

PHARMACISTS, PATIENTS AND PAYMENTS IN 17TH CENTURY MALTA

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Introduction

The meeting of the Commonwealth Pharmaceutical Association held in Malta in 1989 provided a convenient vantage point for casting a glance backwards in time on (a) the activities of Maltese pharmacists three hundred years ago, when our Island was dominated by the Order of St John of Jerusalem; and (b) on the kind of *materia medica* which they handled and dispensed for the sick.

The sources on which this paper is based are a number of unpublished manuscript volumes containing the *spogli* or "spoils" of members of the Order of St John who died during the 17th century. They are preserved at the Cathedral Museum, Mdina.

The *spoglio* was a kind of inventory of the property, personal belongings, assets and liabilities of the Order's member at his death. It formed part of a dossier containing, among other documents, the requests from various creditors to be paid for services and for goods supplied to him during his life time.

The claims for the settlement of the outstanding bills were submitted to the *Commissione degli spogli* which was made up of two or three dignitaries of the Order. After examining the creditor's claims and ascertaining their validity, the Commission would approve the honouring of the debt.¹

In the manuscripts forming part of these dossiers, one comes across items of pharmaceutical interest and of requests by pharmacists for payment for medicaments supplied

to Knights and other members of the Order of St John during their illnesses.

Being concerned only with wealthy and higher levels of the state and church hierarchy of the population of the time, the *spogli* furnish only fleeting glimpses of contemporary pharmaceutical practice; but even such restricted sidelights are not to be ignored as they focus attention, apart from the *materia medica* of their time, on some of the economic aspects of pharmaceutical business of the past that would otherwise have remained unknown. Indeed this paper is complementary to the author's previous studies on the history of Maltese pharmacy to which the reader is referred for a panoramic view of the conditions and practice of pharmacy in Malta from the 16th to the nineteenth centuries and of the type of pharmaceutical services available for the low-income groups and for the indigent in our population.²

In the text that follows, I have retained the Latin/Italian terms and abbreviations of the drugs in the form in which they are written in the manuscript bills but I have given their English equivalents and added short notes about their ingredients and uses.

The names of at least ten pharmacists and of nineteen patients served by them appear in the records examined. The former are considered in the alphabetical order of their surnames. In the case of the earliest patient in the series, however, there is no mention of the pharmacist who

provided him with the drugs. The patient was no less a person than the Grand Master himself – Hugues Loubenx de Verdalle (1582-1595).

Grand Master Hugues Loubenx de Verdalle

Grand Master Hugues Loubenx de Verdalle has been described as a "practical and shrewd" man whose rule was marked by troubles with his own refractory knights, by fear of invasion by the Turks, and by an outbreak of plague in 1592. Pope Sixtus V honoured him with a cardinal's hat³.

It is said that he suffered from gout but from the medicinal items contained in the inventory drawn up following his death on the 4th May 1595⁴ it appears that he was subject to other ailments as well. The items were:-

A small vial containing an oil for the treatment of wounds.

A fragment of *Bolo armeno*

The Bolo armeno was a reddish-yellow clay originally obtained from Armenia.

Used as astringent in dysentery and bleeding.

A piece of bone reputed to be effective in relieving difficult micturition

A number of roots used for the alleviation of pain.

A stone for the treatment of colic.

A small vase made of box-wood containing *Teriaca*.

Theriaca was an electuary which could contain up to seventy-three ingredients, the most important of which was the flesh of vipers. An antidote against poisons and bites of serpents.

Ten pater nostri di pietra di rocca said to be effective in arresting bleeding.

The paternosters are the small beads in a rosary indicating that the Lord's Prayer is to be said. Here the paternosters are said to have been of stone of a rocky consistency but the name was also applied to the fresh bark and fruit of the tree Melia Azedarach, indigenous to the orient, that was administered as a vermifuge in the form of a decoction⁵.

Two petri benzoar

The bezoar stone was a calculus found in the stomach of certain ruminants. Used as a sudorific and antidote against poisons.

