

PHARMACY OF FRIARS MINOR IN DUBROVNIK AS FRANCISCAN CONTRIBUTION TO THE HISTORY OF PHARMACY

O LJEKARNI MALE BRAĆE U DUBROVNIKU
KAO DOPRINOSU FRANJEVACA U POVIJESTI
LJEKARNIŠTVA

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SUMMARY

After reminding of the first pharmacy on the soil of Croatia in Trogir and Dubrovnik in the 13th century, there follows a presentation of the best known Franciscan pharmacy of Friars Minor, which, owing to its continuous activity since 1317 up to date, has become a pharmacy with the longest tradition in the world.

The description of the foundation of the pharmacy and of its development until the 17th century is relatively short because most documents from the early period disappeared in the earthquake and fire in 1667. The abundance of written documents from the next period, which are kept in the archives and the exceptionally rich monastery library, as well as the impressive exhibits in the wonderful museum, bear witness to a highly professional level that distinguished the work in the Franciscan pharmacy. No wonder that many young Franciscans traditionally used to come here for additional specific education, especially from the neighbouring Franciscan Province of Bosna Argentina (Silver Bosnia) or the Herzegovinian Franciscan Province.

Key words: *History of pharmacy, 14th to 20th century, Franciscans, Dubrovnik, Croatia, Herzegovina*

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FROM MONASTERY AROMATARIA TO REAL PHARMACIES

On the road from the first medieval monastery aromataria to the first town pharmacies, the year 1240 is taken as the turning point, when Friedrich II, the king of both Sicilies, issued his famous *Medicinal Edict* at Melfi, by which he separated pharmacy from its centuries-old connectedness with medicine, and laid legislative foundations for pharmaceuticals out of which pharmacies originated as separate institutions in the present-day sense of the word. Especially worth mentioning is the fact that the organisation of pharmacist service in this spirit very quickly found its place in the Statutes of some Dalmatian towns as well.

The oldest archival mention of the existence of a pharmacy on the Croatian soil is a sales contract of the pharmacy in Trogir from 1271. However, no less interesting is the fact that this same pharmacist, who was selling his pharmacy in Trogir, had a pharmacy in Dubrovnik [1] in 1283 as well, which is related to the year 1317 [2].

The already mentioned aromataria not only continued existing in many monasteries but some of them also developed into real pharmacies.

THE PHARMACY OF FRIARS MINOR IN DUBROVNIK

In the field of their charitable work the Franciscans devoted themselves to the care of the poor and the sick. In some monasteries they were given everyday alimentation. The Franciscans took care of the sick either directly or indirectly. Directly: in conferring the sacraments and giving consolation to seriously ill or dying patients as curators of souls or chaplains in hospitals and the like. Indirectly: in all major monasteries there was always a Franciscan adept at curing and pharmacy; in some monasteries they used to found pharmacies where the brethren prepared drugs.

The Pharmacy of Friars Minor in Dubrovnik is undoubtedly a model among Franciscan pharmacies. Its origins date back to the year 1317, that is to the time when the Big Council of the Republic of Dubrovnik passed a decision to tear down the Franciscan monastery of St. Thomas outside the city walls at Pile and to build a new, the present, one within the city [3]. This early beginning throws round it a romantic halo. In the new premises the Franciscans housed the Pharmacy as well. The original idea was for it to be a monastery pharmacy for the needs of the sick brethren, its embryo being, as already said, in the commandment of the Franciscan Rule that the brethren should care for the needs of the sick brethren. With the time, after the foundation of the Pharmacy, the Franciscans used to cure, within their possibilities, ordinary citizens of the Republic of Dubrovnik as well. In this



Figure 1. The old *officina* – now an attractive exhibit of the Pharmacy’s museum

Slika 1. Povijesna *officina* – danas atraktivan eksponat u muzeju Ljekarne

way in the course of time the Pharmacy of Friars Minor, mostly for humanitarian and charitable motives, went out of monastery walls and became a public pharmacy. This publicity and durability are its specific features.

