

# Apothecaries in medieval Burgundy (1200-1600)

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On the cover: A dispensary sign originating from the pharmacy Cosseret-et-Grand in Autun, France, around 1600. Painter anonymous, oil on canvas, Autun, Musée Rolin.

Cover design: Textcetera, The Hague

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# Preface

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Most studies on the history of medieval apothecaries are country-based. But the State of Burgundy from Charles the Bold included in 1477 the Low Countries (comprising large parts of present-day Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg and parts of northern France) as well the duchy of Burgundy and the counties of Nevers and Burgundy.

During the reign of his father, Philip the Good (1419-1467), a further administrative cohesion for the territory was developed with the first convocation of the States-General in 1464 in Bruges and later on in Brussels. In 1581 the States-General proclaimed formally the abjuration of the king of Spain and the assembly was transposed to The Hague.

This book is principally about the apothecaries who lived and worked in the State of Burgundy between 1200 and 1477, but for the sake of continuity we have followed the events concerning the apothecaries within the territory of the Burgundian State up to the end of the sixteenth century. This was the time where the first systematic administrations of guild members were found and the start of a period where data, analyses and studies concerning apothecaries are more and more available.

For the present study, a thematic structure is chosen, presenting respectively the dispensary itself, the social standing of the apothecaries, including their guilds and clothing, their clients and competitors, their regulations, libraries and the quality assurance of the delivered medicines. Each theme has been developed chronologically.

The book is based on the new *Biographic Index of apothecaries in medieval Burgundy up to 1600*, henceforth abbreviated as *the Index of Burgundian apothecaries*. Attached as appendix, *the Index of Burgundian apothecaries* list all data published on apothecaries who lived in the concerning territory and in the period 1200-1600, all data at least which we found in the journals on pharmaceutical history, in the national editions and – often incidentally – in many local publications. *The Index of Burgundian apothecaries* has been completed by the author with data found into the archives.

Thanks to the large volume of compiled information, several hypotheses – often based on one single reference – could be confirmed with more trustworthiness or on the contrary, disproved.

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# The Burgundian State

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The origin of the State of Burgundy could be considered as the resultant of a sequence of coincidences. The king of France, John the Good, gave in 1363 the duchy of Burgundy to his fourth son, Philip the Bold. When he inherited in 1384 the counties of Flanders, Artois, Nevers and Burgundy, the ambition to found a state could have been born, as testifies several attempts to convert his territory into a European power: the ambition to play a leading role in the crusade of 1396, the appointment of ambassadors from Burgundy in entire Europe and the publication of a document mentioning Burgundy as a European state adjacent to the State of France [1].

Actually, in hundred years Philip the Bold and his descendants raised one of the most powerful states of Europe, more and more moving away from the kingdom of France. Philip the Good, who reigned from 1419 to 1467, enlarged his domain – by acquisition, by inheritance or by conquest – with the provinces of Brabant, Limburg Holland, Utrecht, Zeeland, Picardie, Hainaut and Luxembourg. He developed an administrative cohesion which was established in several towns in his territory. Figure 1.1 represents all territories composing the State of Burgundy during the reign of his son Charles the Bold (1467-1477).

During the reign of Philip the Bold (1364-1404) and John the Fearless (1404-1419), the duke and his counsel travelled frequently. Lille represented the political, juridical and financial power for Flanders, Artois, Antwerp and Mechlin. Dijon had the same function for the duchy and the county of Burgundy, while the duchy of Brabant and the county of Holland had their own institutions. During the reign of Philip the Good, Brussels became the ducal residence, but the duke continued nevertheless traveling between Lille, Arras, Bruges, Brussels and Dijon.<sup>1</sup>

In 1473, Charles the Bold established the Parliament and the Court of Accounts in Mechlin – a small seigniory – avoiding, by doing so, the rivalry between mighty regions.



Fig. 1.1 The territory of the State of Burgundy in 1477. Wikipedia, Marco Zanoli.



The duke and his counsel were usually accompanied by an extensive court including chamberlains, masters of the house, cup-bearers, bread masters, carver masters, kitchen masters, equerries, sergeants-at-arms, counsellors, treasurers, chaplains, almoners, men-at-arms and a medical team comprising a physician, a surgeon, a barber, a master apothecary and a master grocer. Besides permanent appointments, many chamberlains, artisans and medical team members worked part-time with contracts of three to six months.<sup>2</sup>



Fig. 1.2 and 1.3 Mausoleums of Charles the Bold (above) and Mary of Burgundy (below) in the church of Our Lady in Bruges. Wikimedia Commons.