A small spouted glass vial containing oglio di balsamo.

This balsam oil would be either Liquid Balsam of Peru, an expectorant; or Copaiba Balsam for the cleansing of ulcers; or Oriental Balsam used "to fortify the heart" or as an antidote against bites of poisonous animals.

Other glass vials with various liquids of unknown nature.

A quantity of balls of terra sigillata.

The terra sigillata or Sealed Earth was also known as Terra Lemnia because originally it consisted of clay derived from caves in the Island of Lemnos. The seal consisted of an impression of the figure of Diana. A similar terra was obtained from the cave of St. Paul in Rabat, Malta, hence its name of Terra Sancti Pauli. It was in the form of clay tablets bearing the effigy of St Paul on the obverse and the eight-pointed cross of the Order of St John on the reverse. It was used as an astringent in diarrhoea.

A vase of terra sigillata

Vases or drinking cups were made of the same clay from Malta in the belief that they acted as antidotes "to any poisonous liquid" placed in them⁶.

THE PHARMACISTS

The pharmacists are referred to as *aromatari* and occasionally *speziali*.

I. LUCIO AZZUPARDU of Valletta had furnished medicaments to Commendatore Francois de la Roche. On the 23 May 1663 he presented his bill for payment to the Commissioners of Spoils.

To prove his claim he called as witness the "Most Illustrious Doctor of Art and Medicine and Proto-medicus (Chief Government Physician)" Blasius Cazzola, who

had treated the Commendatore. Dr Cazzola stated that he knew that the late Francois de la Roche had bought medicaments from Lucio Azzupardu "because he had, on many occasions, seen his own prescriptions in Lucio's shop"⁷.

II. PETRICO AZZUPARDU, *speziale*, had supplied medicines to Bailiff Antoine de Puget-St Marc, Bailiff of Manosque. Petrico's bill, dated 8 May 1664, amounted to 6 scudi and 10 tari.⁸

Among the preparations figure:-
Syr, magistralis

A magistral medicament was any preparation, in this instance a syrup, prescribed by a physician for a particular case.

Infusum rosae pallidae

Infusion of petals of white rose. Laxative.

Salis prunis

Preparation of sodium or potassium nitrate. For renal colic.

Flor, genist. viol. et bugloss.

Flowers of broom, violets and bugloss.

Diuretic.

Salis pruneti, absint et tamar.

Salts extracted from prunes, absinth and tamarind. Promote urination.

Agar hortus

The fungus white agaric. Purgative.

Conf. alchermes

A syrupy preparation named after the kermes insect which is one of its ingredients. Astringent.

Epithema pro corde.

Fomentation for the heart.⁹

On the 2 May 1666, the same Petrico submitted a bill for 2 scudi being the price of drugs supplied to the Knight Giorgio Berencles. Among the items mentioned are:-

Ol. ros. lumbrici

Oil of roses and earthworms. Diuretics. For bladder stone.

Foment. anodini

Fomentation for the relief of pain.

Dia cassia

Preparation made from the cassia plant, a kind of cinnamon. Laxative.

Dia catholicon

Electuary from senna leaves, rhubarb etc. Purgative

Theriaca

Electuary composed of many ingredients the most important of

which was the flesh of vipers. An antidote against poisons (10).

III. GIO. PAOLO BUTTIGIEG was owned 30 scudi and 3 tari for medicines, by the Knight Bernardo Nerognia. The bill, dated 26 May 1662, was accepted for payment by the Commission of Spoils after the friends, servants and neighbours of the deceased knight had confirmed on oath that the medicaments were actually obtained from Buttigieg.

The medicines were:-

Capelli veneris

Dried fronds of the plant Adiantum capillus-Veneris. Promotes expectoration.

Cremor tartar

Cream of tartar (Acid potassium tartrate). Used as a "refrigerant" and purgative.

Reubarb

Rhubarb. Dried roots from species of rheum. Purgative.

Tamarind

Pulp of the fruit of Tamarindus Indica used to make cooling drinks in fevers.

