

# HEALTH AND ASSISTANCE IN 16<sup>TH</sup> C. LYONS

TOPIC

## ROOM 8: RENAISSANCE, INTERIORS - 16<sup>TH</sup> C.

### Hôtel-Dieu and the accommodation of patients

#### The Grand Hôtel-Dieu de Notre-Dame de Pitié du Rhône

In the late 15<sup>th</sup> c., Lyons had several hospital establishments, all of which were religious, including hôpital de la Chanal, hôpital Saint-Jean, the small Hôtel-Dieu for women and the hôpital de Saint-Laurent des Vignes for plague victims, etc.

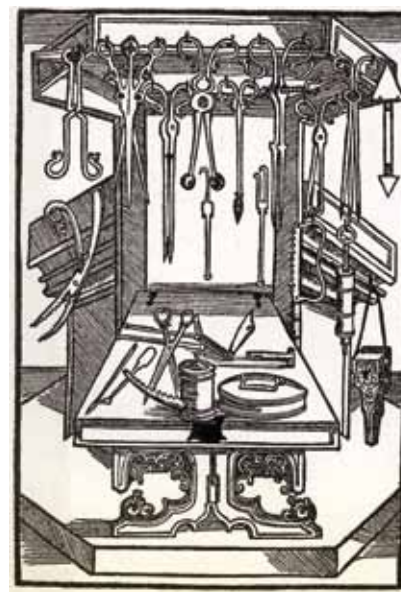
In 1478, in view of the extent of the plague epidemic, the Consulate took control of all hospital establishments. Around 1507, the alderman had a big hospital constructed on the site of the current chapel of the Hôtel-Dieu: the Grand Hôtel-Dieu de Notre-Dame de Pitié du Rhône, which developed during the 16<sup>th</sup> c. thanks to financial and property donations from the Middle Classes. In 1530 King François I exempted it from tax and tolls. In 1583, hospital administration was handed over to the Middle Classes and the merchants.



L'hôtel-Dieu in the 16<sup>th</sup> c. when Rabelais practised medicine there, photocopy of lithography, anonymous engraver, 16<sup>th</sup> c., Inv. 52.28

### Hospital staff

L'Hôtel-Dieu was managed by a Board of Rectors. In terms of medical staff hierarchy, the physician topped the list. He was responsible for making the diagnosis and deciding on the drugs, dressings and operations to prescribe for the patient, "talk about his (the patient's) case and boost his morale". He did not carry out any procedures. The physician neither lodged nor ate at the



hospital, but received 40 pounds per year. Under his instructions, the barber surgeon, who shaved patients ("removed their hair"), dressed them and carried out operations, lived in the hospital and was paid 10 pounds a year. The apothecary administered drugs. Finally, the hospital had about twenty nuns who lodged and ate at the hospital and who were directed by Mother Superior.

Dresser holding surgical instruments, engraving, anonymous, 16<sup>th</sup> c., Inv. 1832.1

### François Rabelais, a good physician

Rabelais, who was appointed physician at the Grand Hôtel-Dieu in 1532, is remembered as a good physician who paid attention to his patients. He was the inventor of two surgical instruments: a *syringotome* for hernia repair and a *glottocomon* to reduce pelvic fractures. In 1534, he quickly left the town and his job: faced with the surge in Protestantism, promoted by Calvin – "libertine swine" – he no longer felt safe. But he made sure that he was replaced by colleagues.



Portrait of François Rabelais, engraving, anonymous, 16<sup>th</sup> c., Inv. 55.155

### Three patients per bed!

The number of patients cared for at the Grand Hôtel-Dieu varied from 150 to 200, but only 74 beds were available! Half of the patients were strangers in town: people from Paris, Italy, Picardy, Gascony, Brittany or Normandy, who had come to Lyons because of the fairs and wars. The other half came from the parishes of Saint-Nizier, Saint-Paul, la Platière, Sainte-Croix and Saint-Michel. Most were poor. In hospital, the men and women were treated separately but all saw the chapel from their bed and warmed themselves around the central fireplace. A room was reserved for pregnant women and abandoned children up to 7 years of age.

### The general almshouse and aid for the poor

#### The boost from collective charity in the face of famine

In 1529, there was a shortage of wheat in Lyons but there were rumours of huge exports to Italy and fine houses were said to be under construction for the merchants. Posters signed "*Le Pôvre*" were hung up to draw attention to the situation. On 25 April 1529, in Cordeliers, 2 000 rioters pillaged the homes of the Middle Classes. This was known as the Grande Rebeyne (in local dialect meaning "riot"), which persisted for three days before being forcibly repressed by the Consulate.

When the threat of famine reappeared in 1531, the Consulate, clergy, foreigners (the Florentines, Germans such as Jean Kleberger (Inv. 157), and people from Milan) rubbed shoulders with the merchants. The poor people were gathered together in Cordeliers, Jacobins, at the Commanderie Saint-Georges (commander's residence), hôpital de la Chanal or in cabins in the Ainay meadows and a temporary charity programme fed 5 056 individuals for 52 days... before asking them to leave the town after their lives had been saved!

A permanent **General Almshouse** (Inv. 41.197 **Plaque of the general almshouse**) was then created by the Consulate in 1533.



*Hospice général des vieillards et orphelins de Lyon* (General hospice for the elderly and orphaned of Lyons), stamp and seal of the hôpital de la Charité, anonymous, date unknown, Inv. 1579.6

### Charity workers

The General Almshouse was managed by fifteen or so rectors. Their involvement was voluntary and they had to provide money advances without charging interest and give donations on their departure... they were chosen from amongst the wealthiest merchants. Their role led to the position of alderman/magistrate and involved wearing a wig!

Staff at the almshouse was limited because the residents, most of whom were able-bodied, also carried out tasks. The following were often recruited from amongst those being helped: a chaplain, accounts secretary, school mistress, four beadles for the internal police service, a miller and a baker, etc. Basic health service was provided: the barber surgeon of the Grand Hôtel-Dieu, and then, from 1551 onwards, a community practitioner, who provided care.

During the 16th c., the services of the General Almshouse were scattered in various parts of the town in dilapidated buildings. In 1624, a project to unite these services resulted in the construction of the hôpital de la Charité, according to plans drawn up by Jesuit brother Étienne Martellange.

### Children protected in the general almshouse

The General Almshouse accommodated orphaned or needy boys from the age of 7 years upwards. These "boys of Chanal (hospital)" were educated and, to give them a source of income, they took on apprenticeships at manufacturing companies or worked as domestic staff or as novices in convents.

The "girls of Sainte-Catherine (hospital)" were trained as chambermaids in middle class households in order to become good housekeepers when they weren't sent to silk workshops. Their wages were sent to the Almshouse until they reached adulthood or married.

### The General Almshouse – a house of correction?

By order of the King, the "*rogues, rascals, able-bodied knaves and vagabonds*" – all able-bodied beggars – were instructed to leave the town or were sent to carry out forced labour cleaning the streets and building ditches at Saint-Sébastien (ramparts at the top of the Croix-Rousse slopes). Treated harshly, they were imprisoned in the Almshouse tower. Difficult children were also sometimes sent to the Almshouse for a limited period of time by their parents.

Finally, some prisoners were sent to the Almshouse to serve out their sentence.

### Assistance for citizens

However, the Almshouse also helped citizens: handing out bread or money (basic resources for unemployed canuts in particular), linen for prisoners, "*passades*" (short-term assistance in the form of food, clothing or shelter) for foreigners passing through, donations for poor girls... even secret alms (charity) for people in the public eye who had fallen on bad times.