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ZBIGNIEW BELA

Museum of Pharmacy at the Jagiellonian University, Kraków, Poland

The Grabowski Collection in the Kraków Museum of Pharmacy

ABSTRACT

The article presents 23 antique pharmaceutical vessels from the Kraków's Museum of Pharmacy. The whole collection consists of 83 vessels, which in 1976 were donated to the Museum by Bronisław Mateusz Grabowski, a pharmacist and an art collector. Apart from the information about the donor as well as the major types of majolica pharmaceutical vessels, the article presents the pictures of the selected vessels and their descriptions which are made up of such elements as the type of a vessel, its size, character of decoration, the place and time of origin and the explanation of the inscription (name of medicament, its composition and application).

Keywords: museum, pharmacy, antique, maiolica, vessel, Grabowski, medication

Fig. I. Display cases with pharmacy vessels in Kraków Museum of Pharmacy. Photo A. Olszowski

The collection of 83 maiolica vessels, manufactured between the 16th and the 19th century, was donated to the Museum in 1976 by Mateusz Bronisław Grabowski, Polish pharmacist and art collector. He completed his pharmaceutical studies in 1931 at the Stefan Batory University in Vilnius. Until the outbreak of war, he worked in the pharmacies in Piotrków Trybunalski and Warsaw. In 1939, as head of an in-house pharmacy in a military hospital, he left for France with the Polish Army, where he was subsequently tasked with managing the sanitary supplies. In 1940, following the capitulation of France, he moved to Britain, where he worked as a pharmacist in a number of both military and civilian hospitals. In 1948, after having completed the courses and passed the exams necessary for the recognition of his professional qualifications, he became a licensed pharmacist (earned the right to run a pharmacy in Great Britain). Initially, it was a small chemist on the outskirts of London, then, after a year, he moved his business venture into Sloane Avenue, Chelsea, the very hub of the city. The pharmacy also ran a mail-order service to Poland. In 1959, Grabowski established the "Grabowski Gallery", also located on Sloane Avenue, which operated until 1975. Before his death in 1976, Grabowski donated his art collection (paintings and prints) to the National Museum in Warsaw and

Fig. II. Forms od maiolica vessels. Photo A. Olszowski

the Museum of Contemporary Art in Łódź. The actual handover of the collection of pharmaceutical maiolica vessels within the same year to the Museum of Pharmacy in Kraków was preceded by Grabowski's personal letter to Prof. Wojciech Roeske, the then director of the museum: "Dear Sir, during my stay in the UK I have assembled a collection of about 100 pharmacy vessels. Most of them, in fact, almost 90% of the items, originate from the Netherlands, Italy and England. I want to have this collection donated to your museum. Would you be interested in accommodating it in your establishment?". Prof. Roeske was genuinely surprised, as much as delighted at the generous offer, and replied to Grabowski, *inter alia*: "Your proposal, Sir, is quite unprecedented, unexpected, and

of such an immense value to us, that words actually fail us in an attempt to express the torrent of emotions that ran through us upon its acceptance. (…)"[1].

The basic forms of maiolica vessels which are referred to by their Italian names, include the *albarello* (which falls into three types: waisted, double gourd form, and straight-sided – cf. A, B, C). Other types include the *boccale* (small jug; D) and the *orciuolo* (It. watering can), a jug with a spout and a handle on opposite sides of the vessel (E). A large round jug with a short wide neck and two handles, with or without a spout, would be called an *orcio biansato* ("orcio con doppia ansa" – a jug with two handles; F and G). A medium-sized (17–25 cm) vessel shaped like a bulb (round or pear-shaped body with a long thin neck) would be referred to as *bottiglia* or *fiasca* (bottle; H), while a similar middle-sized vessel with a wider neck would be called a *caraffa* (carafe; I). A middle-sized container set on a high base would be referred to as *vaso* (vase; J). The words *stagnone* and *idria* were used in reference to large vessels (c. 40–60 cm) with two handles shaped like heads of fantastical animals and a mascaron in relief, which was placed just above the base and whose mouth, fitted with a cork or a faucet, served as an opening. The name *stagnone* suggests that the prototypical vessel was made of tin (It. *stagno*), while *idria* (hydra) refers to the character of the stylized handles (K). A low round vessel with a distinctly shaped base and a short wide neck was called a *pilloliere* (if it was used for storing pills) or an *unguentario* (if it was used for storing ointment; L). A vessel decorated in dark blue against a lighter greyish-blue background would be called a *berettino* (M).