The information about the Pharmacy of Friars Minor from its foundation until the fatal earthquake 6 April 1667 is scarce. The Pharmacy became very early the victim of a disastrous fire. The fire also devoured all memories related to the monastery and the Pharmacy so that the first news come from a man who survived the earthquake, from the chronicle of Father Vitalis (fra Božo) Andrijašević. He wrote the monastery chronicle of his time, covering the period from 1643 to 1713. At the beginning of the *Chronicle* he entered the known data from older times so that among various decisions, changes, orders and names of members of prominent brethren we find the news that on the ground floor of the monastery there had been since the time immemorial until 1681 a pharmacy – *aromatarium*. Shepherding the Catholics in the villages, the Franciscans would find medicinal herbs and used them for healing. They would write down the inherited and newly acquired experi-

ences in medicine books (*ljekaruše*) or handy manuscripts. No doubt that the reference library of the Friars Minor Pharmacy as well as the exceptionally valuable old library abounded in such manuscripts. It is symptomatic, fra Justin Velnić points out in the 20th century, that of all Dalmatian towns there is a pharmacy only in the monastery of Friars Minor in Dubrovnik, where the need of it was the least for the care of the sick brethren (doctors and drugs) was provided through the city health organisation. When employing doctors in the city service a contract used to be concluded between the Republic and the doctor in question. In the clause of every such contract persons and institutions were specified that had to be cured free of charge. Friar Minors were among them without fail. So the question of the health care of the Franciscans was not acute. More acute though was the question how to secure the material basis for the existence of the friars. Apart from the usual activity of the Franciscans in the church, the work of trained Franciscans in the Pharmacy was certainly the most suitable for that purpose, since it was humanitarian and charitable at the same time. Namely, such activity was in the spirit of St. Francis who at the beginning of his conversion nursed lepers and the sick, and it was also in full harmony with the tradition of the monastic life to engage in medical treatment and pharmacy. This was also born out by the fresh memories of the times when monastery repositories were the only pharmacies and monks the only physicians. These facts cause us to conclude that a pharmacy had already existed as early as the time when the Franciscan monastery was built – first at Pile then within the city walls of the Republic of Dubrovnik. While acting in

their former monastery of St. Thomas they had already won not only sympathies but also merits among the citizens of the Republic, as well as in today's Herzegovina where they had spread their activity and recruited a certain number of their future members. In that case the actual founda-



Figure 2 Apothecary utensils and tools used by the Franciscan friars of Dubrovnik

Slika 2. Ljekarničko posuđe i alati kojim su se služili dubrovački franjevci u svojoj ljekarni.

tion of the Pharmacy of Friars Minor in Dubrovnik would be shifted back towards the beginnings of the foundation of the monastery itself, for the year 1235 is taken as a historical fact of the foundation of the Franciscan monastery of St. Thomas at Pile. And this date is not far from the year of issuance of the *Medicinal Edict* of Friedrich II. The Pharmacy of Friars Minor had been operating without major modifications all the time until the fall of the Republic of Dubrovnik. Its peace was a bit disturbed by the decree of pope Benedict XIV in 1741 banning the public character of monastery pharmacies [4], but the very old age of the Pharmacy of Friars Minor was even stronger than the Pope's decree itself, so that on 2 December 1794 Pope Pius VI by his *Oraculo vivae vocis* – by the word of mouth – to the Franciscan general commissioner allowed further activity of the Pharmacy of Friars Minor in Dubrovnik. Under French and Austrian rule in Dubrovnik the very existence of the Pharmacy was put into question. After several difficulties, in 1828 emperor Franz I granted a special licence to the monastery under which the monastery of Friars Minor continued to be the owner of its pharmacy subject to obligatory adherence to the existing health regulations, whether they refer to the preparation and sale of drugs or to the trained personnel of the Pharmacy [5].

FRANCISCANS OF BOSNA ARGENTINA PROVINCE TRAINED AT THE PHARMACY OF THEIR DUBROVNIK BRETHREN

The young Franciscans of the Province of Bosna Argentina – whose members spread their activity as far as the borders of the Republic of Dubrovnik – had for centuries been coming to the monastery of Friars Minor in Dubrovnik. There, in addition to the study of philosophy and theology, they were trained in pharmacy and medicine. With that knowledge they would return to Bosnia and Herzegovina, and under the then circumstances prepare drugs from herbs and bring with them the drugs from the Pharmacy of Friars Minor in Dubrovnik. So in 1823 two clerics were mentioned in the monastery of Friars Minor. They were: fra Augustin Marić from Mostar and fra Jakov Perković from Rama. They cured the sick of various [6].