The alliance between the Burgundian court and the towns of Flanders is well illustrated by the presence of the mausoleums of Mary of Burgundy and Charles the Bold in the church of Our Lady in Bruges (Figure 1.2 and 1.3).

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## Where do we meet the late medieval apothecary?

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### 2.1 Identification of medieval apothecaries

In the late Middle Ages, a systematic administration of guild members did hardly exist, with exception of a single town like Bruges. The first guild administrations origin in general from the end of the sixteenth century. Identification of apothecaries before that time has been accomplished based on a wide spectrum of (incidentally) sources. Hereafter, two examples of those incidentally sources are presented: one in the account registers of an abbey and the other in the account registers of a ducal court.

### 2.2 The account registers of the Egmond abbey

In 925 the count of Holland, Dirk I, founded a simple wooden nunnery in Egmond (about 35 km north-west of Amsterdam), which was replaced in 970 by an abbey of bricks – unique in these regions – by his son, Dirk II. At that time, a community of Benedictine monks from Ghent took over what was the oldest monastery in Holland. Figure 2.1 represents a (later) impression of the Egmond abbey.



Fig. 2.1 View of the abbey of Egmond by Claes Jacobsz van der Heck, 1638. Rijksmuseum Amsterdam.

The Emond abbey, or St. Adalbert's Abbey, owned several medicinal-pharmaceutical manuscripts.<sup>1</sup> One of the first books, mentioned as *medicinalem librum* was a gift of the wife of Dirk II, Hildegard.<sup>2</sup> Together they offered in 975 a gospel book decorated with gemstones to the abbey as shown in figure 2.2. In the abbey, four other medical-pharmaceutical books



Fig. 2.2 Miniature with count Dirk II and his wife Hildegard of Flanders presenting the codex to the Egmond Abbey. They are positioned underneath an arched structure with the open gospel book lying on an altar. The exterior of the abbey is depicted as an architectural frame for the event. The Latin text in the upper lefthand corner states: *This book was given by Dirk and his wife Hildegard to the merciful father Adalbert, so that he will think of them in eternity.* Royal Library, The Hague, Fol. 214v.

from the period 1100-1527 were present. The abbey disposed over a medicinal herb garden<sup>3</sup> and the presence of a mortar and two pestles is mentioned in 1570 which indicates that the monks prepared their own (simple) remedies.

In the records of the Egmond abbey we found the names of six up to now unknown apothecaries.<sup>4</sup> The oldest known account dates from 1344-1345 and mentions all expenses in detail. So do the other conserved accounts from 1399 and from 1499-1510. Among others, purchases at the pharmacy shops in the surrounding towns were documented, sometimes even with the name of the apothecary. Purchases like ginger, cinnamon, saffron, galangal, sugar, ointments and remedies. The six up to now unknown apothecaries are: Egidii Alijd Michiels in Delft, Jacob Firmijn and Jan de Swarte in Utrecht, Meester Jan in Haarlem (all active in 1344), Meester Jan Stoffels as well in Haarlem (1399) and Clemeyns van Foreest in Alkmaar (between 1499 and 1510). The last name is remarkable because it concerns a female apothecary, exceptional in that period. Perhaps because she was the sister of a monk from the Egmond abbey, Adriaen van Foreest, prior of the abbey, allowing her to deliver *duodecim ampullis* and payed for *pro infirmaria* and *pro iudicanda urina*.

### 2.3 The account registers of the dukes of Burgundy

The period 1374-1482 comprised the reign of the dukes and the duchess of Burgundy:

- Philip the Bold (1364-1404)
- John the Fearless (1404-1419)
- Philip the Good (1419-1467)
- Charles the Bold (1467-1477)
- Mary of Burgundy (1477-1482)

The account registers of Philip the Bold over the years 1363-1387 are actually accessible in the *Archives départementales de la Côte d'Or* in Dijon. In 1387 an overall account register was created which functioned until the death of Mary of Burgundy in 1482 and which is nowadays conserved in the *Archives départementales du Nord* in Lille and partly in the *Archives départementales de la Côte d'Or*. Besides that, we found information on apothecaries in the Low Countries in the municipal archives of Dijon.

