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## **CAMBIOS SOCIALES Y COMUNICATIVOS A TRAVÉS DE LA PUBLICIDAD MÉDICA Y FARMACÉUTICA EN LA PRENSA HISTÓRICA DE BILBAO, 1885-1936**

### ***Social and communicative changes through medical and pharmaceutical advertising in Bilbao historical newspapers, 1885-1936***

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### **Resumen**

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En las últimas décadas del siglo XIX y primeras del XX la publicidad se convirtió en una herramienta comunicativa que coadyuvó a las transformaciones sociales en el mundo urbano español. Este artículo analiza los cambios sociales y comunicativos acaecidos en la España urbana de dicho periodo, a través del análisis de los anuncios impresos del sector de la salud, publicados en las principales cabeceras de la prensa de Bilbao, incluyendo las de mayor circulación en esos momentos. El trabajo trata de establecer tanto el público al que iban destinados, como las innovaciones acaecidas en el sector a lo largo de las décadas estudiadas.

**Palabras clave:** publicidad, medicinas, salud, consumo, Bilbao.

### **Abstract**

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Throughout the last decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century and first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, advertising became a key communicative tool that contributed to social transformations in urban Spain. This paper studies social and communicative changes arisen in the country at that time, by analyzing a sample of medical and pharmaceutical advertisements published and collected in Bilbao's historical newspapers, included

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those of highest circulation in the city. The research intends to determinate both the audiences and the innovations that happened within the sector at that time.

**Keywords:** advertising, pharmaceutical & medical products, health, consumption, Bilbao.

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Advertising is one of the most characteristic cultural phenomena of contemporary society, a communicative tool that has made a decisive contribution to shaping values, aspirations, lifestyles and social archetypes over the last two centuries (Eguizábal, 2009). However, advertisements, in their different media, continue to be a documentary source little exploited by Spanish historiography, with exceptions (Marchamalo, 1996; De Andrés del Campo, 2005; Bermejo Barrios, coord., 2005; Balandrón Pazos, Correyero-Ruiz and Villalobos Montes, 2007; Rodríguez Martín, 2008; González Mesa, 2010; Montero, 2011; Rodríguez Martín, 2015).

This article aims to make a contribution to the study of socio-cultural transformations in the Spanish urban world in the first third of the twentieth century by examining a large and representative sample of advertisements for medical and pharmaceutical products, disseminated throughout the last decades of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in several historical newspapers published in Bilbao, including those with the largest circulation during the period: *El Noticiero Bilbaíno*, *El Liberal*, *El Nervión*, *El Porvenir Vasco*, *La Gaceta del Norte* and *Euzkadi*. We have also reviewed the advertisements in the medicine and pharmacopoeia sector that appeared in some newspapers published in the second half of the 19th century, such as *Irurac Bac*, in order to try to contextualise and explain with greater rigour and accuracy the changes that took place in the subsequent period.

Methodologically, it should be noted that the analysis focuses, on the one hand, on the evolution of the number of advertisements and advertisers, as well as on the type of medical products and services advertised. It also analyses the slogans, texts, typography and commercial images used in the composition of the advertising pieces. The research is therefore based on historical print advertisements, and is complemented by other secondary sources, such as specialised magazines and medical publications published in the reference period.

## 2. THE MEDICAL PANTRY: ORIGINS AND EVOLUTION

Medical remedies formed an essential part of the household larder in urban society in the first third of the 20th century. This can be deduced from the health-related advertising inserted in the press. For much of the period it was the most important group of advertisements, although its relative weight declined in the 1920s, when there was a considerable increase in the advertising of branded products in the cosmetics, personal hygiene and food sectors. Also of the new consumer products that began to flood the market in this period, such as automobiles and the first household appliances, as well as shops and leisure and catering establishments, some of which were very modern, such as dry cleaners and photoengraving shops.

Up to that time, advertising for medical and pharmaceutical products designed the largest advertisements, frequently using graphics and a language of their own, something unusual in other sectors. His engravings depicted two poles, the patient in pain - suffering, resting if he had become convalescent - and the cured patient, brimming with health. There was no in-between: either sick or full of health. In between was the medical action, sometimes miraculous, if the advertisements were to be believed. Medical advertising portrayed extreme situations, health in spurts and illness without palliatives - or before they had acted - but not two social worlds. Its images always presented a bourgeois physiognomy: in health and in illness. If the size and frequency of the advertisements corresponded to consumer interest, medical remedies had pride of place in many larders. These advertisements reveal the most commercially popular solutions, even if their medical usefulness is sometimes in doubt. The advertising arguments used in these advertisements give us an insight into the mentality of certain urban groups<sup>2</sup>.

Here we analyse medical advertising in the Bilbao press during the late 19th and early 20th centuries in *El Noticiero Bilbaíno*, *El Liberal*, *El Nervión*, *La Gaceta del Norte* and *Euzkadi*<sup>3</sup>. The most representative of these newspapers was the first one, the one with the greatest continuity, which allows us to trace the evolution between 1885 and 1936 - the advertisements of the 19th century help us to interpret the later years-. *El Noticiero Bilbaíno* was the newspaper of reference in Bilbao, as well as the masthead with the highest number of advertisements. At the beginning of the 1920s, it was equalled in medical insertions by the newspaper *El Liberal*. On a day chosen as representative, 30 June 1921, medical advertising in Bilbao's newspapers was as follows, measured in terms of the number of advertisements published:

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<sup>2</sup> For the case of England, see the work of Barker (2009), in which the author analyses the boom in medical advertising in the newspapers of Manchester, Liverpool, Leeds and Sheffield between 1760 and 1820, in the context of the urban growth of the period, and in relation to the notion of "trust", to explain the development of new patterns of consumption.

<sup>3</sup> The reference work for the study of the Spanish press in this period is the complete study by Seone and Saiz (1996), where data on the founding, affiliation, circulation and readership of the newspapers in circulation during these years can be consulted, including those on which this work is based, with the exception of *El Nervión*. The dean of the Bilbao press is *El Noticiero Bilbaíno*, founded in 1875 and in circulation until 1937. The independent republican *El Liberal* and the Catholic *La Gaceta del Norte* were founded in 1901, and the nationalist *Euzkadi* in 1913. On the Basque press in particular, see Sáiz

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Valdivielso (2000) and Urquijo Goitia (2005).