The rest of the article consists of presentations and descriptions of twenty-three pharmacy vessels from the Grabowski's collection.

Fig. III. Vessel 1. Photo A. Olszowski

Pharmacy vessel of the *albarello* type. Height: 21 cm. Maiolica. Delft (The Netherlands), 18th century. The decoration comprises a basket of fruit and two peacocks, the head of an angel, and bunches of fruit. Inscription: METRID: DEM: the shortened forms

[1] Archives of the Museum of Pharmacy, Jagiellonian University, Kraków.

of METRIDATUM and DEMOCRATIS (Democrates' mithridate – antidote). Servilius Democrates was one of the physicians of the Emperor Nero. He wrote several treatises on medications in verse which somehow survived for posterity, as quoted by Galen in his treatise *On Antidotes*. The Democrates' antidote consisted of opium at 5 drachmas (15.7 g – the maximum dose) and 50 other medical materials, e.g. a larch hub, valerian, Celtic and Indian nard, field penny-cress, Castoreum, Cytinus juice, germander, carrot seed, gentian, wild ginger, seeds of St. John's wort, wine and honey. According to Galen (*On Antidotes*) this was a medication "effective for all bodily diseases".

Fig. IV. Vessel 2. Photo A. Olszowski

Waisted pharmacy jar of the *albarello* type. Height: 21 cm. Maiolica. Faenza (Italy), mid-16th century. Figurative and floral decoration: the human figure is a herb picker with a herb cloth attached to her back. Inscribed *Aloe patico* on the banner. *Aloe patico* is the Italian name for the substance known as *aloë hepatica* in Latin and *hepatic aloes* in English. It was prepared from the juice of Cape aloe (*Aloe ferox* Mill.). By slowly thickening and drying the juice opaque brown clods were obtained, known as hepatic aloes (Lat. *aloë hepatica*). If subjected to fast evaporation, the juice would yield transparent yellow ones, known as Cape aloes (Lat. *aloë lucida*). Both varieties are strongly laxative.

Fig. V. Vessel 3. Photo A. Olszowski

Double gourd form pharmacy jar of the *albarello* type. Height: 20 cm. Maiolica. Probably Winterthur (Switzerland), second half of the 17th century. The central part is decorated with a cartouche in the shape of a coat-of-arms, which shows a lamb, a tree, and a star. The area just above the base is inscribed *Oximel Zuccarino*. Oxymel was a drink obtained by evaporating a mixture of purified honey and vinegar (Gr. *oxos* – vinegar, *mel* – honey), so that it gained the consistency of syrup. *Oximel zuccarino* was obtained by evaporating a solution of sugar and vinegar, sometimes enriched with pomegranate juice. "Digests choleric exudates mixed with phlegm, which strain the stomach, cures a three- and four-day malaria"; Valerius Cordus, *Dispensatorium norimbergense*, Venice 1563.

Fig. VI. Vessel 4. Photo A. Olszowski

Double gourd form pharmacy jar of the *albarello* type. Height: 18.6 cm. Maiolica. Deruta or Castel Durante (Italy), first half of the 17th century. The oval yellow cartouche shows St. Francis of Assisi holding a cross in his left hand and pointing to a six-pointed star with the right one. On the remaining surface a floral decoration: bay laurel fruit and leaves and, just above the base, an inscription: UNG(UENTUM) APOSTUL(ORUM) ('ointment of the Apostles'). Apart from wax and olive oil, 'ointment of the Apostles' consisted of 12 ingredients (12 "apostles"), among others mineral-derived medicinal substances, litharge and verdigris, and aromatic gums: myrrh, frankincense, bdellium, and galbanum. "It consumes corrupt and dead flesh, and makes flesh soft which is hard, it cleanses wounds, ulcers, and fistulas, and restores flesh where it is wanting" (Nicolas Culpeper [1616–1654], *Complete Herbal and English Physician*, London 1816).