Oxymel volut, diuretic

A mixture of honey and vinegar to promote diuresis.

Mirob, mistura

A mixture of myrobolans - a plum-like fruit. Astringent.

Sanguinis hircus

Dried blood of billy goat. Powdered and administered to promote sweating and urination.

Spirit. vitrioli

Sulphuric acid. A caustic¹¹.

In 1663, Gio Paolo Buttigieg was the creditor for 70 scudi for medicaments supplied since February 1661 to the Venerable Grand Hospitaler Antoine de Conflans-Saint-Remy, for his personal use and for the contents of a medicine chest, furnished on the 13 May 1662, for the Hospitaler's galeotta (a small galley) engaged in corsairing under Captain Gioe Ardizzone.

Buttigieg's claim was presented on the 19 May 1663.

Several witnesses were heard on oath by the Spoils Commission including a surgeon, a barber-surgeon, who attended on the Knight for eighteen months, and a servant.

It took some time before the Commission was convinced that Buttigieg's claims were genuine and before it authorised payment on the 16 May 1665 – two years after the bill was presented.

The preparations for the Hospitaller's personal needs comprised:-

- Lavand. pro ocul.
An eye-wash.
- Zucc. cand.
A candied confection. Expectorant.
- Cons. borag.
Preparation made from borage and sugar. Cordial.
- Mel. viol.
Honey of violets. Cordial.
- Ol. de nuc. musc.
Oil of nutmeg. A carminative.
- Ung. digest.
Ointment of wax, turpentine, etc used to promote suppuration.
- Ung. de plumbi.
Lead ointment. Astringent and resolvent.
- Clist. lenit.
Emollient enema.
- Ung. sandal.
Ointment from white and red sandal wood. Astringent¹².

On the 12 February 1664, Buttigieg asked for the settlement of a bill amounting to 403 scudi. This sum represented the cost of medicinal preparations, as assessed by the Protomedicus, supplied to the Bishop of Malta, Fra Giovanni Balaguer Camarasa, Grand Prior of the Order of St John (1636-1663), over a period of twelve years.

Buttigieg, however, received only 350 scudi because the Bishop had declared in his testament that he only owed the pharmacist about 300 scudi. The Spoils Commission, therefore, approved a payment of 350 scudi "with the consent and agreement" of the pharmacist.

The list of the medicaments obtained by the Bishop runs into 28 folio-sized pages containing an average of 32 preparations per page (a total of about 896). It included:-

- Ol. de cappar.
Oil from flower buds of capers. Aperitive.

Indicated in obstruction of the spleen.

- Ung. de althea.
Ointment of roots of marsh mallow herb.
- Renal colic. Expectorant.*
- Mist. anisi
Anise mixture. Cordial and pectoral.
- Hiera picra
Electuary of aloes, cinnamon, saffron, etc., A purgative.
- Emp. de ranis
A plaster of frogs, mercury and storax. A "resolvent" for swellings.
- Aq. funiculi
Fennel water made from the leaves and roots of the plant. Carminative.
- Emp. de panis cum mercurio.
Poultice of bread and mercury. Against infestation by lice and fleas.
- Decoc. fol. senae.
A decoction made from the pods of Cassia acutifolia. Purgative.
- Cons de acido citr.
A sugary preparation of citric acid. Refrigerant for fevers.
- Sarsaparill. contus.
Crushed saraparilla roots. Powder of decoction in Venereal Disease¹³.

Following the death at the Lazzaretto of the Chaplain of the Langue of Italy, Fra Fabrizio Cagliola on the 7 May 1665, Buttigieg endeavoured to obtain payment for drugs furnished to the priest over a period of "almost thirty years". The list which he submitted to the Spoils Commission consists of eight folios of closely written entries of pre-parations averaging forty-eight lines per page!

