



Museo de Sanidad Piece of the month Plague doctor



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In its central hall, the Museo de Sanidad exhibits a reproduction of the 17th century engraving *Der Doctor Schnabel von Rom* (Doctor Beak of Rome). This well-known work refers to the bizarre clothing worn by a kind of practitioner known as "Plague Doctor" while they were on duty. It depicts a character wearing a long waxed leather cloak; his face is covered by a beak-shaped mask filled with aromatic substances; his eyes are protected by glass goggles; the rest of his outfit is composed of gloves, shoes and a hat, all of them made of goat fur. He is wielding in his right hand a staff topped by a winged hourglass, which symbolizes the ephemeral nature of existence and the passing of life. It depicts a character wearing a long waxed leather cloak; his face is covered by a beak-shaped mask filled with aromatic substances; his eyes are protected by glass goggles; the rest of his outfit is composed of gloves, shoes and a hat, all of them made of goat fur. He is wielding in his right hand a staff topped by a winged hourglass, which symbolizes the ephemeral nature of existence and the passing of life. It depicts a character wearing a long waxed leather cloak; his face is covered by a beak-shaped mask filled with aromatic substances; his eyes are protected by glass goggles; the rest of his outfit is composed of gloves, shoes and a hat, all of them made of goat fur. He is wielding in his right hand a staff topped by a winged hourglass, which symbolizes the ephemeral nature of existence and the passing of life.



Detail of the winged hourglass

You believe it is a fable
What is written about Doctor Beak
Who flees the contagion
And snatches his wage from it
He seeks cadavers to eke out a living
Just like the raven on the dung heap
Oh believe, don't look away
For the plague rules Rome.



Who would not be very frightened
Before his little rod or stick
By which means he speaks as though he were mute,
and indicates his decision
So many a one believes without doubt
That he is touched by a black devil
His hell is called "purse"
And the souls he fetches are gold.

Source: <https://beforenewton.wordpress.com/2014/11/03/did-plague-doctors-wear-those-masks/>



Vestidura de médico (1656). En el pico de pájaro llevaba un algodón empapado en perfume para evitar el contagio.

Display in the Museo de Sanidad with the reproduction of the engraving *Der Doctor Schnabel von Rom* and accompanying text.