

The Evolution of Porto Medical School Honour Students' Folders

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ABSTRACT: In the “Maximiano Lemos” Museum of Medical History of the Medical School of the University of Porto (FMUP, 1911) there is a collection of Honour Students' folders that dates back to the time of its predecessor, the Porto Medical-Surgical School (1836–1911). Contrary to what happened with the student attire, the honour students' folders were not included in the institutional rules, a fact that explains the diversity of motifs and materials used. However, the colours of the ribbons and the coating are course-specific and constant over time, as is the symbolism underlying the different representations.

In the past, the beauty of the specimens mirrors the aesthetic taste and affection of the people involved in their idealisation and/or production, even when made to order. They contrast with the simplicity and uniformity of the recent mass-produced folders.

Underlying all the folders are dates, signatures and inscriptions, in prose or in verse, of the masters, fellow students, family and friends, which reflect feelings and highlight the most striking features of each personality.

Honour folders represent one of the oldest traditions of student life and are material proof of the academic community's identity and rejoicing. Their preservation and outreach matter.

KEYWORDS: Honour Folders; Academic Traditions; FMUP History; Museum of History of Medicine “Maximiano Lemos” of FMUP.

THE MUSEUM

The “Maximiano Lemos” Museum of Medical History of the Medical School of the University of Porto (FMUP) opened its doors on 17 October 1933, following an initiative of the University School Board. Previously, in 1925, a medical-historical exhibition, held at the Porto Crystal Palace to celebrate the hundredth anniversary of the former Porto Royal Surgical School (1825–1836), had gathered several items, some of which were later offered to the Medical School by their owners. To this group of items were added other objects held in several School Departments, as well as old medical books ^[1]. The acquisition and organisation of other documents and instruments was led by Professor Luís de Pina (1901–1971), who in 1930 had concluded a PhD in Medicine and held the chairs of History of Medicine and Professional Ethics ^[2]. In fact, FMUP's predecessor, i.e., the Porto Medical-Surgical School (1836–1911), had already included the teaching of History of Medicine since 1836 ^[3].

In 1959–60, the Museum moved to its current location in the building of the Porto Medical School, in the borough of Asprela. Its reorganisation was conducted by Professor Luís de Pina and Assistant Professor Maria Olívia Rúber de Meneses (1932–1990), who succeeded him until her death in 1990. Since this date until 2023, I served as the Director of the Museum and as a lecturer in the History of Medicine and Medical Museology at this Faculty.

The collections were mainly organised according to a chronological order, from ancient to modern times. The Museum contains several important collections for the history of medical science, of great value due to their rarity, quality of execution, and scientific, technological, and technical relevance. The vast estate of the Museum includes paintings, drawings, caricatures, sculptures and jewellery, as well as medical and surgical instruments and devices, and documents.

Since its transfer to Asprela, the Museum has been able to provide graduate and post-graduate medical students with the necessary training, not only to raise awareness about the importance of medical museum studies, but also to teach them the basic skills for the identification, characterisation and classification of medical objects. The history of those objects activates a sequence of medical, historical, scientific, technological and social knowledge, calling for historical contextualisation and evolutionary analysis. In the ambit of pre-graduate training, the Museum has organised guided tours for secondary school students, at the request of those institutions, in order to complement their curricula. Post-graduate training has focused on medical-historical communications in national and international conferences dealing with different medical and surgical fields, as well as the organisation of exhibitions featured within academic and scientific events, the bibliographical supervision of papers and communications written by teachers, medical practitioners and specialists, and scientific and bibliographical support provided to masters' and doctoral dissertations related to the health sciences. Scientific and technological research has always guided the activities carried out in and by the Museum. Through exchange protocols, it has been possible to define lines of research shared with other national and international institutions related to the History of Medicine or to medical museum studies. Since its transfer to Asprela it has met the conditions to be open to the public [4].

Since 2023, the Museum's collections have been stored in an archive, pending their reinstallation in a new exhibition space.