To substantiate his claim, Buttigieg produced as witness the physician Dr Joseph Lanza who had treated Cagliola for twenty-five years and who declared that this patient had acquired his medicaments from Buttigieg's shop. It so happened, however, that Cagliola, in drawing up his last will and testament, did not declare his debt to Buttigieg as he had done in the case of his other creditors. The Spoils Commission was, therefore, very reluctant to accept the pharmacist's claim. On the contrary it criticised Buttigieg "for failing to obtain payment during Cagliola's lifetime; and, especially because having known that Cagliola

had made his will, the pharmacist did not endeavour to tell the patient to declare his debt to him (Buttigieg) in his will. The Commission, therefore, decided to meet the bill only in part, i.e. limiting it to those medicaments supplied to the priest since his return to Malta following his freedom from captivity. The amount, as taxed by the Protomedicus and approved by the Commission, amounted to 197 scudi¹⁴.

IV. ANTONIUS HAGIUS

On the 2nd September 1673, Antonio Hagius asked for the sum of 14 scudi and 5 tari to cover the cost of medicaments supplied to the French Knight Jean de Bellure.

The Commissioners called Dr Jacobus Cassia, the physician who attended the Knight during his illness, to testify on oath that the medicaments prescribed by him were "for the use of the late Knight". They also interviewed the knight's servant who stated, also on oath, that he used to go himself to the pharmacy (*spezzaria sic*) of Antonio Hagius to collect the medicaments ordered by the physician. Having satisfied themselves that the case was genuine, the Commissioners approved payment.

Among the ingredients included in the bill were:-

- Confectio de hyacinti et alchermis
Syrup preparation of hyacinth root and kermes insect. In dysentery.
- Saccar. alb.
White sugar. Pectoral and expectorant.
- Sandal
White or red sandal wood. Astrigent and "to fortify the heart, stomach and brain".
- Ung. aegyptiacum.
Ointment of copper acetate and honey. For the treatment of ulcers.
- Aq. scorson.
Water from the roots of Viper Grass. Antidote to poisonous bites, smallpox and plague¹⁵.

V. LORENZO HAGIUS

The Knight of the French Langue Antoine de Bataille died on the 22nd August 1703. He owed the pharmacist Lorenzo Hagius the sum of 4 scudi and 5 tari for medicaments

Conto del fr. Venz. Brior di Barletta (Chichevan)

- Di Theriac fin. ʒ.ʒ. sivr. de g. infus. ros. rub. de betton. an. ʒ. m. _____ ✓
- ʒ. sivr. de sero ʒi. Empl. covon. ʒi. Ol. ros. lumbr. ʒij. _____ ✓
- ʒi. sivr. de sero ʒij. Amar. condit. ʒij. _____ ✓
- ʒi. Manne ebe. ʒij. dec. flor. cord. fol. sen. agar. et anis. g. s. f. p. _____ ✓
- ʒi. Tabell. ros. ʒxv. _____ ✓
- ʒi. sivr. de sero ʒi. n.º 20. _____ ✓
- ʒi. Ol. ros. lumbr. ʒij. _____ ✓
- ʒi. diacint. ʒi. sivr. de g. infus. ros. rub. ʒi. fol. aux. n.º i. m. _____ ✓
- ʒi. Theriac. fin. ʒij. _____ ✓
- ʒi. sivr. succ. ros. pens. lib. rubar. uig. ʒi. dec. flor. cord. fol. sen. anis. g. m. f. p. _____ ✓
- ʒi. sivr. de sero ʒij. Tabell. ros. ʒxx. _____ ✓
- ʒi. manne ebe. ʒij. Ol. ros. lumbr. ʒij. _____ ✓
- ʒi. rosmall. sac. ʒij. Ol. lumbric. ʒi. fomen. stom. et arom. n.º i. _____ ✓
- ʒi. tabell. ros. ʒx. _____ ✓
- ʒi. fomen. stom. n.º i. Ol. cedon. et absint. an. ʒi. _____ ✓
- ʒi. Empl. covon. ʒi. Cis. len. n.º i. _____ ✓
- ʒi. fomen. stom. et arom. n.º i. _____ ✓
- ʒi. Ol. amig. dulc. ʒij. Tabell. ros. ʒx. _____ ✓
- ʒi. Ol. uol. et mall. ros. an. ʒij. dia. cas. ʒij. hier. pier. ʒi. dec. herb. emoll. anod. et sem. carn. g. s. f. cis. _____ ✓
- ʒi. Ol. de scorpion. et lihor. an. ʒi. Empl. covon. ʒi. _____ ✓
- ʒi. prun. coct. cum des. sen. et suo com. n.º 6. fuit. vegetib. n.º viij. _____ ✓
- ʒi. diacint. et theriac. fin. an. ʒi. Ag. romph. ʒij. _____ ✓
- ʒi. Tabell. ros. ʒi. n.º xv. _____ ✓
- ʒi. diacint. ʒi. Theriac. fin. ʒ.ʒ. sivr. de pomis ʒij. fol. aux. n.º i. m. _____ ✓
- ʒi. ag. cord. lib. i. fol. aux. n.º ij. m. _____ ✓
- ʒi. Ung. diges. et d. ros. an. ʒi. Empl. de betton. ʒij. _____ ✓

