

## *In Focus: Pharmacy in Spain*

# The Spanish Museum of Pharmacy

F. JAVIER PUERTO

*Faculty of Pharmacy, Complutense University of Madrid, 28040 Madrid (Spain)*

### HISTORY OF THE MUSEUM

A museum today should function according to basic didactic principles. That is, it should garner interest whilst simultaneously instructing and teaching the visitor. The cliché of “*delectando pariterque monendo*” is thus realised in the delight of learning.

Traditionally, the museum is also a temple of the Muses. In the case of the Spanish Museum of Pharmacy, as in almost all cases, the Muses have their own names and are only exceptionally male. In keeping with the inspirational role of the Muses, I here call attention to Rafael and Guillermo Folch, who, aided by certain collaborators, compiled the collections now on display. It would be difficult to evaluate their labour adequately and, in the case of Guillermo Folch, it culminated with the donation of his very valuable collection of pharmaceutical ceramics and ancient books. He also donated a large part of his personal patrimony to the Rafael Folch Foundation of the Faculty of Pharmacy. Therefore, whilst acknowledging the efforts carried out by the Complutense University in creating and maintaining the museum, there are

many of us who refer to this institution as the Folch Museum of the History of Pharmacy.

In 1915, when Rafael Folch Andreu won by competitive exam the first Chair of History of Pharmacy at the Spanish university, he was probably already considering the possibility of assembling a museum. He drew his inspiration from the common belief in positivism that inspired historians in the different scientific fields during those years.

The problem of space in the old Faculty, situated in Madrid in the “Calle de la Farmacia” or “Pharmacy Street,” was responsible for the new Professor’s initial lack of office. In 1923, however, he was appointed Secretary of the Faculty. It was at this time that, in the glass cabinets of the Secretary’s office, he began to keep all the old cast-off instruments that the Faculty laboratories threw out. The glass utensils from the old chemistry laboratory of the College of Apothecaries, amongst other things, were thus saved. Some of these utensils were most certainly inherited by Andrés Alcón from the Proust laboratory in Turco Street. Other instruments were salvaged from the San Fernando College of Pharmacy, with the herbarium plate being culled from the

Santiago de Compostela College of Pharmacy. All of these objects represent priceless intellectual and material artefacts.

Once building began on the University City, under the auspices of King Alfonso XII, Rafael Folch was appointed as member of the Construction Board. He managed, therefore, to acquire a zone for housing the Pharmacognosis, Natural Science and History Museums included in the plans for the new Faculty.

The Civil War of 1936–1939 not only put a halt to building, but also turned the University City into a battle front in the fight for Madrid. Once this fratricidal conflict was over, the university campus was re-built and, in 1944, the Faculty of Pharmacy was moved to its current location. The museums that had been planned were not constructed, except for the History of Pharmacy Museum for which premises measuring 25 × 15 m were assigned.

The museum, then, was officially inaugurated in 1951 when Rafael Folch Andreu was about to retire. Guillermo Folch Jou was appointed Professor of the vacant Chair, and Pilar Herrero was appointed first as Lecturer and later as Assistant Professor. Together, they compiled card indexes, carried out inventory and for many years were both the spirit and manpower of the institution.

The history of our institution is an eloquent one, denoting the years during which Rafael Folch Andreu laid the foundations for this valuable establishment. Other highlights include the contributions of Guillermo Folch who, with the help of Pilar Herrero, introduced many new objects into the museum. These accomplishments are redolent of the charm, love of work and intelligent dedication to professionalism of those responsible for establishing the museum. Now, times of reason have served to introduce a more structured order to the many displays. We have come to inherit a rich collection of material and it is up to us to endow it with the human and scientific elements that will make it of use to the scientific and cultural community. So far,

this task has been performed on an individual and voluntary basis. The time has now come to separate the institution from the genius of its directors and make it work, whoever takes over the job.