THE HONOUR STUDENTS' FOLDERS

Among the Museum collections, the honour medical students' folders stand out due to their colourful decorations, the diversity of their materials, their aesthetic value and underlying symbolism, depending on who made them—usually the bride, the mother, the sister or a commissioned artist. They belonged to the medical students of the Porto Medical-Surgical School and of the Medical Faculty of the University of Porto and were donated to the Museum by their owners or their families. They were used on special occasions.

The honour students' folders of the Porto Medical-Surgical School clearly show the influence of the traditions adopted by the Portuguese University (1290), based in Coimbra since the mid-16th century. Reading medical journals from the 19th century confirms, in turn, the preference for the French model in Portuguese academia [5].

The honour folders were distinguished from the usual or current folders, which had smaller dimensions and were produced in cardboard coated with paper or silky fabric with cotton or silk ties, of great aesthetic simplicity. Remember that these folders were derived from the cardboard or leather covers that held the student's documents tied with strips of skin or fibre cords and, later, ribbons [6].

The use of honour folders became widespread among Portuguese students in the first half of the 19th century, inspired by these primitive knots.

The **earliest honour folder** in the collection of the "Maximiano Lemos" Museum of Medical History dates to the school year of 1854–55, and the most recent one to 1984–85. Overall, there are twenty-eight. This honour student's folder from the Porto Medical-Surgical School, dated 1854–55, belonged to João Pereira Dias Lebre (1829–1900), who would later hold the chair of Anatomy at this School. It was donated by his grandson, Dr. Mário Caldevilla Paula Santos. It has a velvet-lined cardboard structure, red on one side, yellow on the other. The student's initials are embroidered with silk thread on one side, whereas the other side bears a silver-thread snake entwined around a silver rod, as well as a jar resting on a book—both in silver thread and silk—and a bladed surgical instrument in

silk. The brown colour of the handle recalls the material often used in its manufacture, tortoiseshell, and the grey colour of the carbon-steel blade [7]. The design is surrounded by a floral pattern and a hovering owl. It contains handwritten paper prescriptions. It measures 29,5 × 20 × 1,3 cm [8].

All the folders are rectangular in shape, though the materials used in their production vary considerably.

Yellow and red used to be the colours chosen by the students at the Porto Medical-Surgical School for the fabric covering their folders and for the ribbons hanging from them. The exception to this rule is a folder found in the Museum collection with only yellow ribbons. After this School became the Medical Faculty of the University of Porto (1911), yellow progressively became the colour of choice, although there could be folders featuring both colours in the first years.

Regarding decorations, structures and materials, the earliest folders were mainly made of cardboard lined with silk, or wood partially or fully covered in silk. More recent folders are made of cardboard and leather, some featuring engravings and appliqués. This structure has been maintained since the 1980s, though with a plain design without images but full of inscriptions.

When fabric was used in the folders, they were embroidered with silk thread and hair by the students' mothers, fiancées and girlfriends or by order—these decorations were customised and always unique. One side of the folder usually shows more intricate motifs than the other. Most of them include the student's date of graduation, as well as their initials and their first name or signature. Floral patterns were extremely common and, although there was wide diversity, the most frequently represented flowers were poppies (*Papaver somniferum*), foxgloves (*Digitalis purpurea*) and morning glories (*Ipomoea*). The preference for these flowers was probably no coincidence, as they all have medical applications—the first two being the sources of opium and digitalis, respectively. From the high number of medicinal plants, these were chosen due to their unique beauty, and the shape and colour of their flowers. One of the folders shows a butterfly and a bee hovering among the flowers, an idyllic scene captured with refined aesthetic sensitivity. All the folders made of fabric feature the symbol of the medical course, i.e., a serpent coiling around a cup and a staff or tree trunk. This central motif may be accompanied by a variety of other figures: a book, a skeleton, the inscription "Galeno", a bird feather, or surgical instruments.