4. March 1666

Segli d'oro in testa sudici sudici et al. nudi et

Ant. Agius
C. S. M.

List of medicaments, dated 4 March 1666, supplied by the pharmacist Antonio Agius to the Prior of Barletta during his last illness. Note the Theriaca (line 1 & 9) and the Oil of Scorpions (line 21). The cost would be determined by the Protomedico or Chief Government Physician (Courtesy Cathedral Museum, Mdina, Spogli 17A, f.216 (335)).

supplied during his last illness. The bill, dated 9 September 1703, includes:-

Saccar. fumar.

Sugar with the Common Fumitory herb. Promotes urination; in disease of the spleen.

Hypericon magist.

A preparation from the plant St John's Wort. In renal colic and diuretic.

Cataplasma da mica pan. cum lactis

A poultice made from bread and milk.¹⁶

Another client was the Knight, Francisco Cinevailla, who had bought drugs to the value of 3 scudi and 11 tari. The bill, dated 11 December 1704, contained, among other drugs, the following items:-

Syr. da cicor. Nicol (aus) cum rheobar

Syrup of chicory and rhubarb. To purify the blood.

Aq. still, cicor.

Distilled water of chicory. To purify the blood.

Ung. ex cort. castan.

Ointment of cortex of chestnut. Astringent.¹⁷

VI ANTONIO HELLUL

This pharmacist from Birgu asked to be remunerated for the medicaments furnished to the French Knight Pietro de Vivier, Captain of the Magistral Galley. He submitted a long list of preparations, dated 9 March 1665, with the following statement from Dr (Gio Domenico) Xeberras, physician at Birgu, in support of his claim:- "I, the undersigned, bear testimony that the above mentioned medicaments were prescribed by doctors for the treatment of Fra Pietro de Vivier".

Among the preparations listed were:-

Ung. refrigerantis

Ointment of oil of roses or of oil of sweet almonds for the treatment of inflammatory conditions.

Semen anisi fiat decoc. In aquis cordialibus

Decoction of anisi seeds (Pimpinella anisum) prepared by boiling the anisi seeds in water followed by straining of the liquid. Heart tonic.

Emulsio melon.

Emulsion of melon seeds (Cucumis melo). Heart tonic.

Ol. viol.

Oil made from petals, seeds and leaves of plants of the genus Viola (violets). Heart tonic.

Vesicatori.

Emplastrum vesicatorum. A poultice made from cantharides and other ingredients. For raising blisters on the skin.¹⁸

VII GIO FRANCESCO MAGRO

Gio Francesco Magro claimed 5 scudi and 4 tari on the 22 May 1663, for over twenty-eight preparations dispensed from his shop in Valletta for Fra Angelo Taneredino, Chaplain of the Langue of Italy.

Among the medicinal items can be distinguished:-

Confectio Hyacinti

Syrup preparation made of honey, myrrh and terra sigillata of Lemons. A sudorific and antiemetic.