Furthermore, when the rumour about the plague widely spread, the Franciscans of Dubrovnik, by way of prevention, investigated its extent and looked for information in Herzegovina. Fra Mijo Slišković wrote from Gradnići on 13 September 1837: “I received your esteemed letter on the tenth of this month and understand that you would like to know whether there is the terrible disease of plague here or anywhere near these parts.” In his reply the same fra Mijo testifies: “to tell you the truth, so far there is no such disease either

in Bosnia or Herzegovina...” Then the wish: “*May the Almighty help us, but should the said disease appear anywhere, I will inform you even without your asking me.*” At the end of the letter in the *post scriptum* the same fra Mijo repeats: “*as for that lemon plant, if you could possibly send it to Mr Deputy in Metkovići.*” [7]. Very touching is the letter of the guardian of the Franciscan monastery at Široki Brijeg, fra Anđeo Kraljević (1807 – 1879), to the provincial fra Sabin Franković begging the latter to apprentice one of their lay brothers to the Pharmacy: “*...Having returned from you, Juro Budimir of this Province praised to the skies the affection you had welcomed him with. Moreover he told me that in your great goodness you would be willing to bear up with this same layman for some time until he learns something. So the same layman is returning to you. I recommend him most fervently to your goodness, love and patience to apprentice him in your Pharmacy so that he may learn something, for example to prepare balm for wounds, let blood... for as such he would be of great use in this miserable homeland of ours where we have no doctors at all. If you see that I could reciprocate in any way, do not hesitate to ask and I will try to do any favour to your Honourable Province from which we have received so much good, be it even at my inconvenience... Best regards to the brethren there; sending my special regards to you on behalf of this whole new custodia, and kissing your holy right hand, I remain at Široki Brijeg, die 24. Maii 1845.*” [8].

The experiences acquired or inherited in the Pharmacy of Friars Minor came in most useful to the students of the Franciscan Province of Bosna Argentina during the theological studies in the monastery of Friars Minor. Among these were fra Mijo Nikolić, fra Franjo Gracić, Lagarić and Ilijić, the best known “uncles” who practiced medicine.

THE MUSEUM LAYOUT OF THE PHARMACY

In the 20th century Friars Minor had actually two pharmacies in their monastery in Dubrovnik: the museum pharmacy and the modern pharmacy. The museum pharmacy had kept the requisites from the past and the modern one offered citizens up-to-date medicines. The present-day museum display of the Pharmacy of Friars Minor in Dubrovnik is a proof and a memory of the highly professional pharmacist activity of Croatian Franciscans, especially on the territory of the Republic of Dubrovnik.

The Ministry of Public Health of the People’s Republic of Croatia passed a decision on 10 July 1947 to “abolish the licence for keeping the real pharmacy of Friars Minor in Dubrovnik”. The Franciscans “understood” that this referred only to the new pharmacy. The old pharmacy still remained in the ownership of the monastery of Friars Minor and since

then the centuries-old name of the pharmacy of Friars Minor has been narrowed only to the latter. The legal dichotomy was followed by the formal one that was manifested in the change of the premises of the old pharmacy. For some time it was housed in the former premises of the upper porch until in 1955, for easier access demanded by ever greater frequency of visitors, both of home and foreign ones, it was finally returned to its former place where it sprang in 1317. "The Pharmacy of Friars Minor, in spite of all the difficulties and bans, pater Velnić points out, is a unique monument not only of the Croatian pharmacy but also of the pharmacy in general, for no other pharmacy can boast of a place in which pharmaceuticals has gone through all the development stages from the primitive aromatarium to the modern pharmacy, as well as of so different documents (objects, printed material, written material) about that course of development." [9].

The pharmacy of Friars Minor was kept by the Franciscans until the year 1947, and after that the Pharmacy at Friars Minor has been operating in the monastery premises.

The names of drugs in public pharmacies offer themselves to the view on the pharmacy vessels. The pharmacy vessels of Friars Minor are of different origin, age and form. Most of them are vitreous bodies, jugs and albarellas. These vessels are designed for keeping the most important ingredients of various preparations made *lege artis* in the Pharmacy. They have preserved their ancient attractiveness up to date although owing to their fragility they are fewer and fewer. The oldest pharmacy vessels are decorated with very nice polychrome pastel tints. The vessels of younger age are of cobalt blue colour, and most of them have ornaments in addition to the inscription. Many objects of the Pharmacy of Friars Minor are exhibited in their original setting. The formula table is painted in special colour that Italian painters called the colour of poison, the typical colour of a pharmacy. It pleasantly attracts the eye of every visitor, especially pharmacists, for on its front they see the symbol of their profession, and on its sides their predecessors: Aesculapius (Asclepius) and Hippocrates. There is the ancient pharmacist kit on the table: a pill making device, scales, weights of various kinds, the most appealing to the eye being the ancient libras of Dubrovnik, calibrated and hall-marked in the times of the Republic, ancient Dubrovnik candlesticks and very practical powder dispensers. At the front door there hangs an old, nicely fashioned and decorated cabinet for venoms (poisonous preparations that need to be kept separately under lock and key. The picture of how Franciscan pharmacies operated is maybe best conjured up by the mortars. There are five



Figure 3 The library of the Monastery of Friars Minor in Dubrovnik

Slika 3. Knjižnica Samostana Male braće u Dubrovniku

of these in the Pharmacy of Friars Minor. They are beautiful and elegant, bell-shaped, ornamented with various reliefs. On the biggest mortar especially attractive is the late-Gothic relief of St. Francis.