Throughout history, the serpent has been closely related to Medicine. In Antiquity, for example, the temples in honour of Asclepius treated eye conditions by using a snake on the patient's eyes [9]. It was also one of the ingredients used in theriac, an ancient medical concoction made from several animal, vegetable and mineral substances, widely used for centuries to treat all sorts of maladies [10]. The snake-entwined staff of Asclepius, the Greek god of medicine, remains a symbol of medicine today. In fact, the staff, as a symbol of power, was used by healers in primitive communities [11]. The stylised representation of one or more skeletons was another students' favourite, which completed the dense symbology related to Medicine. Knowledge and the dissemination of medical skills are represented through embroidered designs depicting books and feathers around the symbol of medicine. Only one name among all the figures in the History of Medicine is mentioned on the folders: Galen of Pergamon (c.129 AD–c.217). A physician to gladiators in Rome, Galen is considered a precursor of Claude Bernard (1813–1878), due to his studies in experimental physiology. He also expanded anatomical terminology, and for more than thirteen centuries, Galenic anatomy was regarded as authoritative—any challenge to the Galenic tradition could be punished with death. In Portuguese universities, Galenic medicine was taught until the 18th century, together with Hippocratic medicine and Islamic medicine [12].

We can follow some examples in the collection:

■ An honour student's folder from the Porto Medical-Surgical School, dated 1871–72, belonged to Joaquim Rodrigues de Carvalho. It has a cardboard structure with red silk outer lining and beige silk inner lining, ornamented with yellow silk ribbons. One side presents an intricate floral pattern embroidered in velvet and silver threads, as well as sequin and strass appliqués around the symbol of medicine (a cup in silver thread next to a snake-entwined staff in silk). Close to this symbol, an open book shows an inscription with the school initials (EMCP), the student's initials (J.R.C.), his graduation date (1871–72), and the school year (4th). There are also two silk-embroidered floral patterns and a white ribbon with the inscription "Galeno". On the other side, the same floral pattern surrounds the student's initials embroidered in silver thread (J.R.C.). It measures 22,7 × 31,5 × 1,5 cm [13].

■ An honour student's folder from the Porto Medical-Surgical School, dated 1896–97, belonged to Joaquim da Silva Ramalho. It has a cardboard structure with yellow satin outer lining and grosgrain inner lining with yellow and red satin ribbons. On one side, silk-embroidered floral patterns, including the poppy, surround the symbol of medicine, embroidered with hair (a skeleton rises over Galen's book, holding a torch in its right hand and a staff in its left; next to the book, a snake coils around a cup). The other side shows the student's initials and graduation date ("96–97") embroidered with hair, framed by a silk-embroidered floral design. It measures 31,5 × 22 × 1,5 cm [14]. (Fig. 1)

■ An honour student's folder from the Porto Medical-Surgical School, dated 1897–98, belonged to António Joaquim de Sousa Júnior (1871–1936), who would later become Professor of Surgery. It was donated by his granddaughter Maria Nazaré Guimarães Laroze Rocha. It has a cardboard structure with an outer lining in yellow and red satin and an inner lining in beige satin, ornamented with yellow and red ribbons. Using silks of different colours and silver thread, a floral pattern is embroidered on one side, which also features the symbol of the medical-surgical course embroidered with hair (a cup on top of a staff and branches, all entwined by a snake). The other side displays the student's initials (AJSJ) and graduation date ("1897–1898"), embroidered with silver thread. It measures 22 × 30,5 × 2,2 cm [15].