Fig. VII. Vessel 5. Photo A. Olszowski

Double gourd form pharmacy jar of the *albarello* type. Height: 18.6 cm. Maiolica. Deruta or Castel Durante (Italy), first half of the 17th century. The oval yellow cartouche shows St Francis of Assisi holding a cross in his left hand and pointing to a six-pointed star with the right one. On the remaining surface a floral decoration: bay laurel fruit and leaves and, just above the base, an inscription: TRIFORA MAGNA. *Trifora magna* was a medicine composed of, among others, opium, mandrake, galangal, santonica, sweet flag, henbane seed, and Alpine valerian. It was applied internally in cases of abdominal pain "in both men and women" as well as in cases of "prolapsed uterus" and vaginally to provoke menstruation "in women who are not impregnated". *Trifora magna* dissolved in wine in which elderberry had been boiled was recommended to children "who cannot sleep and cry at night" (Nicolas Culpeper [1616–1654], *Complete Herbal and English Physician*, London 1816).

Fig. VIII. Vessel 6. Photo A. Olszowski

Double gourd form pharmacy jar of the *albarello* type. Height: 22 cm. Maiolica. Venice, 2nd half of the 16th century. On the lower bulge a medallion with a dragon in yellow and orange. On the remaining surface of the vessel plant decoration in dark blue. An inscription on the ribbon reading: CONF(ECTIO) AMECH. *Confectio Amech* (correctly Hamech) was a multi-component composition devised by Pseudo-Mesuë (author of famous pharmacopoeia titled *Grabadin*, 11/12th century), which included, among others, yellow myrobalan (*Terminalia citrina*), chebulic myrobalan (*Terminalia chebula*), rhubarb, colocynth (*Citrullus colocynthis*), polypody, wormwood, senna, common fumitory (*Fumaria officinalis*), scammony (*Convulsus scammonia*), and the so-called *pulpa tamarindorum*, that is raw pulp of tamarind fruit. *Confectio Amech* was recommended to patients suffering from skin diseases, such as leprosy, scabies, ringworm, eczema, etc.

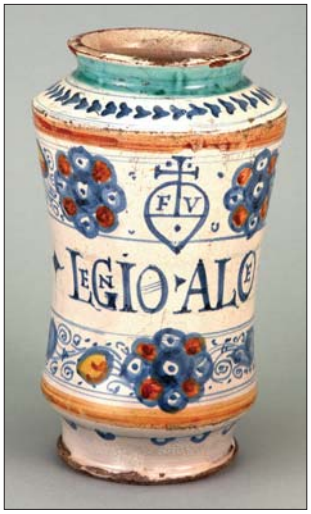

Fig. IX. Vessel 7. Photo A. Olszowski

Pharmacy jar of the *albarello* type. Height: 21.3 cm. Maiolica. Probably Antwerp, mid-16th century. In the 16th century, Italian manufacturers who specialized in maiolica would set up shop abroad: in France, Spain, and the Netherlands. Hence Italian inscriptions on the jars and the Italian-style decoration. The main decorative element is a stylised blue and white rosette. The jar is inscribed LEGNO ALOE (lignaloes) at half its height. Lignaloes is the wood of the evergreen tree *Aquilaria agallocha*, indigenous to south-east Asia (Laos, Vietnam, Cambodia) and the Indian province of Assam. "Great lords cherish the wood for its aroma; it is used primarily as incense, for not only is the smoke pleasant to the nostrils, but it also strengthens the action of the heart and all the other internal organs better than any other incense" (Marcin Siennik, *Herbal*, Kraków 1568).