Amygdala dulcis

Oil of sweet almonds. Prescribed for the relief of renal colic and expulsion of bladder stones.

Syr. ros. solut.

Syrup of pale roses. Astringent for dysentery.

Ung. rosae et litarg.

Ointment of roses and oxide of lead. Emollient.

Syr. de cort. cit.

Syrup of lemon peel. Refrigerant for fevers.

Syr. de artem et cap. ven.

Syrup of the herbs mugwort (Artemisia vulgaris) and Maiden Hair. Aperitivo¹⁹.

VIII NICOLO' MALLIA

On the 11 December 1702, he advanced his claim for 3 scudi by the Knight Francisco Cinevailla, of the Langue of Castille, for a number of medicaments the cost of which had been assessed by the Protomedico Dr Archangelo Grech. They comprised:-

Conserv. borag.

Sugar preparation made from flowers of borage. "Purifies the blood" and heart-tonic.

Pulv. stomac. querc.

Stomachic powder from the bark and leaves of the oak tree. For the relief of stomach pain.

Syr. de limonis et corallini

Syrup of lemon and sea-moss. To purify the blood.²⁰

IX ANTONIO MANNO

He submitted a list of no less than seventy-two items, acquired from him by the Knight Giacomo Duretta, on the 23 December 1704 and costing 22 scudi and 9 tari. Here are some of the medicaments dispensed:-

Philon. ros.

A preparation from opium and other ingredients for the relief of pain and insomnia.

Oxymel squill

A potion of honey, vinegar and bulb of squill (Urginea maritima). Diuretic.

Conf. ros. damascen.

Confection of Damask Rose. Purgative.

Ol. castor, et de euphorb.

Oil made of a resin from the euphorbia stem and a substance from the sacs near the genital organs of the beaver. "Fortified the brain" and indicated in epilepsy and paralysis.

Sang. hircini.

Dried goat's blood. To promote urination and sweating.²¹

X PIETRO MEISONAT

This pharmacist had delivered medicaments and vases, to contain them, to the Knight and Sea Captain (name?) La Carta to the value of 5 scudi and 2 tari.

"Three years ago", wrote Meisonat on the 16 May 1662 to the Spoils Commission, "La Carta came to Malta on his ship and fell sick with colicky pains while he was in the apartment of Nicholas Loste ... " He took various medicaments "for his infirmity and for the preservation (of his health) ... He departed suddenly from Malta without paying me".

The bill, which was settled in the following year, contained:-

Ol. sesami

Oil of sesame seeds. Emollient and anodyne.

Melis rosati

A balm from leaves of Melissa officinalis and rose petals. "To fortify the heart."

Ung. ros. refrig. galeni et sandalini.

Ointment of oil of roses and of scandalwood according to Galen of

M^{mo} Sig^{ri}

Pietro Meisonat v^{mo} ser de le ss. vv. M^{mo} river spono che si debbia
 creditore del spoglio del fu Cavallier Capitano la Carta tre anni
 sonno che venne in Malta con suo fratello e si amalo con dolor colico nel
 alloggiamento de Nicolois Loffe e prese diversi medicamenti y de la infer
 mita e p sua preservatione nella somma de 75-2 come y lincluso ^{presente} ~~presente~~
 e se ne parti al improvviso senza darli satisfatione alcuna e dico ne dar
 i testimoni Per tanto Ricorre alle ss vv M^{mo} si degnino Ordinare che loro
 sia satisfatto sopra il suo spoglio e resten oblig^{ato} ser de le ss. vv. M^{mo}

The pharmacist Pietro Meisonat complains that the Knight Capitano La Carta failed to pay him the sum of scudi 5 and tari 2 to cover the cost of the medicaments supplied. (Courtesy Cathedral Museum, Mdina. Spogli 17A, f.111 (177)).

Pergamon (AD 130-201) one of the renowned physicians of Classical Antiquity who was noted for his writings on *materia medica*. The ointment was indicated in the treatment of inflamed parts and joints²².