■ A very special honour student's folder from the Porto Medical-Surgical School, dated 1901–02, belonged to Manuel Monterroso (1875–1968). This doctor-artist published creative and humorous works in Portuguese and foreign periodicals. He illustrated the works of different authors. This folder was donated by its owner. It has a cardboard structure with yellow silk outer lining and beige grosgrain inner lining, ornamented with grosgrain yellow and red ribbons. One side portrays a domestic scene, entirely embroidered with hair: a seated male figure holds an open book and looks at a skeleton, which is pointing at him with a rod/pencil—both a symbol of medicine and of the plastic arts that stand for the student's wisdom and artistic skills; next to this figure are a Chinese-pattern folding screen, a vase holding a bunch of flowers and a candlestick, and three books on a desk; to the left, a flower bouquet, in-

cluding poppies and foxgloves, is wrapped by a ribbon inscribed with the name "Monterroso". On the other side, the central design shows a snake-entwined jar; to the left, a line of eleven skeletons holds a plaque bearing the graduation date ("1901/1902"), whereas a bunch of morning glories is found on the right. Inside the folder, an inscription on the upper left corner, next to a silk-embroidered flower design, reads: "To you! ... I entrust my soul. Yours MGRS". Right below is the following handwritten note, dated 1965, by Manuel Monterroso: "Embroidered by Maria da Glória Ribeiro da Silva, when still a bride, using gauze and her own hair, following my own design, which Rafael Bordalo intended to, but could not, author for lack of time, as he admitted in a letter that he sent me, which has been framed and sent to the Amarante Museum, where a room is named after me. A part of my heart is here, as a widower of the adored bride of my youth, who was to become my beloved and never forgotten wife!" It measures 33,5 × 23,5 × 1,5 cm. It is kept in a casing made of wood, glass, metal and fabric (5 × 36,5 × 26,5 cm) [16], [17]. (Fig.2)

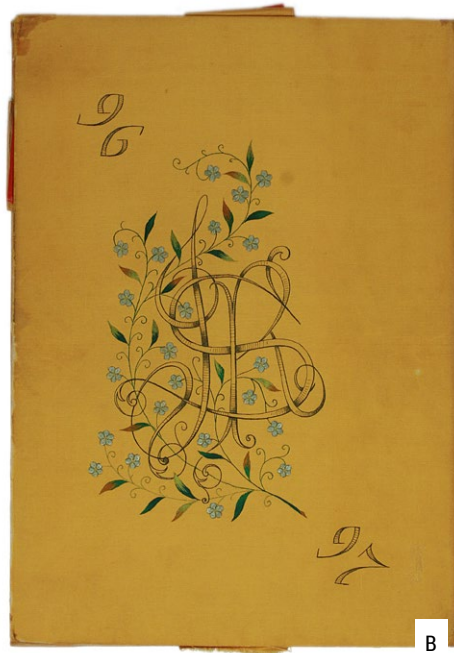
■ Two folders show surgical instruments in combination with the date of graduation. One is the earliest honour folder from 1854–55, already described, and the other an honour student's folder from the Porto Medical-Surgical School, dated 1910–11. This folder has a cardboard structure with yellow silk outer lining and beige grosgrain inner lining, ornamented with grosgrain yellow and red ribbons. A dégradé embroidery on one side shows a poppy next to a snake-entwined tree trunk. The other side shows the student's initials ("C A" or "A C." or "G A" or "A G") and the dates 1910 and 1911 embroidered with silver thread and crossed respectively by a pair of scissors and a scalpel. The inscriptions are framed by six urinary catheters. It measures 35,5 × 26 × 1,3 cm [18]. (Fig.3)

It is important to note the different structures and materials used in these folders, pointing out some examples from the collection.

■ An honour student's folder from the Porto Medical-Surgical School, dated 1890–91, belonged to Carlos Alberto de Lima (1866–1958), who would later become Professor of Surgery. It has a cardboard structure with yellow silk outer lining and red silk inner lining, ornamented with yellow and red grosgrain ribbons.



