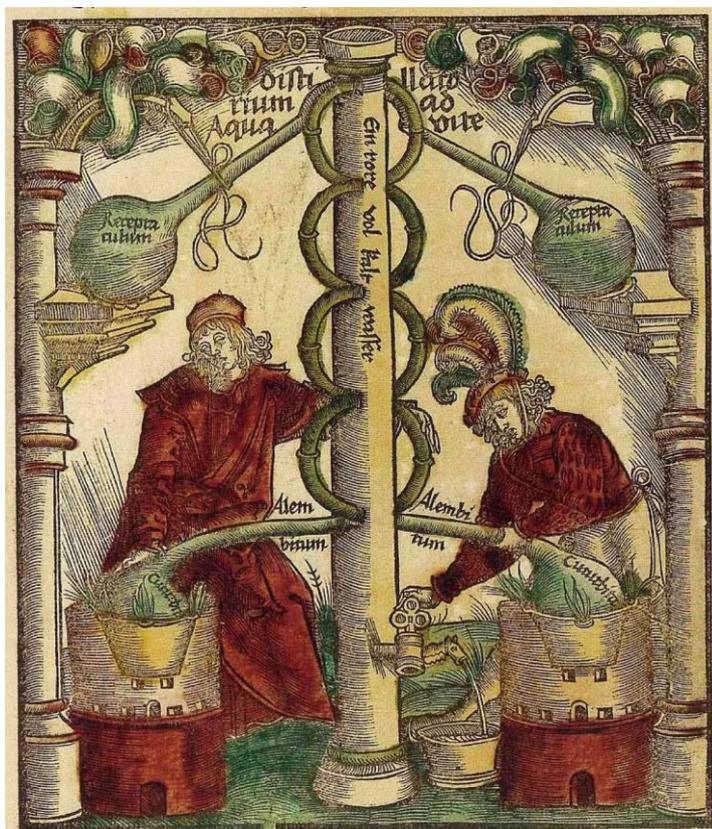


Healing in the Changes of Time - Aurum Potabile

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An interesting drug with exceptionally miraculous effects was **Aurum Potabile**, i.e. drinking or consumable liquid gold. Precious metals were believed to have healing properties and improve human health.



Figures 1-2: The mysterious panacea of the Middle Ages Aurum Potabile had a reputation for curing all diseases of the world. The use of drinking gold was also taken seriously by Artepheus in the 12th century who was convinced that this elixir extended his life by ten years. He published a secret book in around 1150, in which he wrote that he had discovered an elixir to prolong his life.

The belief in the miraculous effects of gold has existed for a long time but was revived significantly in the 16th century. Since gold resisted solvents and physical phenomena, it also acquired the properties of indestructibility and immortality.

The first to attribute the healing power of liquid gold was Arnold de Villa Nova (1235/1240 – 1311), a physician who was also persecuted by the Inquisition for alleged magic. Paracelsus was also enthusiastic about the effects of Aurum Potabile. Drinking gold has been recommended for the treatment of various diseases such as gout, rheumatism, stomach problems, gastric acid deficiency or excess, appendicitis, suppression of inflammation, strengthening of bones and heart, various infectious diseases, and epidemics.



Figures 3-5: There were several different recipes for drinking gold. The recipe of the unknown date reads: “Cook up borage, common bugloss, lemon balm in rose water which had been dissolved in white sugar; add 3 gold leaves with a small amount of white wine of golden colour. Then take distilled water; put a few gold flakes that had been previously melted, and cool in clean spring water. Stir everything into the white wine and soften the drink with fresh egg yolk.” Francis Anthony (1550 – 1623) was an English physician and chemist, his father was a goldsmith in London. In 1598 he published the work *Panacea Aurea*, in which he describes the excellent effects of the medicine. In his later writings, he also defended gold in drinking form as a universal medicine. He came into a conflict with a college of doctors for concealing the medicine’s composition. They denied any special effectiveness of gold and ejected the superiority of metals over drugs.

Many doctors assumed it was beneficial to strengthen the body as a whole and ensure disease resistance, but it was exceptional mainly in that it slowed down aging and prolonged life. We learn from written documents that the recommended dose was one to two drinks a day before meals for four days. The methods and ways of preparing the drink of eternal life were different. Sometimes they contained gold, but often it was missing. According to contemporary writings, it was a heavy, oily liquid of dark yellow colour. The preparation process itself took several months.