Another bill to the value of 5 scudi and 8 tari was presented on the 12 October 1663 for drugs furnished to the priest Fra Alfonso Cassar. The bill, as taxed by the Protomedico Dr Blasius Cazzola, was paid in full seven months later.

Among the eighteen preparations dispensed were:-

Ol. camomill

Chamomile oil. Used in the form of a poultice as a "resolvent" or softening agent.

Fomenta stomach.

Poultice for application over the stomach region.

Diaphaenicum

Electuary compounded from dates, scammony, etc. Used in the treatment of dropsy and paralysis.

Mannae elect.

Electuary made of the exudation from the stem of *Fraxinus ornus*. A laxative.

Ol. scorp

Oil of scorpions. The animal was immersed in olive oil and exposed to sunlight. An antidote against bites of scorpions and other poisonous creatures.²³

Bailiff Domenico Enrico Roccaful

owed Pietro Meisonat the sum of 14 scudi 1 tari and 17 grani for medicaments at the time of his death on 11 May 1665; and also the sum of 100 scudi which Meisonat had lent to be Bailiff. The pharmacist eventually received the full payment of 114 scudi 1 tari and 17 grani.

Among the ingredients listed in the bill on 6 June 1665 are:-

Gargarisma cons. ros.

Gargarium of conserve of roses. For throat ailments.

Cat. de malv.

Poultice of roots and leaves of common mallow. Emollient.

Julep violat.

Julep of violets. Mixture of sugar and distilled violets. Febrifuge.

Syr. de sena.

Syrup of leaves of Cassia senna. Purgative.

Syr. de fumar.

Syrup of the herb Common Fumitory. Used in "diseases of the spleen"²⁴

The Prior of Toulouse, of the Langue of Provence, Horace de Blacas d'Aups was another client of Meisonat at the time of his demise on the 9 September 1666. He had been supplied with a number of drugs among which were:-

Aqua fortis

Nitric acid. Used as a "resolvent".

Amareni cordial.

Heart tonic made from bitter tasting herbs.

Epitema pro hepati

Fomentation for the liver.

Aqua cuscut.

Water prepared from the plant *Cuscuta major*. Taken "to purify the blood"²⁵.

On the 17 October 1676, Meisonat drew up the following request, expressed in the formal wording of the time (translated from the original Italian):- "Antonio Meisonat, most humble servant of your Illustrious Sirs, petitioning with profound reverence, submits that he is the creditor of the late Knight Francesco Pecci for the amount of three scudi and eight tari, being the cost of medicaments supplied to him during his last illness as certified by his physician Dr. Del Cosso and as assessed by the Protomedico Dr (Gio. Domenico) Xeberras. He, therefore, petitions that Your Illustrious Sirs be pleased to accord him the said amount from the spoils of the said Knight for which favour he would be most grateful".

This plea was addressed to the Treasury Council, the Auditors of Accounts and the Commissioners of the Spoils. Having satisfied themselves that the drugs were prescribed for, and actually taken by Fra Francesco Pecci, the Commissioners approved the request for payment.

The following items appear in the bill:-

Lapid. Belzuar. or.

Oriental bezoar stone. The bezoar stone was a concretion found in the stomach of certain animals. It was prescribed as a sudorific and hence as a means of getting rid, by the sweat, of the poisons that enter the human body.

Pulv. preser. contr. infest.

Powder for preservation from infection. What were the ingredients? It is known that "theriaca" and scordium (the herb *Teucrium scordium*) were taken internally in Malta during the plague of Dec. 1675 to September 1676²⁶.