**Table 1.** *Number of advertisements in the above-mentioned newspapers, 30 June 1921.*

Headline	N.º of adverts
<i>El Noticiero Bilbaíno</i>	38
<i>El Liberal</i>	37
<i>Euzkadi</i>	17
<i>El Nervión y la tarde</i>	10
<i>Gaceta del Norte</i>	10

**Source:** *own elaboration.*

The comparison between *El Noticiero Bilbaíno* and *El Liberal* only took place at the time. It did not question the former's leadership in medicine advertising, as most of the latter's were about doctors, not medicines. As we shall see, the contrast refers to the social segmentation that took place in advertising. Since the eighties of the nineteenth century, medical advertising had a very high presence in the Bilbao press, and in the last two decades of the century it accounted for more than 20% of the advertisements. The high presence of these advertisements in the Bilbao newspapers corresponds to what was happening in the national illustrated press at the end of the nineteenth century (Fernández Poyatos, 2011, p. 121). It experienced the greatest growth in the 1990s, when it comfortably exceeded 30 advertisements per issue. After that, it stagnated, with ups and downs between 25 and 44 -advertising had a marked seasonal rhythm, so in the continuous series we stick to homogeneous dates-. During the thirties of the 20th century, it exceeded 20, even in the months when this advertising declined. However, this advertising lost relative importance, as it did not follow the expansion of advertisements when they exceeded 200 and approached 300, most of which were word advertisements.

As we have pointed out above, the medical advertisements of the second half of the 19th century are of interest for this study, as they allow us to interpret more accurately the changes that occurred in the following decades. Before the last Carlist War, they already used their own advertising language, not without a certain aggressiveness. They were the most extensive, with lengthy explanations of illnesses, prizes received and the virtues of the medicine. Miracle products predominated, which were presented as a solution to cure a wide range of ailments. Rob Boyveau-Lafecteur, for example, was advertised in 1868 as a remedy to cure 'radically cutaneous diseases, instep, abscesses [sic], cancers, ulcers, degenerate scabies, scrofula, scurvy, loss, etc."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Advertisement Rob Boyveau-Lafecteur, (1868, May 23) *Irurac bat*.

Holloway's Pills and Ointment, on the other hand, were said in their advertisements to put an end to "the impurity of the blood", the origin of all illnesses; we know that they had no active ingredient, except the placebo effect, but all kinds of virtues were attributed to them: "it spulses [sic] all morbid particles, cools and cleanses all the diseased parts"<sup>5</sup>.

Advertising techniques based on technical language, large-format advertisements, mention of prizes and efficacy against a wide range of diseases were found in the years after the third Carlist war. They had suggestive names, uncertain content and recurrently used the adjective "depurative". They suggested that the panacea in question purified the body and prevented the onset of illnesses or cured them<sup>6</sup>. Thus, Orive's syrup of iodised Honduras bramble, "purifying, anti-scrofulous and anti-syphilitic", cured the greater and the lesser. Or it prevented it, advertising its application to cure the effects of syphilis and "recent and chronic heart attacks, skin eruptions, bone cavities, and finally, it effectively combats all blood vices that usually manifest themselves by disturbances in hearing and sight and heaviness of the body". It used comparative advertising, quoting its competitors, claiming that it outperformed other depuratives such as Rob Lafecteur Rob Claret, 'shrouded in the farce of secrecy'<sup>7</sup>. From 1880 onwards, medical advertisements grew spectacularly in our sample, from 7 per day to 38 in 1900. The main growth occurred in the nineties, coinciding with the settlement of the middle classes in Bilbao. Interest in medical remedies was associated with this area. A large part of the medical advertisements were for foreign products - it was the only sector in which this was the case - and they reproduced arguments and graphics used in the United States, Great Britain or France. Their advertising modernisation introduced international criteria.

In the last twenty years of the 19th century, we can highlight a series of characteristics. Firstly, the maintenance of depurative and restorative products as compulsory items in medicine cabinets. It is also noted that they ceased to be of unnamed composition, and the advertisements contained information on the product on which they were based: ferruginous, phosphates, quinine wines, kola wines, magnesium, meat concentrates or flours.... Most of them were presented as a panacea capable of combating everything, exploiting the idea that illnesses were caused by impurities in the blood. Thus, Iron Bravais fought anaemia, chlorosis, weakness, exhaustion..., Bellini's Wine with cinchona and Columbo, impoverishment of the blood, pale colours, hot flushes, fevers<sup>8</sup>...

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<sup>5</sup> Holloway Ointment was claimed to be an 'infallible curative for scrofula, cancers, tumours, leg ailments, stiffness of the joints, rheumatism, gout, neuralgia, tic-pain and paralysis'. Advertisement Holloway's Pills and Ointment, (1868, March 25) *Irurac bat*.

<sup>6</sup> Ricord Favrot's Depurative Syrup, for example, claimed to be indispensable to "completely cure skin diseases and to finish purifying the blood after an anti-syphilitic treatment". As a preventive, it was said to be useful to avoid "all the accidents that can result from constitutional syphilis". Advertisement Ricord Favrot, (1876, August 3) *El Noticiero Bilbaíno*.

<sup>7</sup> Advertisement Orive's syrup of iodised Honduras bramble, (1876, August 3) *El Noticiero Bilbaíno*.

<sup>8</sup> Bellini wine advertisement, (1880, June 12) *El Noticiero Bilbaíno*.