The role of the ducal grocer/apothecary was a special one. In order to stay aware of the latest pharmaceutical developments and to be well-informed

where to get the best quality of herbs and simples, it was indispensable for the apothecary to keep his own shop. The majority of them worked part-time, often by a three-monthly rotation, keeping so in touch with the daily practice. Only the first master apothecary of the duke was appointed for several years. The duchess kept normally her own medical staff. Already in 1390, the ducal apothecary disposed over his own workshop in the palace of the duke in Dijon, where herbs and simples were stocked but also spiced wine, confectioneries and candied fruits and where he could prepare remedies under the supervision of the ducal physician. The workshop was located at the east side of the palace, just beside the *Tour de Bar* (Bar Tower) and the kitchens, as shown in figure 2.3.



Fig. 2.3 The *Tour de Bar* (Bar Tower), build in 1365, with the apothecary workshop just beside the building. Wikimedia Commons.

In other towns where the duke resided, the court apothecary disposed over its own workshops as well or hired one in the direct surroundings of the residence as was the case in 1376 in Bruges: the ducal apothecary Guillaume de Monthaut has been paid for hiring a pharmaceutical workshop. During the frequent voyages of the duke, the essential stocks and tools moved as well: an account register from 1386 mentions the payment to the driver Dam de la Croix for the hire of a cart with four horses and two servants and for the transport of the ducal pharmacy from Arras to Cambrai.<sup>4</sup>

Thanks to the accurate book-keeping during the journeys of the duke in the Low Countries we were able to identify in the archives of Lille and Dijon fifteen names of up to now unknown apothecaries, established in the southern Low Countries between 1374 and 1482 in the towns of Antwerp (Jan van der Elst, 1478), Brussels (Claiz de Batenbourg, 1410, Jean Aubertin, 1450), Ghent (Jehan Blalreve, 1410, Jan Stellast, 1432), Bruges (Étienne Guillaume, 1375, Willen Strevel, 1410, Jacob van den Leene, 1428, Jean Lestard, 1446, Martin Remgroet, 141480, Augustin Burgher, 1482), Mechlin (Colinet, 1374), Ostend (Evrard Sparke, 1477), Audenaerde (Jean de Bignes, 1377) and one apothecary more northerly located in The Hague (Jean Claissonne, 1469). Moreover, from seven apothecaries – already known from the Belgium archives – complementary information was obtained. Just one example: according to the Belgium archives, the apothecary Jasper Mathieu from Bruges was paid in 1462 for delivering white wax and pine-cones to the court of Philip the Good and, as found in the ducal archives, in 1467, after the death of the duke, for ingredients for his embalmment, so we know now he was at least active from 1462 to 1467.

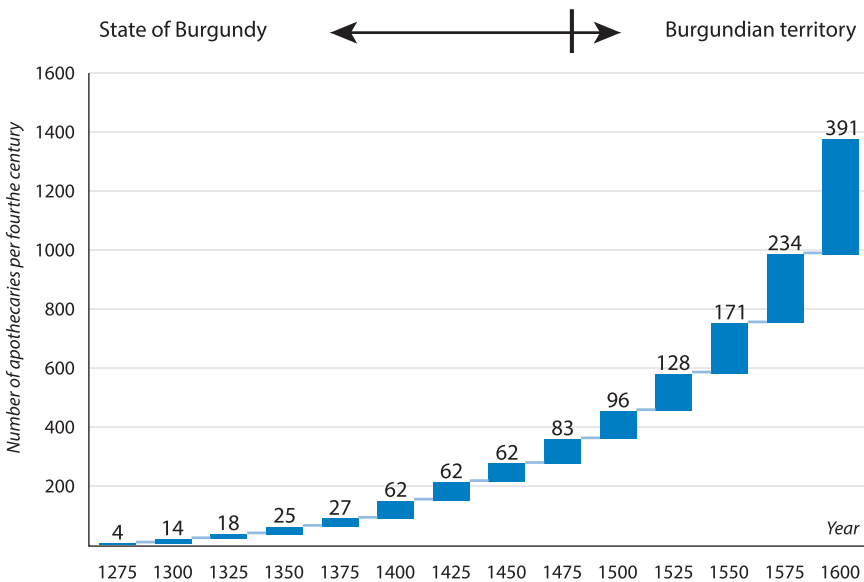
## 2.4 A new Biographic Index of apothecaries in medieval Burgundy up to 1600

Based on publications in scientific journals from Belgium, the Netherlands and France, on national surveys of the history of apothecaries and on local publications of the history of towns, a first database on Burgundian apothecaries has been set up. In the digitalised archives of the above-mentioned countries, we found subsequently several hundreds of unknown apothecaries, unsystematically appearing in sources like appointment agreements, mentions in deeds of house sale, heritage arrangements, archives of Courts of Chancery, account registers from abbeys, from churches, from noble courts and from town councils. The final resulting database is annexed to this edition as the *Biographic Index of apothecaries*

*in medieval Burgundy up to 1600* and comprises over 1350 apothecaries in well over hundred towns.