Fig. X. Vessel 8. Photo A. Olszowski

Pharmacy jar of the *albarello* type. Height: 32.5 cm. Maiolica. Naples, first half of the 18th century. The biblical decoration at the front shows Lot and his two daughters ("And they made their father drink wine that night also: and the younger arose, and lay with him; and he perceived not when she lay down, nor when she arose. Thus were both the daughters of Lot with child by their father"; Genesis XIX, 35–36). The inscription at the bottom reads: A(QUA) D(I) HIPERICON (water of St. John's wort). Water of St. John's wort is an aqueous distillate of the plant. According to Mediaeval writers, the water "cures apoplexy", "strengthens the brain", "fights toothache if kept warm in the mouth", "cures gummas in the mouth" and is important in "angina and pharyngitis", "nourishes the heart", "restores diseased lungs", "cleanses the liver and the loins and eases their pain", "stops diarrhoea" and "chases away worms", "heals blisters caused by fire and rotting ulcers", "dries wounds and is excellent at cleansing them of venom".

Fig. XI. Vessel 9. Photo A. Olszowski

Pharmaceutical jug. Height: 21 cm. Maiolica. Urbino (Italy), c. 1610. The spout is supported by a maiolica cord. Floral and landscape decoration (a red-roofed granary and a celery leaf). In the foreground is a putto blowing a trumpet. The orange ribbon label bears the heavily abbreviated inscription SYRUPUS DE BIZANTIIS (Byzantine syrup). One formula for the syrup, found in the *Ricettario Fiorentino* (1498), reads: "Take endive juice and celery juice, two pounds each, hop juice, borage juice, and bugloss juice, one pound each. Boil the mixture, collect the scum, put aside to clarify. Take four pounds of the clarified liquid, add four pounds of the choicest sugar and boil it over a light fire to make the syrup". Byzantine syrup was recommended chiefly to patients suffering from jaundice.

Fig. XII. Vessel 10. Photo A. Olszowski

Pharmaceutical jug. Height: 23.3 cm. Maiolica. Deruta or Castel Durante (Italy), first half of the 17th century. The oval yellow field shows St. Francis of Assisi holding a cross in his left hand and pointing to a six-pointed star with the right one. The spout (fitted with a cork) is shaped like a bird's head. Floral decoration: leaves and fruit of bay

laurel. Above the base is a ribbon inscribed SY(RUPUS) D(E) LUPULIS (hop syrup). One formula for hop syrup, found in the *Ricettario Fiorentino* (1498), reads: "Take four pounds of purified hop juice, two pounds of common fumitory juice, six pounds of sugar and make the syrup". According to Marcin Siennik (*Herbal*, Kraków 1568) "this syrup, which is made of hop, cures the yellow ailment".

Fig. XIII. Vessel 11. Photo A. Olszowski

Pharmaceutical jug. Height: 20.5 cm. Maiolica. Probably Montelupo, second half of the 16th century. Floral and figurative decoration. The inscription on the banner reads: SY(RUPUS) BETT(ONICAE) COMP(OSITUM) (composite betony syrup). Apart from common betony, the syrup consisted of decoctions of such herbs as marjoram, thyme, rose, sage, fennel, and anise. "It is good in strong headaches, paralysis, and epilepsy" (Gaetano Savi, *Materia Medica Vegetabile Toscana*, Florence 1805).

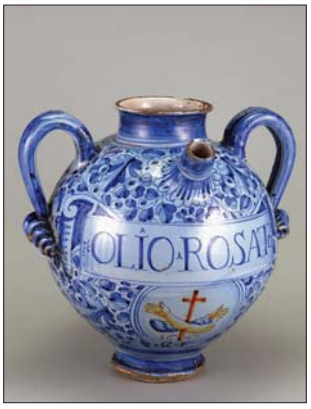

Fig. XIV. Vessel 12. Photo A. Olszowski

Pharmaceutical jug of the *orcio biansato* type. Height: 34 cm. Maiolica. Probably Rome, 17th century. The everted collar rim made it possible to fix parchment to it with a string. The lower part of the belly shows the emblem of the Franciscan Order: a cross and two arms (Christ's and a monk's). Below the emblem is the date 1663. The inscription on the ribbon label reads: OLIO ROSATO (rose oil). "Rose oil is made thus: Take four lots of rose and put it into a large glass vessel filled with one pound of oil. Cover the opening with parchment and fix it with a string. Leave the vessel in the sun for forty days. Rose oil has the power to make cold organs warm and to cool down inflamed ones" (Marcin Siennik, *Herbal*, Kraków 1568).