Along the same lines, purgatives were also attributed with extraordinary efficacy<sup>9</sup>. Generic products appeared that did not cure everything, but only certain types of illnesses, for example, those of the nerves, such as potassium bromide syrup made from bitter orange peels, against "epilepsy, hysteria, migraine, St. Vitus dance, insomnia, convulsions [...] in a word, all nervous disorders"<sup>10</sup>. Similarly, there is a trend towards specialisation - as a guarantee of efficacy, an advertising gimmick or for both reasons - which is also confirmed by the appearance of specific products. P. Lamouroux's Syrup and Pectoral Paste cured "Diseases of the chest"<sup>11</sup>, Paterson's Powders and Pills, stomach pills<sup>12</sup>. And there were capsules against contagious diseases<sup>13</sup>, eye ointments, some toothpaste products (powder and paste).... The most widely advertised were against venereal diseases. These were Raquin capsules, Injectio Brouy or Ricord Favort injections.

A third characteristic is the inclusion of medicinal mineral waters as health claims, particularly when there was a cholera epidemic, which was also combated by some liquors - aniseed -, wines and some toothpaste. These waters were presented as panaceas. For example, the Agua de Loeches La Margarita claimed to cure "scrofula, herpes, rheumatism, syphilis, ulcers, womb infarctions, white discharge, stomach pain...", as well as being "the cheapest, mildest and most effective purgative"<sup>14</sup>. Products related to the hygiene and beauty sector also appeared, such as hair dyes, skin creams, baldness remedies, depilatories, cosmetic powders or pills for the development of the female breast. Modernity was thus associated with body care and beauty. In addition, and increasingly, these advertisements included those for doctors. The city was growing and personal knowledge or circles of acquaintances were no longer enough, advertising was necessary. Doctors advertised themselves as specialists - dentists, callisthenics, nervous diseases, respiratory diseases, "throat, nose and ear", etc. - and as "specialists"<sup>15</sup>, etc.-. Skin, syphilis, secretory and venereal diseases" were also very important.

Some changes in the last years of the century point to the modernisation of medical advertising. Specialisation was growing and cough, cold and cold products were gaining strength. Brand names were gaining prominence, backed by a manufacturer. They often claimed to be suitable for all respiratory diseases.

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<sup>9</sup> Dr. Jayne's Healing Pills, for example, were offered as "a safe purgative", which combated constipation, but also offered to restore "the action of the liver by removing obstructions of the biliary duct", as well as to "gradually change the vitiated secretions of the stomach and liver". Advertisement Dr. Jayne's Pildoras Sanativas, (1880, June 16) El Noticiero Bilbaíno.

<sup>10</sup> Advertisement Bromide Syrup, (1882, December 23) El Noticiero Bilbaíno.

<sup>11</sup> "Cough, Influenza, Whooping Cough, Bronchitis, Catarrh". Advertisement P. Lamouroux's Pectoral Syrup, (1880, March 9) El Noticiero Bilbaíno.

<sup>12</sup> "These anti-acid and digestive powders and tablets cure stomach ailments, lack of appetite, laborious or difficult digestion, acidity, vomiting, nausea, colic", read the advertisement published in (1878, May 22) El Noticiero Bilbaíno.

<sup>13</sup> Like the Capsules Mothes, (1880, June 12) El Noticiero Bilbaíno.

<sup>14</sup> Advertisement Agua de Loeches La Margarita, (1880, December 24) El Noticiero Bilbaíno.

<sup>15</sup> Advertisement Medical Office, (1899, August 22) El Porvenir Vasco.

In 1900 we found more than 20 brands of cigarettes, powders, candies, pills, inhalers, syrups, emplastes .... There was also a proliferation of products for all kinds of physical ailments: against worms, ointments against piles, callicides, stomach elixirs, "health grains against constipation", liniments, elixirs against insomnia, sandalwood capsules for urinary diseases, etc. Specific attention to each ailment and medicines with a well-defined purpose were imposed. Around 1900, products with scientific backing also appeared, such as vaccines, bicarbonate of soda, hydrogen peroxide and painkillers.

### 3. THE MEDICAL PANTRY: MODERNISATION

If the press advertisements devoted to health are an indication of the medicines that were in the domestic pantry, the latter began to empty out in the late 1920s. From 1930 onwards, modernisation reduced the supply of commercial medicines and increased the presence of specialists. There was therefore a rationalisation of health treatments. The remedies that were advertised had clear characteristics: beauty and depurative remedies or specific remedies for well-established brands. Distrust of miracle products had taken hold, while at the same time, apparently, a greater role was given to the doctor in the management of health. Medical advertisements had reached their peak by 1915.

In the first third of the 20th century, medical advertisements proliferated, but modernisation was noticeable in a number of changes, beginning in the 1990s: specifics, reformulation of depurative and/or restorative products, and consolidation of products associated with beauty. In addition, medicines for venereal diseases, which in the new century only occasionally appeared in advertisements, disappeared. This was not because of the reduced presence of these diseases, but because of new treatments, which could not be sold in the free market way suggested by the advertisements, as they required medical control.

Depuratives" were no longer the panaceas of uncertain content of the 19th century, and until 1920 they were a must in any larger reproducing advertisements. The advertisements consulted usually mentioned the composition, which thus formed part of the claim, as a suggestion of efficacy: beef juice, iron iodide, hydrochloric lime phosphate, phosphated, ferruginous, phosphatine, creosote, flour concentrate, cereal broth, Canary Island gofio, vegetable compound...<sup>16</sup>. These were scientifically endorsed active ingredients, even though they suggested a wide range of effects that were not always plausible.

If the composition was missing, the argument was well developed. Pagliano Syrup was "a true blood purifier and refreshing, world famous, awarded with the highest

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<sup>16</sup> Rob Xarrié was advertised as 'purifying the blood' and 'radically curing herpes, scrofula and other skin affections', a broad and diverse effect which contrasts with the precariousness of the advertisement in terms of its vegetable composition.



honours [sic]". It warned against counterfeits - whether true or not, it was an advertising device. It concluded: "Pagliano syrup is necessary in every family"<sup>17</sup>. Something similar happened with Purgante Yer - its chemical composition, as we know, was not suggestive in terms of advertising - and Phoscao, although the name suggested the combination of phosphates and cocoa.

