitions and offers of donations has been centralised in the Cultural Heritage Management Unit of the Complutense University.

In the present day, the museum benefits from the assistance of student trainees from the Faculty of Fine Arts when it comes to restoring the exhibits that require urgent attention. Furthermore, the museum is also supported by the Folch Foundation, which con-

tributes to the conservation of the museum and encourages research by offering grants to those wishing to pursue a PhD in the history of pharmacy.

A visit to the museum is obligatory for all first year Pharmacy students as part of the subject of the History of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Legislation. In addition, it continues to cater to numerous researchers whose activity focuses on the history of pharmacies, the analysis of different styles of ceramics or the study of scientific instruments.

We at the museum hope to see you soon.

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