A



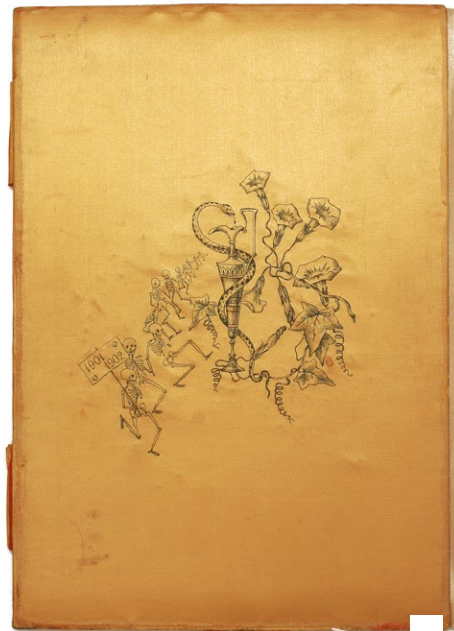
B

Fig 1. Honour student's folder from Porto Medical-Surgical School, 1896-97 [A - front; B - back]

Photograph by Catarina Carrinho (FMUP). "Maximiano Lemos" Museum of Medical History (FMUP).



A



B

Fig 2. Honour student's folder from Porto Medical-Surgical School, 1901-02 [A - front; B - back]

Photograph by Catarina Carrinho (FMUP). "Maximiano Lemos" Museum of Medical History (FMUP).

One side shows a butterfly and a bee hovering over a floral pattern, as well as the course symbol: a cup on a book, and a snake-entwined staff surrounded by branches. The branches are held by a ribbon embroidered with the initials of the Medical-Surgical School (E.M.C.P.) and the date of graduation ("1890 a 1891"). On the other side, the student's initials (C.A.L.) are framed by a floral pattern. The entire embroidery is made with hair. It measures 33,5 × 23 × 1,5 cm [19].

■ A senior student's folder from the Porto Medical-Surgical School, dated 1901–02, belonged to Ângelo Alves de Sousa Vaz. It was donated by Júlio Machado de Sousa Vaz and Bernardino Machado Vaz. It has a cardboard structure with yellow silk outer lining and red silk inner lining, ornamented with yellow and red gros-grain ribbons. A floral pattern and the symbol of medicine (book, cup, snake-entwined rod) are painted on one side, together with the date of graduation ("1901–1902").

The student's initials ("AV") and another floral pattern are also painted on the other side. Inside, Professor Júlio Machado de Sousa Vaz's card may be found, with a handwritten note related to the donation of the folder. It measures 32 × 22 × 2 cm [20].

Wood folders usually have the student's initials and signature engraved, together with the date of graduation and floral motifs painted on both sides, mostly poppies. Only one of these folders has ribbons, belonging to Antero Augusto da Cunha Brochado. Though dated 1912–13, when the faculty had already been established, the folder has red and yellow ribbons, which characterised those of the Porto Medical-Surgical School. Inside, the folders are lined with paper or silk, and may contain the date of graduation, signatures, handwritten notes and poems. One of the wood folders used to belong to Tiago de Almeida (1864–1936), who would be a prestigious Professor of Clinical Medicine at this University.

■ **The honour student's folder from the Porto Medical-Surgical School, dated 1892–93**, belonged to Tiago de Almeida (1864–1936) and was donated by Professor Pereira Viana. It is a wooden and velvet folder lined with paper, containing several handwritten notes from friends and classmates. Two of them read as follows: "Aristotle used to say that three things are necessary to excel in one's profession: nature, study and practice. None of them are lacking in you, you are the glory or my course, you are my glory because you are not only my classmate but my friend" [21]; "My dear Thiago, your (apparent) physical sturdiness is inversely proportional to the strength of your talent. I remain an admirer of your talent, your energy and the kindness and generosity of your heart. Your classmate and most loyal friend, Fran.co H. de Magalhães Pesqueira – Sarzedinho" [22]. It measures 30 × 20 × 3 cm [23].

■ **Another honour student's folder from the Porto Medical-Surgical School, dated 1908–09**, has a wooden structure with red and yellow silk lining, and red and yellow grosgrain ribbons. One side shows a silk-embroidered poppy bouquet, as well as a silver monogram bearing the initials A and C, or G. A silk-embroidered bunch of maidenhair fern is placed above the date of 1909, embroidered with hair. It measures 31,5 × 22,5 × 2,12 cm [24].