In 1215 the clerical medicine was definitively prohibited during the Fourth Council of the Lateran by the decree *Ecclesia abhorret a sanguine* (the clergy abhors blood), but also inspired by the commercial medical practices, which had gotten out of hand. This gave the lay medicine the chance to rise.

In the second half of the thirteenth century, we come across the first traces of apothecary establishments in the Burgundian territory with eighteen identified apothecaries. Figure 2.4 presents the increment of the number of apothecaries per fourth century, active in the Burgundian territory between 1250 and 1600. It can be seen that in the fourteenth century 132 apothecaries have been identified, in the fifteenth century 303 apothecaries, in the first half of the sixteenth century about 300 and in the second half over 600.



**Fig. 2.4** Increase of the number of apothecaries per fourth century as compiled in the *Index of Burgundian apothecaries*. The vertical line indicates the end of the State of Burgundy in 1477.



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## The apothecary's shop

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By the end of the thirteenth century, and only in the towns, the first apothecaries' shops appeared. Those dispensaries did probably not very much differ from the shops of other merchants. The late medieval pharmacy consisted of two sections: *l'ouvroir*, the workroom, open to the streetside, where orders were received, prepared and delivered and the back room where the bulk products were treated and stocked. Little remains of apothecaries' shops are nowadays left. With regard to the Burgundian territory, a painting of Alkmaar, including a pharmacy exists, just as an illustration of an apothecary's shop in Flanders. An accurate description of a medieval pharmacy in Amiens and four inventories provide valuable complementary information. Outside Burgundy, the illuminated manuscript *Tacuinum sanitatis* and a fresco in the Issogne castle offer some additional views of medieval apothecaries' streetside shops.

### 3.1 The apothecary's shop in pictures.

#### *A painting and a miniature*

The painting *View on the Weigh house* (figure 3.1) includes the shop *The White Rose* from the apothecary Gerrit Dekker, active in Alkmaar from 1641 till 1645<sup>1</sup> and gives an idea of the streetside shop with a surrounding awning, pots displayed on a counter and merchandise hanging from the awning. The counters are fold up at night to close off the pharmacy from the elements and from intruders as well.

We meet the presence of awnings at the front of apothecaries' shops in several cases. In 1397, the apothecary Colaert van Barustre had to remove the awning from the façade of his shop by order of the magistrate of Leyden.<sup>2</sup> In 1521 the presence of an awning is mentioned at the pharmacy *Het Vercxken* (The Pig) in Breda and in 1527 an awning at the shop-front of apothecary Goris Jansz van Eyndmer in Breda is mentioned as well.<sup>3</sup>



Fig. 3.1 The apothecary's shop *The White Rose*. At the top right, one sees the sign representing a white rose. Detail of the painting *View on the Weigh house* (1660), Stedelijk museum Alkmaar.



Fig. 3.2 An apothecary's shop in a shopping centre of a medieval town in Flanders. Miniature of the *Éthiques d'Aristote* in *le livre du Trésor*. Brunetto Latini, 1460-1470. Library of Geneva, MS. Fr 160, CC.

Figure 3.2 shows a shopping centre in a medieval town in Flanders.<sup>4</sup> There again, we see an awning with hanging wax candles, with pots on the shelves and commodities displayed on the counter.

### *The Tacuinum sanitatis*

In copies of the manuscript *Tacuinum sanitatis* from the fourteenth and fifteenth century, a miniature appears showing a pharmacy, open to the street, with shelves holding drug containers, with hung wax candles, with