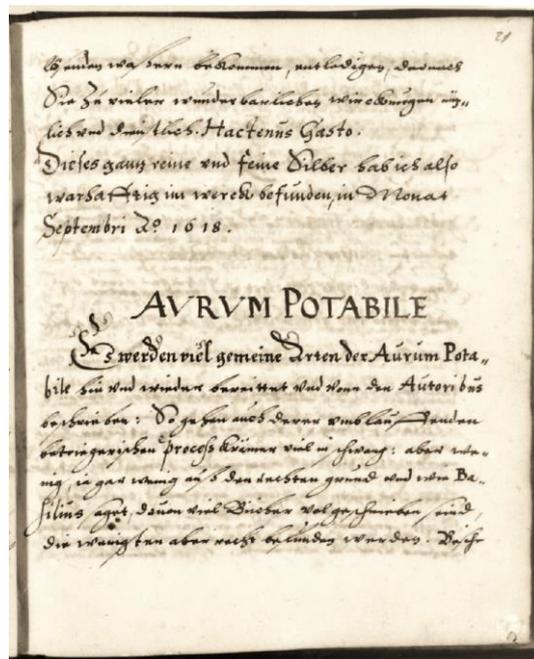
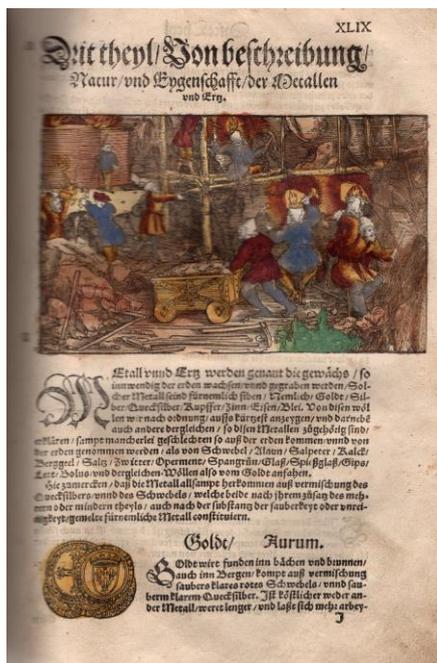


Figure 6: A Description of gold in the book *Kräuterbuch...* by Adam Lonicer from 1560.

Figure 7: Preparation of the drinking gold.

Several recipes have been preserved – from the strangest to the most simple when they cooked gold only with honey and then distilling it, or when leaf gold was soaked in lemon juice, distilled, and then mixed with Cretan wine and apple juice. A Nuremberg physician Johann Hiski Cardilucius (1630 – 1697) also had the recipe for the healing golden liquid. He left the gold in a “sufficient” amount of Aqua Regis and mixed it with rainwater. According to him, the resulting drug was useful in incurable diseases. Recipe from 1684 describes the preparation of the liquid gold as follows: “Collect the flowers of the lily of the valley, store in a glass bottle, add strong wine, wallflower (*Erysimum Cheiri*), rosemary, sage, and lavender.

Place in a shade and mix daily. Add ground cinnamon, nutmeg, chamomile flowers, 3 gold coins three days before distilling.” Only solvent consumers could afford this disease-relieving and life-prolonging drug. Monarchs, prelates, and nobility were among them. The influential Italian physician Marsilio Ficino (1433 – 1499) recommended it to King Matthias Corvinus to prolong his life. A prescription was also sent to him by a doctor named Ulricus. The recipe for Aurum Potabile was also owned by Emperor Rudolf II who purchased the drug. The miraculous medicine was still produced in the 17th century. Mentioned of this drug can be found in the work *Processus Angeli Salae, Chymici illius & Philosophi Spagyrici celeberrimi, De Auro Potabili...* (1630) by Italian physician and chemist Angelo Sala, or in *De Auri Tinctura sive Auro Potabili Vero* (1646) by Johann Rudolf Glauber (1604-1670).



Figure 8: The case of Diane de Poitiers (1499 – 1566), a courtier, advisor, and later a mistress of King Henry II of France (1519 – 1559), was well known. Although she was twenty years older than the king, she was beautiful, she had porcelain skin. Her secret was the golden elixir, which she drank several times a day to maintain her youth. After analyzing her hair, it was found she died of gold poisoning.

Figure 9: Francis Anthony (1550 – 1623) was an English physician and chemist, his father was a goldsmith in London. In 1598 he published the work *Panacea Aurea*, in which he describes the excellent effects of the medicine. In his later writings, he also defended gold in drinking form as a universal medicine. He came into a conflict with a college of doctors for concealing the medicine's composition. They denied any special effectiveness of gold and ejected the superiority of metals over drugs.



Figure 10: Drinking gold as a miracle drug also resonated in literature, e.g. in *Gargantua and Pantagruel* (1534) by French writer, physician, and priest Francois Rabelais, “Gentleman, I am poor as a devil! I ask you for mercy for myself. I still have a tolar, we will spend it because it is aurum potabile...” The belief in the panacea was strong even in the middle of the 18th century when Count Mittrovsky received an order for 8 ló (lót – old unit of weight) of 24 carat gold, which he was to send in the finest possible quality to Count Bishop Csiky. The chronicle does not mention whether the bishop used the drinking gold.

Sources of illustrations

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