■ **The honour student's folder from the Porto Medical-Surgical School**, belonging to Antero Augusto da Cunha Brochado, already mentioned, is a wooden and silk folder with paper inner lining. It has four red and yellow grosgrain ribbons. The student's initials and signature are engraved on one side. A poem, dated "25-XI-912", is written on the paper lining, as well as several classmate signatures. It measures 30,5 × 21 × 1,8 cm [25].

■ **An honour student's folder from the Medical Faculty of the University of Porto, dated 1912–13**, was donated by J. Castelo Branco e Castro in 1957. It is a wood and red velvet folder with silk lining, ornamented with yellow grosgrain ribbons. Poppy flowers are painted on one side, whereas the other side shows the student's initials and graduation dates, framed by a floral pattern. Inside, two dates are painted on the silk lining—"13-VII-1912" and "26-VII-1912". It measures 23,4 × 33,8 × 2 cm. The folder is kept in a wooden and metal casing (4,5 × 38 × 28 cm), bearing its owner's initials and the symbol of medicine (cup, snake, book and feather) on the upper left corner. Dr. J. Castelo Branco also donated a cardboard desk folder, with black silk outer lining and beige silk inner lining. A bouquet of yellow roses is painted on the inner lining, as well as a snake-entwined staff and cup resting on a book. In one of the corners, the owner's initials are engraved in silver. It contains a list of topics included in several medical examinations throughout his studies [26]. (Fig.4)

Leather folders have appliqués, mostly silver, bearing the student's initials, first surname and date of graduation. Floral motifs are also common. The symbol of medicine (the snake and the cup) on the silver appliqués may be found in three folders, as well as a signature in gold. Joaquim Maia's folder (1922–2008), who would become Professor of Hygiene and Social Medicine, had belonged to his father, as may be seen in the two dates (1919 and 1945) engraved on the silver appliqué. Inside, a floral pattern is embroidered with silk thread. All leather folders have ribbons, mostly yellow. However, the folders of Jorge Azevedo Maia (1886–1931) and Hernâni Bastos Monteiro (1891–1963), who graduated in 1912–1913 and 1914–1915, and who would become Professor of Medical Pathology and Professor of Anatomy and Director of the Institute of Anatomy respectively, combine red and yellow ribbons, as was the tradition of the Porto Medical-Surgical School.



A



B

Fig 3. Honour student's folder from Porto Medical-Surgical School, 1910-11 [A - front; B - back]

Photograph by Catarina Carrinho (FMUP). "Maximiano Lemos" Museum of Medical History (FMUP).



A



B

Fig 4. Honour student's folder from the Medical Faculty of the University of Porto, 1912-13 [A - front; B - back]

Photograph by Catarina Carrinho (FMUP). "Maximiano Lemos" Museum of Medical History (FMUP).

■ An honour student's folder from the Medical Faculty of the University of Porto, dated 1912-13, belonged to Jorge de Azevedo Maia (1886-1931), who, as noted, was later a Professor of Medical Pathology. It was donated by his daughters Berta Azevedo Maia Luizello and Maria Emília Azevedo Maia. It has a leather folder with silver appliques and yellow silk lining. It is orna-

mented with yellow and red grosgrain ribbons. A floral pattern is engraved on one side, together with two silver appliques bearing the student's initials and date of graduation. The symbol of medicine is engraved on the other side (a snake-entwined winged staff). It measures 34,3 × 25 × 2 cm. It is kept in a cardboard casing (3 × 35,5 × 26,5 cm) [27].

■ The honour student's folder from the Medical Faculty of the University of Porto, dated 1918–19 and 1944–45, belonged to Celestino da Costa Maia and later to his son Joaquim Maia (1922–2008), as noted, who became Professor of Hygiene and Social Medicine. It is a cardboard and leather folder with inner satin lining and yellow grosgrain ribbons bearing signatures. On one side there are two silver appliqués: one, in the upper left corner, bears Joaquim Maia's initials, while the other, in the lower right corner, shows the dates "918–919" and "944–945". The inner side of the cover shows a dégradé embroidery of a floral pattern. It measures 21,5 × 33 × 2,2 cm [28].