The mention of its composition detracted from its miraculous character, but that did not prevent the advertising from assuring its capacity to cure a wide range of illnesses. The kola wine of Pinedo - a pharmacist from Bilbao - was a "nutritional tonic", composed of kola, coca, cocoa and guarano, and it fought chlorosis, anaemia, rickets, nervous, cardiac and generic diseases. Glycerophosphates Botta&Baltá also combated "rickets, lack of organic development, chlorosis, anaemia and pale colours"<sup>18</sup>. This argument was based on the idea, inherited from the previous century, that "blood poverty" was the prelude to disease. If it was eliminated, weakness would end, preventing "premature old age and cerebral anaemia". It did not matter whether it was iron iodide or hydrochloric lime phosphate; the chemical composition made the depuratives similar to the miracle products of the previous century: modernity was in the scientifically resonant names, not in the limitation of their effects. In terms of advertising.

According to the medical literature of the time, such products contained active ingredients that had a positive effect on health, although not with the efficacy implied by advertising. For example, phosphate of lime administered to children in its pure form served as the basis for anti-rachitic and anti-diarrhoeal treatments<sup>19</sup>. According to the advertisement for the Cases Solution, it was "the most powerful restorative for cases of general weakness, chlorosis, rickets, phthisis, lack of appetite"<sup>20</sup>. Products previously produced in small doses by pharmacists were mass-marketed. "Iron iodide combined with a nutritive and corroborative substance can produce cures even in the most serious cases of annihilation" (De Bruc, 1873, p. 187). Sometimes one senses that the feeling of efficacy had another origin. In 1925, Oliver Rodés' Elixir Vitoserum was sold for general weakness, neurasthenia, mental fatigue and anaemia. It did not state its composition, but we know that it contained sodium glycerophosphate, an effective nutritional supplement. It also included stovaine, an analgesic used as a substitute for cocaine, as well as strychnine cacodylate, made from an alkaloid. It is likely that its euphoriant effects accentuated the sense of efficacy of the restorative.

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<sup>17</sup> The name under which it was marketed alluded to the counterfeits "True Pagliano Syrup", and "Without such a mark it must be rejected because it is a harmful imitation". Advertisement Plagiano Syrup, (1910, December 24) *El Noticiero Bilbaíno*.

<sup>18</sup> Advertisement Glycerophosphates Botta&Baltá, (1900, September 16) *El Noticiero Bilbaíno*.

<sup>19</sup> "Whenever the sugeto [sic] is weak and weakened, this medicine will be useful". *El Pabellón Médico*, 1871, p. 367.

<sup>20</sup> It was produced nationally and was said to be an advantageous substitute for Coirre's Solution, which had been awarded prizes at several expositions and was "the only one approved and recommended by the Royal Academy of Medicine and other medical corporations". Advertisement Solución Cases, (1905, February 24) *El Noticiero Bilbaíno*.

Some advertisements warned that such a depurative did not contain opium or opiates and perhaps pointed out the exception.

If the product was of domestic manufacture, the advertisement was tailored in such a way as not to diminish its virtues. In fact, it tended to accentuate them, as was the case with the Cases Solution. The *Vino de Peptona Ortega* - a counterpart of the *Vino de Peptona Catillon* - had them to the highest degree: it was the best tonic and nutritive for convalescents and weak people, and it fought inappetence, bad digestion, anaemia, phthisis, rickets, etc. *Elosegui iron iodide phosphate* fortified the lymphatic temperaments, was anti-neurasthenic, reconstituted the bone-muscular system and repaired the blood corpuscles. "It quickly cures lymphatism, chlorosis, anaemia, anaemia, lack of appetite, pale colour, difficult menstruation and general weakness". The forcefulness against a wide spectrum of ailments did not detract from its credibility, but rather accentuated it.

Depuratives with great effects became scarce, but in the 1920s the *Pautauberge Solution* was still advertised, with the described scheme: unquestionable chemical composition, "creosote and chlorhydrophosphate of lime", and results far beyond what medical experimentation assured. From a nutritional supplement, it became a 'sovereign remedy against colds, chronic bronchitis, influenza, rickets and scrofula'. *Purgante Yer*, *Deschiens haemoglobin*, *Falières phosphatine*, etc. were also sold. By contrast, they appeared only occasionally in advertising in the 1930s, when, in our sample, restorative products were limited to *Dr Falp's Vigor vegetable broth*, *San Roque Jerez*, *Ona wine* and *Phoscao*. Urban groups were abandoning the panaceas of great promise. The greater rigour of the *Pharmaceutical Register of 1919* may have contributed (González Bueno et al., 1995; Suñé Arbussa and Valverde López, 1985).

Judging by their continuity in advertising, in the first two decades of the 20th century, some depurative or restorative products were a must in medicine cabinets. Of particular note were *Blancard's Pills and Syrup*, which have had a reputation since the 19th century and are composed of iron iodide and are still used to treat anaemia, *Pautauberge Solution*, *Pagliano Syrup*, *Aroud Wine*, which contains iron and cinchona, and *Haemoglobin Syrup*, *Deschiens Haemoglobin Syrup*, *Falières Phosphatine* - a food supplement for children -, *Brandeth pills* - a great American success, had a strictly vegetable composition, "always effective cure for chronic constipation"... and various digestive ailments, as well as purifying the blood - and *Ambrina*, advertised for arthritics, fought a wide range of ailments, specifying: "chilblains, burns, varicose ulcers, rheumatism, gout..."<sup>21</sup>.

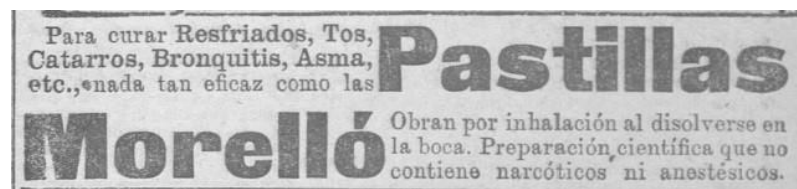
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<sup>21</sup> *Ambrina* advertisement, *El Noticiero Bilbaíno*, 1918. Its advertising arguments referred to the fact that it was a "new product", was used "with great success", treated a variety of ailments and was used by various foreign bodies, the first three of which were important in the middle of the European War: "Used by the French Military Health Service, the English Admiralty, the Italian Navy...".