Fig. XV. Vessel 13. Photo A. Olszowski

Pharmaceutical jar. Height: 31.3 cm. Maiolica. Lisbon or Coimbra, 1706. The untypical handle, parallel rather than perpendicular to the body, makes it easier to lift the jar and carry it in a lowered hand. Below the handle is a mascaron. The crescent and the star at the front, above the name of the medicine, suggests Moorish connections. The vessel on the left is inscribed A(QUA) D(I) CARDO (water of thistle). Water of thistle is an aqueous distillate of blessed thistle (*Cnicus benedictus* L.), which also used to be called *Carduus sanctus* (holy thistle) for the numerous medicinal properties that were ascribed to it, especially from the 16th to the 18th century. According to Marcin Siennik's *Herbal*, "it eases all pain in the head, strengthens memory, nourishes the brain and sight, (…) cleanses the stomach, promotes appetite, makes it easier to breathe, soothes abdominal pain, (…) dissolves kidney stones, removes pimples from the anus that obstruct the passage of wind (...) and aids well-being". Siennik also considers it helpful in conglutination of the external opening of the uterus.

Fig. XVI. Vessel 14. Photo A. Olszowski

Pharmaceutical jug. Height: 20 cm. Maiolica. Alcora (Spain), first half of the 18th century. The dark blue decoration, applied with a broad brush, shows the biblical Jonah. The lower part of the jug bears the inscription: *Sir*(*upus*) *De Liquirit*(*ia*) (liquorice syrup). The syrup was prepared from liquorice (the root of *Glycyrrhiza glabra*) and Venus-hair fern (*Adiantum capillus veneris*), hyssop, rose water, honey, and sugar. "It cleanses the lungs, cures persistent cough, and helps in pleurisy" (Valerius Cordus, *Dispensatorium norimbergense*, Venice 1563).

Fig. XVII. Vessel 15. Photo A. Olszowski

Pharmaceutical jug. Height: 24.1 cm. Maiolica. Probably Venice, second half of the 16th century. Above the name of the medicine there is a date: 15 A 63 (anno 1563), below it there is an escutcheon. Dark blue ribbon against the opaque foreground is inscribed *Miva cotognata*. The names are encircled with wreathes in yellow, orange, and blue. *Miva cotognata* was a medicine made of quince fruit, honey, and white wine, sometimes also cinnamon and other spices. This medication that warms up those who have succumbed to head colds (a reference to an excess of cold humours – mucus [Greek *phlegma*] and the black bile [Greek *melas chole*; hence melancholy]), strengthens the liver and other internal organs, promotes appetite, soothes vomiting and diarrhea" (Valerius Cordus, *Dispensatorium Norimbergense*, Venice 1563).

Fig. XVIII. Vessel 16. Photo A. Olszowski

Pharmaceutical jug. Height: 24.1 cm. Maiolica. Probably Venice, second half of the 16th century. Above the name of the medicine there is a date: 15 A 63 (anno 1563), below it there is an escutcheon. Dark blue ribbon against the opaque foreground is inscribed *Olio Absyntii*. *Olio Absyntii* (wormwood oil) consisted mainly of "the wormwood of Pontus" (a variety of wormwood indigenous to Pontus, a historical region situated on the south-west coast of the Black Sea). Valerius Cordus (*Dispensatorium norimbergense*, Venice 1563) writes that the oil "strenghtens internal organs, promotes appetite, relieves constipation, and chases away worms".