■ An honour student's folder from the Medical School of the University of Porto, dated 1926–27, belonged to Luís José de Pina Guimarães (1901–1972), who would become Professor of History of Medicine and of Professional Ethics, and the founder of the "Maximiano Lemos" Museum of the History of Medicine. It is a cardboard and leather folder lined with satin. The yellow grosgrain ribbons bear several signatures. One side features two silver appliqués—the tympanum of a Greek temple bearing the inscription "Asclepios", and the symbol of medicine (snake and cup). His signature is engraved in gold letters. Two inscriptions on the inner silk lining read as follows: "Graduation: 23.7.927" 1 and "Maria de Lourdes-24 March 1927" 2. It measures 33,5 × 23,5 × 2,5 cm [29]. (Fig.5)

Since 1980, all honour medical students' folders have been made in black leather, lined with yellow satin. They have yellow grosgrain ribbons and no appliqués. They are distinguished from one another according to their handwritten notes. The folders dated 1979–80 and later were donated to the museum by the respective medical class and contain all the graduates' signatures. Regardless of its material, the folder may bear no relevant information but usually contains signatures and handwritten notes by classmates and friends, as well as inscriptions, prescriptions, dates of graduation, poems and floral designs.

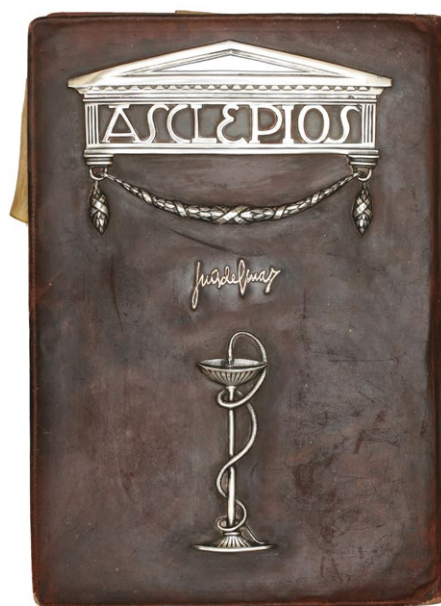


Fig 5. Honour student's folder from the Medical Faculty of the University of Porto, 1926–27
Photograph by Catarina Carrinho (FMUP). "Maximiano Lemos" Museum of Medical History (FMUP).

One of these is the folder of the Medical Class of 1979–1985, donated by this Medical Class—my medical class—which this year celebrates its 40th anniversary and to whom I pay my respects. It has a cardboard structure with outer leather cover, yellow silk inner lining, and is ornamented with yellow grosgrain ribbons. It contains the graduates' signatures. It measures 34 × 24,5 × 2 cm [30]. (Fig.6)

CONCLUSION

Safeguarding, investigating and disseminating knowledge about medical heritage is of extraordinary importance, as it constitutes an undeniable contribution to knowledge about the History of Medicine. It is important to promote within our faculties specialised training in this field in direct relation with their organic units and museums—public and private, national and international—owners of medical heritage, in order to create synergies that promote knowledge and development.

The study of the Honour Folders of the students of the Medical-Surgical School of Porto and the Faculty of Medicine of the University of Porto revives the



Fig 6. Honour student's folder from the Medical Faculty of the University of Porto, 1984-85. Photograph by Catarina Carrinho (FMUP). "Maximiano Lemos" Museum of Medical History (FMUP).

history of student life developed in these institutions, which are marked by contemporary foreign influence and the timeless values of Greek and Roman Medicine, evident in the symbolism of the chosen graphics. Underlying the personalised message of each cover is the complexity of its execution and its aesthetic beauty, conveying an art and a taste of the time.

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29. Idem, Ibidem
30. Ibid., 325