

CABINET OF CURIOSITIES

ELECTROTHERAPY SET

Wood, metal, glass, cloth and synthetic material

20th century (1st decade)

Ludwig Schulmeister, Viena, Áustria

MAH20184006

The 17th century was almost over when, at Lisbon, it fell on the hands of *todos os curiosos*¹ a compendium about *huma Sciencia, a qual*², in the words of Francisco de Faria e Aragão, *além de estar hoje em moda he em si mesma summamente delectável para a vista, maravilhosa nos seus fenómenos e, o que não deve ser menos interessante, não inútil para a saúde*³. It was the author's intention to enlight the charlatans and the very sages whose wonders and hobbies stand on electricus, a neo-Latin word that crystalized in the Portuguese language as electricity. A discovery, not an invention, its status quickly moved from simple curiosity to an instrument of modernity, allowing the societies development, achieving a great reception at the economy different sets of action and being object of a wide diffusion from the media.

Therefore, it will not provoke astonishment that the following century witnessed an Europe carried by the wide field of application of theories like those presented by Luigi Galvani, Alessandro Volta, Giovanni Aldini or Alexander von Humboldt: from animal electricity to medical therapy, that led to electrotherapy. Like this, the flow of the respiratory tract could be accelerated, lowered the risk of diseases and stimulated the locomotor system. The devices conceived for such intentions – being the body, itself, a current carrying conductor – should considerate, by example, the intensity, the voltage and the conductivity.

In the 19th century, this was, almost entirely, a French technology; the supremacy of the German production became clear in the beginning of the 20th century, not just as a result from the diffusion of the work of Emil du Bois-Reymond – a Berlinense physiologist to whom the structure of a living tissue, like the muscle, was made of countless electric molecules – but also for the expertize and excellency of the manufacturer Ludwig Schulmeister in the making of electrical devices for medical therapy, following his principles. From those, the one that can be observed here, belonging to Science and Technology Collection from Angra do Heroísmo Museum, stands as evidence.

Note: the translator opted for a free translation of the text in italic – originally in 17/18th century Portuguese, as footnotes

1- all the curious

2- a Science, which

3- besides being in vogue at present is, itself, greatly delightful at sight, wonderful for its phenomena and, not the least, not useless in what concerns health