For full six centuries Croatian pharmacists, or pharmacists favouring Croatia, had been diligently working in this Pharmacy – from the most ordinary ones, practitioners, through medieval alchemists up to the academically educated pharmacists, even members of foreign Academies. The advantage of the pharmacists at Friars Minor was that their teacher transferred to them not only his own experience but also the experience of his predecessors, the experience that had been stored in various pharmaceutical books and manuscripts, their *vade mecums* – Go with me. Numerous pharmaceutical books are being kept in the library of Friars Minor. Sometimes they bear the name of the one who used them. Sometimes it is the texts accompanied by notes or remarks, *in margine*. Furthermore, in addition to the Latin or Italian name, the reproduced plants are added a Croatian name by hand, for example on the incunabula *Herbolarium de virtutibus herbarum*, on the incunabula *Vocabolarium utriusque iuris*, *herbarium of Castore Durante*, etc. [10].

INSTEAD OF A DISCUSSION OR CONCLUSION

Numerous written documents and medicine books kept in the archives and the rich library of the monastery of Friars Minor in Dubrovnik, as well as the especially impressive exhibits in the wonderful museum, bear a convincing witness to the highly professional level that distinguished the work in the Pharmacy and to the humanitarian mission that the Franciscans of Dubrovnik successfully carried out in the centuries past. And this activity reaches back all way to the beginnings of Friars Minor in the Republic of Dubrovnik – most probably ever since the year 1235, but quite certainly since 1317.

On the other hand, although at some time past a wrong opinion had taken root that the Pharmacy of Friars Minor in Dubrovnik was the oldest Croatian pharmacy, it is indisputably one of the first in Europe, its foundation falling at the beginning of pharmacy in Dubrovnik and in Croatia. At the same time the Pharmacy of Friars Minor has an indisputable privilege in the history of pharmacy: by the continuity of its activity it is the oldest of all the existing pharmacies today.

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3. The decision on building the monastery of Friars Minor in Dubrovnik was documented by the date of 3 March 1319 as well.
4. Archives of Friars Minor in Dubrovnik, Acta et decreta... ab anno 1794. – ad 1843. and Monastery Archives in Dubrovnik, box IV/32. I express my gratitude to dr. fra Josip Sopta for his good services to me when using the documents from the Archives of Friars Minor in Dubrovnik.
5. For more see: Andrija Nikić, Medicina i slavna prošlost franjevac, Mostar, 2000, pp. 21.-23
6. Archives of Friars Minor in Dubrovnik, box V./54

7. Archives of Friars Minor in Dubrovnik, box XI./58.
8. Ibidem
9. For more details cf. J. Velnić, *Ljekarna Male braće*, Samostan Male braće u Dubrovniku, Zagreb – Dubrovnik, 1985., pp. 775.-793.
10. Cf. A. Nikić, *Medicina i slavna prošlost franjevac*, pp. 26.-2

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SAŽETAK

Nakon podsjećanja na prve ljekarne na tlu Hrvatske, u Trogiru i Dubrovniku u XIII. stoljeću, slijedi prikaz najpoznatije franjevačke ljekarne Male braće u Dubrovniku, koja će zahvaljujući neprekinutom djelovanju od 1317. do današnjeg dana postati ljekarnom s najdužom tradicijom na svijetu.

Opis osnutka i razvoja do XVII. stoljeća temeljen je na razmjerno malom broju dokumenata jer je većina nestala za potresa i požara 1667. godine. Obilje pisanih dokaza iz idućeg razdoblja, koji se čuvaju u arhivu i bogatoj knjižnici, te posebno dojmljivi eksponati u prekrasnome muzeju, svjedoče o visokoj profesionalnoj razini koja je krasila rad u ljekarni. Stoga je razumljivo da su tu na dodatnu specifičnu edukaciju tradicionalno dolazili brojni mladi franjevci, poglavito iz susjedne franjevačke provincije Bosne Srebrene.

Ključne riječi: *povijest ljekarništva, XIV. do XX. stoljeća, franjevci, Dubrovnik Hrvatska, Hercegovina*

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