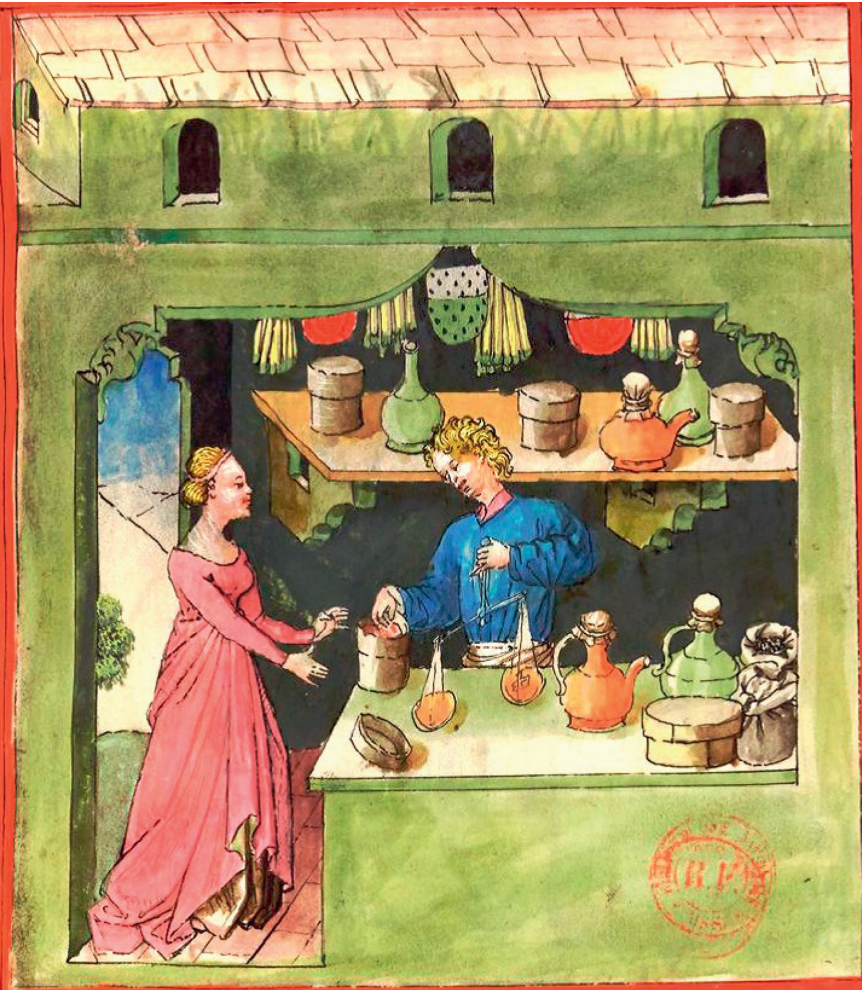


Fig. 3.3 View of an open fronted pharmacy in the illuminated manuscript *Tacuinum sanitatis*, fifteenth century. BnF Paris; ms. Latin 9333, fol. 54r.

jars and bentwood boxes on the counter and an apothecary who weights candies. (Fig. 3.3)

Under the famous frescos in the portico of the Issogne castle in lower Aosta Valley – giving realistic and sometimes humorous depictions of daily life (trade) scenes – one represents a fifteenth century pharmacy shop. Here again we see the hanging wax candles, the shelves with jars and drugs containers, at the top fifteen bentwood boxes and an apothecary weighing merchandises with a balance.

### 3.2 A description of a medieval pharmacy workplace

In 1908, a building in Amiens still conserved the principal elements of the pharmacy of Jehan de Louvegney, dating from 1520. The house is nowadays modernised, but in 1908 the historian Octave Thorel visited the building in



Fig. 3.4 A fifteenth century pharmacy shop. Fresco in the portico of the Issogne castle, Aosta Valley. Public domain.

the *rue des Orfèvres 17* and gave a detailed description.<sup>5</sup> Passing the street-side shop, one arrives down the stairs in the workplace where de Louvigney between 1502 and 1520 extracted herbs and prepared candies and remedies. Thorel described the open fire place, the drying oven and a water well in the corner. The drying oven – with a surface of 106x77cm and only 33 cm high – is placed just above the ember deposit next to the open fire place.

### 3.3 What do the inventories reveal?

In comparison with the pharmacy pictures of the street side fronts, an inventory of a dispensary reveals a more precise view on the instruments and containers in use at that time. We came across four detailed inventories within the Burgundian territory:

- 1408, Dijon, Sancenot de Brecy<sup>6</sup>,
- 1520, Amiens, Jehan de Louvegny<sup>7</sup>,
- 1587, Leyden, Claes Cornelisz<sup>8</sup>,
- 1603, Rotterdam, Jacob Andriesz<sup>9</sup>.

Table 3.1 shows the number of instruments and containers mentioned in the four inventories.

**TABLE 3.1** Number of instruments and containers in the above-mentioned inventories. X=the presence is mentioned, but not the number

	Dijon 1408	Amiens 1520	Leyden 1587	Rotterdam 1603
Instruments of the apothecary				
Mortars	3	5	5	9
Balances	8	8	7	6
Sieves	3		1	3
Spatulas		5	9	7
Measure jugs			7	8
Alembic				X
Ovens		X		X
Containers				
Metal pots	>20	35	151	32
Ceramic pots		26	140	32
Bentwood boxes		X	56	109
Jars			203	101
Bottles		40	6	66