**Figure 1.** Advert for Elixir Estomacal de Saiz de Carlos.  
**Source:** (1922, may 1) *El Nervión y la tarde*.

The main novelty of the first third of the 20th century was the proliferation of specific products. There were dozens of them and only a few brands survived for several years: Saiz de Carlos' stomach elixir, Dr. Artaza's Cephalin, Henri Mure syrup, Espic cigarettes and Sanix laxative, among them. Some brands may have been discontinued because of side effects. Sometimes many products dedicated to the same disease were advertised, perhaps because of occasional increases in competition, only to disappear later. In the first decade of the 20th century, products related to respiratory diseases burst onto the scene. Most were sold for coughs and some for various ailments. Vial's phenylated syrup had "safe efficacy in coughs, colds, catarrh, bronchitis, influenza, hoarseness". More common were the lozenges offered only for coughs, and some for breath, such as the "chloro-potassium lozenges with cummin and menthol from Pinedo", manufactured in Bilbao by the pharmacy of the same name, whose advertisements in 1905 replaced cummin with cocaine.



**Figure 2.** Advert for Pastillas Morelló para las enfermedades respiratorias.  
**Source:** (1911, january 24) *El Noticiero Bilbaíno*.

Another novelty that came with the century: the specific ones related to nervous diseases. Dr. Artaza's Cephalin was presented as "the most effective and harmless of all known analgesics" and became a regular feature in the newspaper pages. The same was true of Henry Mure Syrup. Its advertisements did not specify its composition, but it contained calcium bromide, a relaxant used at the time in this type of illness.

According to the texts with which it was advertised<sup>22</sup>, it was a cure-all for the nervous system, as it offered a "certain cure" for epilepsy, convulsions, vertigo, fainting, etc. There was also Elixir Yvon (epilepsy, insomnia, nervous diseases) and Nervioalmon, against neurasthenia, which was presented as a depurative that treated a wide range of ailments<sup>23</sup>. This product was successful, appearing in advertising in 1905, and we have been able to verify that it was still being marketed in 1945. Other specific products were also found.

In 1905, Kisley Wosmahe was advertised as a product to combat "genital weakness in men" and "sterility in women", although it did not explain how it served such different purposes. The prospective buyer would understand what was meant, for the advertisement dwelt on sexual weakness "occasioned by the struggle of life, sorrows, abuses of Venus or solitary vices, excessive studies, etc"<sup>24</sup>. It was presented as a kind of natural cure, but it was either ineffective or had unwanted side effects, as it soon disappeared from Spanish advertising. Or it may be that the story did not appeal to the Bilbao reader.

Digestive diseases had their own treatment. In terms of advertising, the most important was the Elixir estomacal de Saiz de Carlos, the best-regarded Spanish medicine, which was enormously popular at the time. This elixir was a creation of the pharmacist of the same name, who became a member of the Spanish Parliament. Its excellent advertising<sup>25</sup> conveyed acceptance, with claims such as: "There will hardly be a doctor who has not prescribed Sáiz de Carlos' stomach elixir for most of his illnesses", sometimes accompanied by modern graphics; the most popular one depicted an old man eating with satisfaction. Although not as successful, of equal interest is the Sanchez Stomach Solution, with large format advertisements in 1910. It was created by a pharmacist from Almeria and advertised as "the latest advance in medical science. The renovation of the stomach"<sup>26</sup>. There were more speciality medicines, such as Fénix Estomacal or Dr. Vicente's Digestónico, also advertised as a panacea.

Rheumatism was soon the subject of specifics, with Dr. Laville's Liqueur being advertised in 1900, which was a great success in France, but it was around 1915 that rheumatic drugs for rheumatism proliferated.

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<sup>22</sup> Epilepsy-hysterical, hysteria, epilepsy, St. Victor's dance, diseases of the brain and spinal cord, sugar diabetis, convulsions, vertigo, nervous breakdowns, headaches, fainting, cerebral congestion, spermatorrhoea. In addition to its efficacy even with diseases not necessarily related to nerves, the advertising claims mentioned the years of "proven success of experience of the Paris Hospitals" and the existence of counterfeits.

<sup>23</sup> Nervous. Life is not possible like this. Neurasthenia can be cured... with NERVIONALMON, however old the disease may be". The description was similar to that of a depurative, although the enrichment of the blood was not mentioned: "It awakens the appetite, facilitates sleep and digestion and regularises the stomach".

<sup>24</sup> Impotence. Advertisement, El Noticiero Bilbaíno, 1905.

<sup>25</sup> Saiz de Carlos stands out as one of the most widely advertised brands in Spain during the first third of the 20th century, with large advertisements produced by major agencies of the time, such as Agencia Prado, distributed in the main national newspapers and illustrated magazines.

<sup>26</sup> Advertisement Solución Estomacal Sánchez, (1910, May 23) El Noticiero Bilbaíno.

Advertisements claimed that they attacked excess uric acid and offered drastic cures. There was Urticure, for "Baldado por dolores en las articulaciones"<sup>27</sup> and Gotol, which in addition to rheumatism relieved neuralgia, migraines and headaches. Its advertising was short-lived. More successful was the German antiuric Weis, the first to be authorised in Spain when registration was established. It was presented as a "harmless, scientific, effective and radical treatment". It included the frequent annotation that it was not harmful. And the range that this medicine faced was wide, well within the same family: "it not only alleviates but quickly cures rheumatism, gout, nephritic colic, sciatica and calculi".

Some specific ones were aimed at children, in particular food. With or without therapeutic virtues, they offered food supplements. There had been isolated advertisements of this type in the past, but from 1915 onwards they became commonplace. Most notably Glaxo, advertised as "the wet nurse of the 20th century", which offered artificial milk made from cow's milk. Advertising for this type of food increased from the 1920s onwards, and its marketing reached a wider public, with Glaxo being the first pharmaceutical brand to achieve great success (VV.AA., 2013, 109).

