

Bataviasche Apotheek

A missed opportunity?

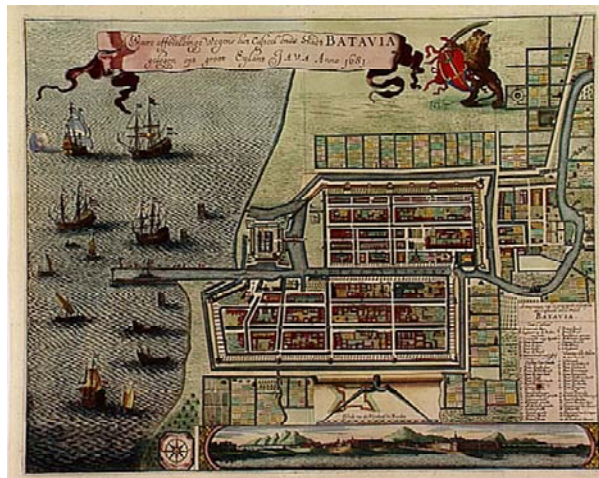
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In 1602 the Dutch East India Company (VOC) was founded. And the next year the Company appointed an apothecary in Amsterdam to take care of the medication-boxes aboard their ships. For many years that was about all the work for pharmacists, as the boxes were used by the ship-surgeons, who sailed to the East. No doctors or pharmacists aboard, these men had to choose the correct medication for all the difficult, often tropical diseases they encountered. And, as we can judge nowadays, with probably very little success.

A few years later, the town of Batavia, nowadays Jakarta, was founded, starting with a fortress, built in stone, while the rest of the growing “city” was mostly build with bamboo. Close to this fortress was a place called the “medicinal shop” , which was to be the only place where medicines, all imported from Holland, were stored.

Map of Batavia (1681)



A medical doctor was the head of this “shop”, and all medication, needed for the treatment of the VOC personnel had to be distributed via this shop. Only many years later a town-pharmacy was in action in the growing colony, but even this pharmacy was obliged to obtain all medication via the “Medicinal Shop” of the VOC.

In the beginning the VOC ordered all “medical” personnel to investigate the herbs and medicinal plants of the region, to send them to Holland, with their names, and, more important, their medical applications. This did not make a lot of changes; the medicines in the Medicinal Shop remained the better known European ones.

At the end of the XVIIth century a medical doctor, in the service of the VOC, Hermannus Grimm published two books which focused on the indigenous herbs and plants for the also indigenous illnesses of the East Indies and Ceylon. His “Pharmacopoeia Indica” was only rediscovered

a few decades ago. Published in Germany, in Latin, it never had a big influence. His “Laboratorium Chymicum” of 1677 was written in Dutch, while we was working in Ceylon.



In this booklet he described a vast amount of plants and herbs, which he found in Ceylon, and which he thought to be superior to many of the medicinal plants from Europe. For instance Cornu Cervi was better replaced by elephant's bones, easier to obtain and just as effective. On the other hand, one of the better medicines, in his opinion, was rhinoceros-horn; we would not agree with him on this point. But his finest medicinal herb was cinnamon; he describes about 20 preparations, made of every imaginable part of that tree!

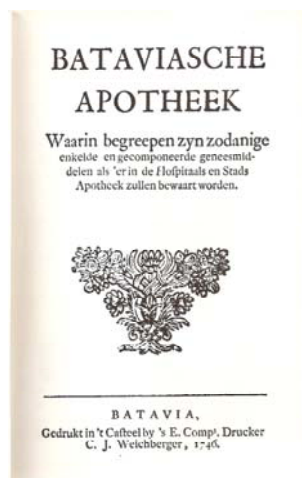
During the first decades of the existence of Batavia, all medication for the European personnel (and for all other personnel, if they wanted it) were to be obtained from the shop in Batavia; this shop provided the substances for the rest of the East-Indies and all other places where the VOC

had settlements, in India, Ceylon, Thailand, Formosa and Japan. Non-European personnel, and in fact, everybody could obtain their medication out of the City-Pharmacy in Batavia (which could get its medicines from the Medicine-shop only!). But of course, when the city of Batavia grew, this was not enough, certainly not for all the local inhabitants. For those people, and for the VOC-personnel without confidence in the European medicines, local pharmacies existed, probably run, as nowadays, by Chinese immigrants.

Without discussing the colonial past of my country, I am afraid the “pogrom” against the Chinese population around 1740, in which many tens of thousands Chinese were slaughtered made the pharmaceutical service for the inhabitants of Batavia difficult. They had to rely on the Medicinal Shop again, and that gave the shop some problems, financially as well. It costs more than the VOC liked, for virtually every medicine had to be imported from Europe, at higher prices, of course. And to overcome this problem, rules had to be made!