## THE COLLECTIONS

The museum is situated in the Faculty of Pharmacy in Madrid, and can be entered through the ground floor. It takes up a space of 470 square metres and is divided into nine rooms, four on the upper floor and five below.

In three of the rooms on the upper floor, two pharmacies and an alchemist's laboratory are exhibited. To be more precise, the Gibert Pharmacy – the replica of the Tavera hospital – and the reproduction of an alchemist's laboratory are displayed. In three other rooms on the lower floor the Astorga Pharmacy – from de Madrid Plaza de Santo Domingo – and the reproduction of the Spanish-Arabic chemist's shop are represented. In the three remaining rooms, most of the 4268 objects catalogued to date are exhibited.

The museum has an important collection of Spanish ceramics made up of over 1200 pieces which date from the end of the thirteenth-century up to the twentieth. Also included in this collection are excellent samples of French, Italian, Dutch and Persian pottery. The pottery exhibit is highlighted by a valuable collection of porcelain jars and goblets, of the kind which began to replace stoneware ones on chemists' shelves during the middle of the nineteenth-century.

The pottery collection has about 200 mortars made from various materials, and includes Roman grindstones, ceramic, stone, marble, ivory and metal specimens. There is a great variance of size in the collection, ranging from great bell-shaped mortars, such as Fulgencio Palomero's from the chemist's shop in Santo Domingo de Silos (Burgos), to those that could be confused

with mortars for domestic purposes. Most of them are of Spanish origin, but there are others of Arabic, German, Italian and French origin, too.

An important collection of scales and balances is also on show. Some are manual, others are table models, others precision models, but all are important for their historical value and some are undoubtedly of artistic interest.

There is an important set of polychromed wooden boxes that were used to preserve medicinal plants. The oldest of these dates from the sixteenth-century, although all of them are of interest both for the medicinal information they provide and for their aesthetic value.

A valuable collection of medicines is also preserved. Of these, the most outstanding are those which date from the pre-scientific tradition, such as the unicorn's "hoof of the great beast," "the rhinoceros horn," "the stamped earth" and "the mummy flesh." Also displayed are medicines with a long tradition in Pharmacopoeia, such as Theriaca, coral, Spanish fly and bezoar stones. The museum preserves the first Spanish "specific," the *Riaza pot*, and, although not on show, also holds a magnificent collection of the oldest Spanish specialities. In this area, we could also include the homeopathic and granulometric medicine chests, of which there are excellent examples; the travelling medicine kits, some dating from the sixteenth-century, such as the one from Granada; and the collection of amulets, most of which are of Guinean origin.

A good collection of scientific equipment is also preserved, some of which is on show, the rest preserved in storage. Amongst the examples on show, we could mention the microscopes,

with German and French examples dating from the seventeenth- and nineteenth-centuries, as well as picnometers, densimeters, basins, hygrometers, stoves, autoclaves, stills, electric and vacuum machines.

There is a good collection of glass utensils, including siphons, curb glasses, small bottles for pharmaceutical use and coloured jars. There are also early flasks – some dating from the seventeenth-century – and laboratory materials – some from the eighteenth-century – such as "the pelicans" or "woman with arms akimbo," the "Moor's head," as well as other distilling instruments.

Finally, regarding the equipment on display, the museum exhibits specific instruments for preparing medicines, such as the pill-boxes, tablet moulds, cups for gilding and silvering pills, compressors of varying sizes, moulds for suppositories, vaginal ovules, amylicaceous capsules or tablets and powder dosifiers.

Then there is the documentary material. This material includes the preserved Acts certifying that the building in Calle de la Farmacia, where the original Faculty was installed and now occupied by the Royal Academy of Pharmacy, was bought through the joint contributions of all Spanish pharmacists. There is the New Testament with the oath used on the swearing-in of doctors; Pharmacopoeia and therapeutic books; academic diplomas of Graduate and Doctor and a few remarkable engravings and paintings.

Finally, the museum preserves academic souvenirs of noteworthy members of the Faculty Board, including their gowns, medals, certificates and in some cases, their personal documents.