At that time, Rakul, "the only true food for children", arrived, but its presence was short-lived, and Nestlé Milk Flour, "a complete food for children", was also introduced<sup>28</sup>. Also Lactophytin, advertised with the text: "Ask these children what they owe their health and beauty to and they will answer you: LACTOFITINA", which was accompanied by a graphic depicting seven children with abundant hair and an appearance that today we would understand as dull and sickly, but which must have represented children's freshness in the bourgeois imagination, as the clothing left no doubt as to the social stratum represented.

There were also specific ones for women. More abundant in the 1920s, they were already to be found in the advertisements of 1900, including Apiolina Chapoteaut, which at the time reproduced the French advertisement, both in its graphics and in its message, according to which it "regularises the monthly flow". Twenty years later, Dr. Valley's irrigations and those of Ruiz Zorrilla cured diseases of the womb. There were many specific ones for various diseases, which occasionally appear in our sample: callicides -Callivoro Marthaud, the Laurel of Callicida-, anti-diabetics -El Rishi, infallible and vegetable-, laxatives -Somonte fig syrup, Sanix-, against meningitis -Meningitina by Doctor Fulgencio de Jorge- and, from 1920, medicines against scabies, among them Antisárnico Martí - "its imitations are expensive, dangerous and stink of latrine"- and Sulfureto Caballero. Remedies against venereal diseases deserve special mention. At the end of the 19th century their advertisements were commonplace, but with the arrival

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<sup>27</sup> In the advertising example, after several years of suffering, the intake of Urticure had put an end to the problems. It removed "the cause of rheumatism, sciatica and sands".

<sup>28</sup> The manufacturer Nestlé and all its products and brands had a prominent advertising presence in the printed press in Spain from the end of the 19th century. In this respect, see the commemorative work published by today's multinational food company (VV.AA., 1992).

of the new century they almost disappeared. Occasionally we find a product - Koch capsules - that "cure in two days the recent secret blennorrhagic fluxes and modify the chronic ones", but with the new treatments, self-medication in diseases disappeared.

Beauty products, presented as medicines, had their own imprint. We find them as early as 1900, in the offer of Pomada de Orive, for example, advertised for cracks in the breasts. These products had continuity, but their presence was scarce if we compare the weight of these advertisements in Bilbao's newspapers with that which they had in illustrated magazines. An example: one day at the end of May 1905, El Noticiero Bilbaíno published three advertisements for two products, both related to baldness -Mr Vega's Pomada prodigiosa and Oriente-Lillo's Céfiro de Oriente-Lillo-. In the weekly Blanco y Negro, eight brands were advertised. Two were related to hair, Agua de Sal - "No more white hair!" - and Royal Windsor, "the famous hair restorer", which prevented hair loss, restored grey hair to its natural colour and prevented dandruff, advertised by the graphic image of a woman with an abundance of hair. There was Le Trefle "Parfum à la mode", Crema Kalodermina, advertised as "unbeatable for preserving the beauty of the skin", Dentrifique Glycerine, Crème Simon, which was used for "daily toilette", and Essence Karistèle, of which the advertisement reproduced the packaging and did not mention what it consisted of. Beauty came from France and, apart from hair care, was associated with skin care and perfumes. These advertisements were aimed primarily at a female audience.

This was not the case with the beauty-related products published in the local press. Vega's Prodigious Pomade was advertised with a classic slogan - "No more bald heads" - and a scientific explanation. The specific product in question destroyed "the atrophy of the hair follicle and hair bulb", so that hair and beards would grow. The Céfiro de Oriente Lillo did not say how it worked, but it did say that it made "hair, beard, moustache and eyebrows grow back and grow", preventing grey hair and curing all scalp diseases. Its slogans were basic: "Baldness is dead!!!" or "He who is bald is because he wants to be". And other advertising resources were used, such as the endorsement of "countless medical eminences" and the use by "millions of people". Likewise, a prize if they found a better product.

In the newspapers, hair-related problems generated the most advertisements. Golden Flower Water, "which cleanses and tones the hair", stimulated the functioning of the hair vessels and cured diseases. Its advertising claim was unsophisticated: "carelessness is almost always the cause of so many heads with bald patches or plaques or dandruff". Boyra Lotion produced similar effects and Tintura Mora dyed grey hair; its advertisement, published in the years of the European war, evoked it in a peculiar versification: "It does not damage or dirty. With peace, so desired, will come the fever of invention; but nothing will be invented like Tintura MORA".

From the end of the 1910s, women's articles made a comeback in the local press. Agua Oriental (Oriental Water) continued, to obtain "in a short time a beautiful, well-developed and hard breast with more seductive beauty, which is a woman's best charm". And then came the desire to depilate, sometimes with categorical claims: "Velludas, el Depilatorio Vasconcel de París" was "the only effective and practical remedy", which succeeded in weakening the growth of hair "until it is no longer produced"<sup>29</sup>. Now that confidence in drastic remedies had passed, better hygiene was the proposal to be put forward. In 1920, Coallar Saponine Le Beuf fortified the hair, cleaned the mouth and strengthened the gums. A few years later came Floroliva, which was suitable for "fine clothes, toilet and bath"; and Richelet toilet soap not only made "all redness and roughness" disappear, but also ensured "well-being and rest, represents the maximum of cleanliness, and is at the same time a beauty cure", in a 1928 advertisement, which also featured a sophisticated graphic presentation, with the representation of a couple in a romantic attitude wrapped in a heart with a drawing of the product at its base<sup>30</sup>. The advertising messages for these articles, as we can see, were often halfway between the promotion of aesthetics and health, thus placing them in an intermediate category between the pharmacopoeia and the beauty and personal grooming sectors.