Their solution for this turned out to be a sort of pharmacopoeia in which the simplicia and composita were described to which the doctors and pharmacists had to stick to. No fancy composita, with perhaps expensive or rare ingredients!

Wherein are included such
simplicia and composita as will
be stored in the "Medicinal
Shop" and the City-Pharmacy



This “pharmacopoeia” turned out to become the “Bataviasche Apotheek”, written in Dutch. All the ingredients of the medicine-trunks from the VOC-ships are found in it and many simplicia from de Amsterdam Pharmacopoeia. In all 311 simplicia are mentioned, while the Amsterdam Pharmacopoeia gave 713 ! Doctor Grimm’s publications were forgotten, only very few Indonesian medicines were mentioned.

ACETUM FLORUM CUSPIDUM.

In 't Maleeifch genoemt

TANJONI, BOEA TANJONG.

ACETUM FLORUM MALATTI.

ACETUM FRUCTUS NAM NAM.

- Acetum florum Cuspidum
- *Called in Malayan*
- Tanjoni, Boea Tanjong
- (Mimusops elengi L. a flower-extract is given for fevers)
- Acetum Florum Malatti
- (Jasminum sambae, still in use nowadays, to stop lactation, and an aqueous extract for eye-complaints)
- Acetum Fructus Nam Nam
- (Cynometra cauliflorum, more a vegetable today than a medicine)

Strangely enough, NamNam is mentioned, without a European name, and not a local medicine any more . Over all only a dozen local simplicia can be found in the “Apotheek”, and most of those are indigenous to East-Africa or India. From time to time in the “compositae” the word “indicae” is added to some European herb, like cochlearea or matricaria, thus indicating that a cheaper herb could be found in the colony. On the other hand, sometimes a preparation is mentioned with the addition: to be imported from Holland.

Cardui benedicti and *Centaurii minoris* can be ordered from Europe

Apotheek.
Cardui benedicti en
Centaurii minoris,
Kunnen uit Europa ontboden worden.

Spiritus Vini Gallici could be replaced by Spiritus Arak, and Olive oil by Coconut oil, both easier to obtain. And so “Frog-oil” was allowed to be prepared with it.

Take *Ranarum fluviatilium*, as many as you want. Boil them in a reasonable quantity of coconut oil until they are molten, filter it and store the *oleum*.

104. *Bataviafche*
OLEUM RANARUM EXPRESSUM.
Neemt Ranarum fluviatilium, zo veel gy wilt. Kookt dezelve zo lange in een beoorlyke quantiteit Clapper-Olie tot ze gesmolten zyn, dan co-locert en bewaart het oleum.

And, quite modern, Cornu Cervi was considered nothing better than “burned earth”, almost useless.

The “Apotheek” itself was declared official for the Medicinal Shop and the City-Pharmacy only ! But nevertheless it was forgotten quite soon. Not being written in Latin gave it perhaps a “non-scientific” impression to the medical doctors. And of course, the VOC favored the European medicines, for with the import of those substances, they made a fine profit.

So the Bataviasche Apotheek, although not written in Latin, was the first official pharmacopoeia in the Dutch tropical colonies, but the lack of any serious influence of the local flora and fauna was probably one of the reasons it was forgotten soon, and for a long time.

A few decades later, at the end of the century, the VOC had the intention to declare the latest version of the Amsterdam Pharmacopoeia the official one in Batavia. The transport of this book took too long, and as a large contingent of military troops in the colony was from Wurttemberg in Germany (with their own medical and pharmaceutical staff), the Pharmacopoeia Wurttembergensis was made official until the end of the VOC-days in Indonesia.

To finish all this, I would like to end with a preparation, quite different from the weird ones like scorpion- or rain worm-oil; I guess you would prefer this one better, perhaps even on your breakfast bread: Pineapple jelly...

Take *Succi expressi fructus
maturi Ananas* one pound
Sacchari candi, half a pound.
Let these boil softly together,
removing regularly the foam,
and let it boil as long as it
needs, to obtain the consistency
of a jelly.

ROB FRUCTUUM ANANAS.

Neemt Succi expressi fructus maturi Ananas,
een pond.

Sacchari candi, een half pond.

*Laat deze zachtjes met malkanderen koken en
neemt met een Schuim spaangeduurig het Schuim
daarvan, en laat ze zo lange kookken tot ze de
consistentie van een Rob hebben:*