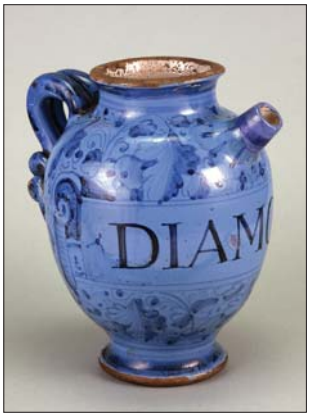

Fig. XIX. Vesssel 17. Photo A. Olszowski

Pharmaceutical jug of the *berettino* type. Height: 22 cm. Maiolica. Venice, second half of the 16th century. Floral decoration: dark blue oak leaves. In mid height an inscription: DIAMORON. *Diamoron* is the Greek name for a remedy made of juice of black mulberry fruit (Gr. *morea*), must, and honey. *Diamoron* formulas are found in Galen (2nd century AD), Nicolas of Salerno (12th century), and in the earliest city pharmacopoeias (16th century). Cordus (in *Dispensatorium Norimbergense*, Venice 1563) recommends *diamoron* in "diseases of the teeth and jaws, ulcers of the lips, and all ailments of the mouth in general".

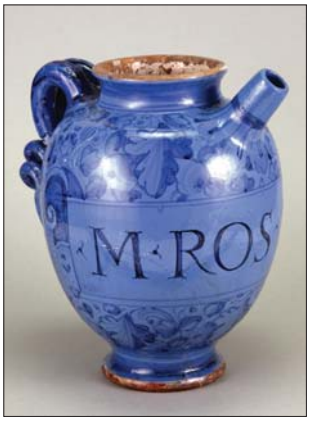

Fig. XX. Vessel 18. Photo A. Olszowski

Pharmaceutical jug of the *berettino* type. Height: 22 cm. Maiolica. Venice, second half of the 16th century. Floral decoration: dark blue oak leaves. In mid height an inscription: M(EL) ROS(ATUM) (honey of rose). Honey of rose is a decoction of rose petals and honey. "Take two pounds of rose petals, boil them in rain water, then press out the liquid. Next, pour the liquid into an equal amount of honey, from which scum has been removed, and boil the mixture until it is of the desired consistency. The honey expels phlegmatic matter from the stomach" (Valerius Cordus, *Dispensatorium Norimbergense*, Venice 1563).

Fig. XXI. Vessel Photo A. Olszowski

Pharmaceutical vase. Height: 16.5 cm. Maiolica. Nove (Italy), Pasquale Antonibon, mid-18th century. Decoration: naturalistically painted flowers, ordered from the biggest to the smallest one. Inscription: "Ung. Ad Scabi" (*unguentum ad scabies* – scabies ointment). This ointment, according to the *Augsburg Pharmacopoeia* (1573), contained Venetian ceruse, styrax resin, turpentine, butter, lime juice and salt. Whereas in a formulation for children ("pro pueris"), it contained turpentine, salt, butter, salt, lemon juice, egg yolks, and rose oil.

Fig. XXII. Vessel 20. Photo A. Olszowski

Pharmaceutical jug. Height: 16.5 cm. Maiolica. Nove (Italy), Pasquale Antonibon, mid-18th century. Decoration: naturalistically painted flowers, ordered from the biggest to the smallest one. Inscription: SYR(UPUS) QUINQ(UE) RADICUM APER(IENTIUM) (syrup of five roots that cleanses [the human organism]). The five roots are the roots of fennel, celery, parsley, butcher's broom, and asparagus. "Take three ounces of each of the roots, five pounds of well water, eight ounces of white wine vinegar and boil them until one-third of the mixture evaporates. Add three pounds of sugar or purified honey, clarify and make the syrup. The syrup helps in liver congestion, excess of yellow bile, catarrh of the bowels, etc." (Valerius Cordus, *Dispensatorium norimbergense*, Venice 1563).