In the 1920s, the number of health advertisements decreased, but not the number of doctors. In 1915, digestive specialists and childbirth teachers appeared, then always with various offers, and specialists in the digestive apparatus. Occasionally we also find advertisements for "Herniated" and callists. In 1930 we counted 18 advertisements of this type, when previously only once it was as many as 13. Doctors advertised by explaining their speciality. They can be grouped into gynaecologists, "Throat, nose, ears", respiratory, dentists, children and venereal diseases. The venereal specialists had continuity and more presence over the years. One advertisement was repeated for years. The 1918 advertisement read: "Venereal and syphilis specialist. With forty-six years of practice. Don Francisco López, senior assistant doctor at the Hospital de especialidades de Madrid"<sup>31</sup>. He was updating the years of experience and changed the name of the Hospital, which until 1905 was Hospital de Sifilíticos de Madrid; perhaps he was trying to soften the expression. Doctor Bustinza's and Doctor Salaverri's names also had continuity. From 1920, the new anti-syphilitic treatments were advertised. The Clínica Ribera applied them and advertised Salvarsan (606) and Neosalvarsan (914), names and numbers well known at the time. Salvarsan, or arsenic that saves, had been obtained in 1910 (Fresquet Febrer, 2011).

There was another novelty, the appearance of advertisements for clinics and medical offices. Dr Goti's Gabinete Médico treated nervous, stomach and venereal diseases.

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<sup>29</sup> Advertisement Vasconcel Depilatorio Vasconcel, (1919, May 26) El Liberal.

<sup>30</sup> Advertisement for Richelet Soap, (1928, September 11) El Liberal.

<sup>31</sup> Likewise, it offered "Quick cures: ringworm, herpes, ear fluxes, eye ulcers, eye sores, eye twists, diseases of the womb and childbirth. He does all kinds of cures. Attends to houses".

The Gabinete Médico de Electricidad was devoted to hair removal, but also to impotence, anaemia, neuralgia, epilepsy, neurasthenia "and ailments of the brain, throat, chest, womb and rectum". The Dental Clinic, the Dental Institute and the Modern Polyclinic reflected this trend. Otherwise, the doctors' advertisements were terse, but sometimes the claim included a reference to some prestigious institution. Dr. Carrasco was Director of the Civil Hospital and his position in the public institution supported his private activity. In his advertisements, Dr. Salaverri presented himself as "head of venereal consultation at the Santo Hospital Civil", Antonio Rubio claimed to be "professor at the Rubio Institute", Juanita advertised herself as "ex-midwife at the Maternidad de Vizcaya"; De la Riva as "ex-chief physician at the Real Sanatorio de Guadarrama", Dr. Bustamante as "ex-professor at the Instituto Rubio", and Dr. Bustamante as "ex-medical director of the Real Sanatorio de Guadarrama". Bustamante was "ex-professor at the Ledo Anti-Tuberculosis Dispensary" and Manuel de Echeverri Aldecoa was in turn "doctor at the Zaldívar Asylum". In the advertisements, modernity was associated with new medical instruments, such as sphygmographs, microscopes and X-ray machines. It was also associated with the use of electricity and ozone, to which extraordinary curative properties were attributed. It was not in Bilbao but in Madrid, but the Instituto Radiumterápico de Madrid was also advertised, for "cancerous diseases", "infiltrating X-rays and Radium and working with them as if it were an intelligent scalpel".

A comparison of medical advertisements in different newspapers provides another very interesting piece of information. During the first third of the century there was a social fragmentation of advertising, at least in health-related advertisements. The difference was between the republican-socialist newspaper *El Liberal* and the other newspapers which, with their doctrinal differences, were aimed at the middle classes, as opposed to the more humble profile of the readers of the former. The differences in the advertisements were therefore not based on ideology but on the social groups targeted by the newspaper.

The medical advertisements in *Euskadi*, *La Gaceta del Norte* and *El Nervión* are very similar to those in *El Noticiero Bilbaíno*, without specific biases. The day chosen for the comparison is 30 June 1921 (table 1). *El Noticiero* published 14 depurative and specific advertisements -Liquid haemoglobin, Brandeth Pills, Fuster Depurative, stomach elixirs-, four beauty advertisements -Agua Argentina, Floralia Soap, Boyra Lotion-, 8 medical advertisements and 1 with Balamaseda Injection for "Secret Illnesses", among other less significant products. The rest of the "bourgeois" newspapers presented a very similar profile. *Euskadi*, 10 depurative and specific products - the North American brand Eno Fruit Salt to "purify the blood", Lactofitina, cough drops and laxatives -, a couple of beauty products - for the complexion and to cover grey hair - and 5 medical products. In *La Gaceta del Norte* we found 3 beauty advertisements - Boyra lotion or Saltratos for sensitive feet, which used the artist Raquel Meller as an advertising claim, the restorative *Vino Bayard*, 1 anti-epileptic syrup and 2 doctors. *Nervión* had fewer advertisements: in addition to 4 doctors, 1 stomach elixir, 1 cough drop, 1 laxative and *Elixir Callol*, which "gives strength, vigour and youth".



The range of advertisements and the arguments used in their texts and slogans were similar in the four newspapers, whose main recipients were the urban middle classes. *El Liberal* had a very different range. There were no beauty or spa articles. There were a dozen or so purifying and specific ones that did not differ much from those that used to appear in the other newspapers, including a ferruginous product presented as a "blood regenerator" and Dr Soivré's medicines for the urinary tract. If anything, a more precise definition of diseases can be noted, with a wider range: skin diseases, anti-syphilitic, laxative and piles remedies, gastric pregnancy, apoplexy, arteriosclerosis, hypertension, tuberculosis, eye diseases, hernias, bronchitis, phthisis and scabies.

But the main difference was the large number of doctors who advertised. On that day, 25 did so, including 7 midwives. Almost half of them, 12, included in their advertisements allusions to venereal diseases: "urinary tract, secretory, skin", "painless injections of 914, "syphilis-venereal-skin", "treatment of syphilis by neo-salvarsan". Perhaps venereal diseases had been less well controlled in the poorer sectors, who were targeted by the new remedies based on salvarsan and new technologies, which required specific medical control.