Conto de medicamenti che prese il fu sig. Caualier Capitano 112.
 la Carta lib. mag. 1662

Rx olei sesamini libior ana ℥ij mellis rosati ℥ij dia Cassie
 edia Catoliconis chiere pigre an ℥ij decocti quatuor an
 dinor et erbas emolientium q.s. f. chister. ℥ij

Rx meng^{ti} rosati refri^{ti} galeni e sandalini an ℥ij

Rx olei amigdal dul^{ci} ℥ij fomentu anodinū dupli^{cat} an ℥ij
 16 det. p portar son hui del vascali

Rx olei camomilla ℥ij anodinor an ℥ij

Flos rosar rub in Completar mund sine pediculis ℥ij

Rx dia Catoliconis ℥ij dia ptericon ℥ij

dia Cassie e chiere pigre an ℥ij

Rx q^{ue} erbas emolientu siccis ℥ij

Rx olei samomiba Saretini ℥ij

Rx mellis rosati e uolati ana ℥ij

Rx olei amigdal dul e sesamini an ℥ij

Rx unguenti crefig^{ti} galeni an ℥ij

f. d. n. m. ha ceringace li sopra soniti chister calidi semini
 f. vasi p mettere le sopra soniti ℥ij 2. w

Cap. lib. 1665.

Segl dia in tutte sandi cinque an ℥ij 5. r.

il
 Calley

List of medicaments obtained by the Knight
 Capitano la Carta from the pharmacist Pietro
 Meisonat on the 16 May 1662 (Courtesy Cathed-
 ral Museum, Mdina. Spogli 17A, f.112 (178)).

Syr. de limon

Syrup of lemon. To promote urination.
Corn. cerv.

*Stag's or hart's horn. It was boiled in water or calcined or formed into gelatine. In the form of a syrup it was recommended in epilepsy apoplexy and paralysis*²⁷.

Epilogue

According to the records here studied, none of the ten pharmacists met with, over a period of more than a century, were celebrities or pioneers in shaping the destiny of their profession in Malta. The view we get of them is rather narrow as it merely shows them as a set of men (a) clinging to the routine round of dispensing drugs against the backcloth of contemporary pharmaceutical practice in Europe; and (b) intent in obtaining from their rich clients the financial rewards for their labours. The dossiers merely record cold facts and do not afford us the opportunity of coming face to face with these pharmacists as living personalities.

The same may be said of their customers although in the latter's case we can hazard a guess as to the kind of diseases from which they suffered from a consideration of the materia medica – long obsolete – dispensed for them. There are indications, for instance, that one of the common ailments of these aristocratic clients was constipation having regard to the frequency with which purgatives and laxatives were prescribed; that the fear of poisoning often haunted them judging from the variety of medicaments with which they were supplied – such as Theriaca, Oil of Scorpions, Terra Sigillata and Bezoar Stones – all of which were meant to ward off the effects of poisons; that the pathology of the urinary system – in the form of renal colic, bladder stones and difficulty of micturition (from enlarged prostate?) – also played a dominant role. Less prominent seem to have been such episodes as cardiac pain, dysentery, ulcers and inflammatory conditions which called,

respectively, for the dispensing of fomentations for the heart, astringents, digestive ointments and anodyne poultices for the relief of pain from inflamed parts.

The pathological concepts of the seventeenth century pharmacist, as those of his contemporary physician and surgeon, were certainly inadequate as they followed the ancient humoral theory according to which disease was the result of disturbances or imbalance of the "humours" of the body – a belief that harked back to the time of Hippocrates (460-377 BC). The overall impression, however, is that our pharmacists were held in high esteem by the community which they served, that they gave scrupulous and dependable service and that they were always at hand when their professional help was needed in spite of the absence of many scientific and technical aids which to-day are accepted as routinely as if they were always available to the profession.

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7. Spogli A 16, fols. 81-3.
8. One scudo would correspond to about 8 cents and one tari to about 6 mils in to-day's currency.
9. Spogli A 17, fol. 55.
10. Spogli A 17, fol. 365.
11. Spogli A 16, fols. 101-102.
12. Spogli A 16, fol. 343.
13. Spogli A 16, fols. 455-459.
14. Spogli A 17, fols. 158-60 & 237.
15. Spogli A 22, fol. 26
16. Spogli B 11, fols. 13-14.
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