Fig. XXIII. Vessel 21. Photo A. Olszowski

Pharmaceutical jug of the *idria* (hydra) type. Height: 41.8 cm. Maiolica. Savona (Spain), second half of the 17th century. The handles are shaped like (fantastical) animal heads on massive curved necks. At the bottom is a relief representing a mascaron, through whose mouth, fitted with a cork, the contents of the jug were accessed. At the sides of the vessel, below the handles, are smaller mascarons, without openings in the mouth. The vessel is decorated with a human figure leading a two-headed dragon by a rope. The decoration at the back of the vessel shows a centaur killing a dragon. Inscription: *Aquae. Plantag:s* (*Aquae Plantaginis*). *Aqua Plantaginis* (plantain water) is an aqueous distillate of greater plantain leaves. "Plantain water is good for wounds and since it is also astringent, it is benefitial in every kind of diarrhoea, especially in patients who have already developed wounds in the intestines. Such patients should drink the water frequently and apply it in the form of an enema. The water relieves congestion of the liver and the spleen, cools down inflamed blood and fills fistulas with sound flesh, for it has the power to promote flesh growth, especially in old wounds. To stop excessive bleeding from haemorrhoids, rinse the anus with the water" (Marcin Siennik, *Herbal*, Kraków 1568).

Fig. XXIV. Vessel 22. Photo A. Olszowski

Pharmaceutical jug of the *idria* (hydra) type. Height: 41.8 cm. Maiolica. Savona (Spain), second half of the 17th century. The handles are shaped like (fantastical) animal heads on massive curved necks. At the bottom is a relief representing a mascaron, through whose mouth, fitted with a cork, the contents of the jug were accessed. At the sides of the vessel, below the handles, are smaller mascarons, without openings in the mouth. The vessel on the right shows two human figures and a deer. Decoration at the back: flowers, butterflies, birds, and a deer. Inscription: *Aquae Capil.s Ven:s* (*Aquae Capillis Veneris*). *Aqua Capillis Veneris* (water of Venus-hair) is an aquaeous distillate of leaves of Venus-hair fern (*Adiantum Capillus Veneris* L.). According to Marcin Siennik (*Herbal*, 1568), the water (i.e. aqueous distillate) is "very good for those who are losing hair, purges the chest and the lungs of all kinds of flegmatic waste, soothes cough, dissolves kidney stones, and should be drunk by patients suffering from yellow ailment. It also cures splenitis, eases the burning sensation while urinating, eradicates scrofula, purges the stomach and the bowels of choleric waste".

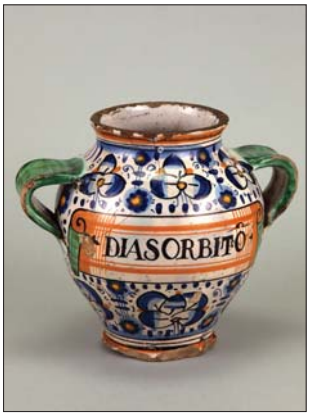

Fig. XXV. Vessel 23. Photo A. Olszowski

Pharmaceutical container of the *biansato* type. Height: 16.7 cm. Maiolica. Montelupo (Italy), 17th century. Floral decoration: stylised flowers and leaves. Black inscription on the ribbon label: DIASORBITO. *Diasorbito* (also known as *Diasorbis* or *Conserva di Sorbe*) is a composite medicine made chiefly from the fruit of sorb tree (Lat. *sorbum*, It. *sorbo*), of which Dioscorides (1st century AD), author of the *De Materia Medica* writes (I, 173): "Sort fruits which are a yellowish colour and not yet ripe, first cut apart and dried in the sun, are astringent for the bowels, ground up and eaten as a meal. It is eaten instead of polenta, and a decoction of them (taken as a drink) does the same". The formula for "sorb conserve" in the *Ricettario Fiorentino* (1573) reads: "Take the necessary amount of sorb fruit that is already getting soft but is not quite red yet, pound it in a mortar and press through a sieve. Take three pounds of the pulp and two pounds of sugar, mix them and heat over a light fire".

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