**Vías urinarias**  
**Impurezas de la sangre**  
**Debilidad nerviosa**

Basta de sufrir inútilmente de dichas enfermedades, gracias al maravilloso descubrimiento de los

**Medicamentos del Dr. SOIVRÉ**

**Vías urinarias** Hemorragia (purgaciones) en todas sus manifestaciones, uretritis, prostatitis, orquitis, epididimitis, gonorrea, etc. del hombre, y vulvitis, vaginitis, colpitis, uretritis, claptis, apofisis, fosa, etc. de la mujer por crónicas y rebeldes que se curan pronto y radicalmente con los **Cachets del Dr. Soivré**. Los internos se curan por sí solos, sin inyecciones, lavados y aplicaciones de aguas y baños, etc. (un poligrafo siempre a que se refieren la presencia del medico, y nada se oculta de su enfermedad. — Venta: 6 pesetas caja.

**Impurezas de la sangre:** Sífilis (avariada), escamas, herpes, úlceras varicosas (llagas de las piernas), erupciones escrofulosas, eritemas, anid, urticaria, etc. enfermedades que vienen por causa humores viciados o infecciones de la sangre por crónicas y rebeldes que se curan pronto y radicalmente con las **Pildoras depurativas del Dr. Soivré**, que son la medicación depurativa ideal y perfecta porque actúan regenerando la sangre, la rejuvenen, aumentan todas las energías del organismo y fomentan la salud, resolviendo en breve tiempo las lesiones, llagas, granos, forúnculos, supuración de las mucosas, caída del cabello, inflamaciones en general, etc., quedando la piel limpia y regenerada, el cabello brillante y copioso, no dejando en el organismo huellas del pasado. **Venta: 6 pesetas frasco.**

**DEBILIDAD NERVIOSA** Impotencia (falta de vigor sexual), poluciones nocturnas, spermatorreas, pérdidas seminales, cansancio mental pérdida de memoria, dolor de cabeza, vértigo, debilidad muscular, fatiga corporal, temblores, palpitaciones, trastornos nerviosos de la mujer y todas las manifestaciones de la Neurastenia, o agotamiento nervioso, por crónicas y rebeldes que se curan pronto y radicalmente con las **Grageas potenciales del doctor Soivré**.—Más que un medicamento son un alimento esencial del cerebro, medulla y todo el sistema nervioso, indicadas especialmente a los agotados en la juventud por toda clase de excesos (viejos sin años), para recuperar inmediatamente todas sus funciones y conservar hasta la extrema vejez, sin violentar el organismo, el vigor sexual propio de la edad.

**VENTA, A CINCO PESETAS CAJA.**

Agente exclusivo: Hijo de José Vidal y Ribas, S. en C. Menéndez, 21, Barcelona. Venta en Bilbao: Barzantuarán y Compañía, Arriola, 21, y principales farmacias de España, Portugal y América.

**Figure 3.** Advert for Medicamentos del Dr. Soivré.  
**Source:** (1921, june 30) *El Liberal*.

The focus on venereal diseases was, therefore, the specific feature of the newspaper *El Liberal* and, together with the absence of beauty products, allows us to speak of a certain social segmentation of advertising, which would be in line with the different needs generated by health care. The differentiation took place from 1918 onwards, as before that time *El Liberal* did not have such a marked bias. In 1916, its profile was

similar to that of El Noticiero Bilbaíno: Vichy waters, La Muela spa, two opticians, cough drops, quinine against flu and several doctors, three of whom were dedicated to venereal diseases.

were dedicated to venereal diseases. In the 14 health-related advertisements published in 1920 at the same time, 7 were already doctors specialising in these diseases, including a Syphilotherapy Clinic, which offered "exclusive treatment of syphilis by Neo-Salvarsan Erlich, from the German State deposits". In addition, two medicines were of some use against syphilis and blennorrhagia. Thus, most of this advertising was related to venereal diseases. There were, in addition, two advertisements for midwives and one for "ladies' health". Thus, the medical bias of El Liberal, a projection of social segmentation, had already been established.

#### **4. CONCLUSIONS**

In an overview, we have seen clear changes in the home medicine cabinet reflected in advertisements, urban modernisation from the point of view of health care. We noted the decline in advertising for medical products during the 1920s and even more so during the following decade. At the same time, advertisements for medical professionals, clinics and doctors' offices increased. All indications are that self-medication was reduced.

Since the beginning of the 20th century, there has been a reduction in the supply of depurative and restorative products, which, according to the advertisements, were used for very different illnesses. As a result, the mentality gradually changed and people no longer believed in panaceas. This was probably influenced by a greater caution regarding the side effects of these products, as well as the fact that those containing narcotics were being discarded. The success of large-scale advertisements for miracle products - of impossible efficacy - could not only be due to the effectiveness of the advertising slogan. Nor could their maintenance be justified by their alleged purifying or restorative functions, which could not be verified in the short term. Their success had another, more immediate reason: they included opiates, coke or other drugs. They would not "purify the blood", but they would provoke sensations that could be equated with better health.

Such products did not usually publish their composition, which were often declared secret formulas. Still at the beginning of the century we find in the advertisements of some products the claim that they contained cocaine; and in some cases we know of the presence of other drugs. Some others also claimed: "does not contain opium or opiates", "does not cause harm". So it was not just the mentality. There was a greater awareness of the harms that such products could cause and a new pharmaceutical register, which limited them. The argument of great blood-purifying effects did remain. Confidence in the ultimate goodness of a single product did not disappear.

Also characteristic of the maturing of the middle classes in medical consumption was the proliferation of specific and new treatments, which were presented as scientific or associated with new technologies, such as electricity, X-rays, radiotherapy or new anti-syphilis techniques. We should also mention the presence of products related to beauty,

presented as a consequence of hygiene and with medical endorsement.

Finally, we have also noted the social segmentation of medical advertisements, visible in the greater presence of remedies against venereal diseases in the press aimed at the poorest groups, where beauty-related products were scarce while specific products were offered against a very wide range of diseases. In short, we have shown the relationship between social changes and communicative changes in the context of urban growth in Spain in the first third of the 20th century, through the analysis of advertisements in the medical and pharmacopoeia sector. Likewise, the work contributes to a better understanding of the transformations in the uses and customs of Spanish urban society of the period.

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