This article presents the private and professional life of Jan Hecker (ca. 1605 – before 1660), royal pharmacist serving the last two Polish kings from the Vasa dynasty, Władysław IV and Jan Kazimierz. This draft is biographical in nature and aims to identify the family roots of the royal pharmacist and his activity in the court of the two Vasa kings, as well as the stages of creation and operation of the castle pharmacy in the period in question.

Jan Hecker (also Hekier, Heckier) was born in a German bourgeois family which had its roots in Cologne, but settled in Gdańsk and Brodnica at the beginning of the 15th century. Brodnica was also the home town of two other men called Jan Hecker – both the former (1603–1668), who was a municipal councillor in Gdańsk, and the latter, his son (1625–1675), who also worked as municipal councillor and astronomer, were relatives of famous astronomer Johannes Hevelius and tend to be confused with the court pharmacist of “the last two Vasa kings”.

Pharmacist Jan Hecker was born ca. 1605 in Brodnica, Chełmińskie Province. In June 1619 he enrolled in the Academic Gymnasium in Gdańsk and most probably studied medicine until 1621. At the time, Hecker attended lectures in

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1 Jan Hecker “senior” (as a senior councillor of Gdańsk and a war commissary) was granted ennoblement and his own coat of arms in 1660, see Album armorum nobilium Regni Poloniae XV-XVIII saec. Herby nobilitacji i indygenatów XV-XVIII w., ed. B. Trelińska, Lublin 2001, p. 338, no. 881.

the Chair of Anatomy and Medicine and explored the origins of medicinal raw materials, their processing and practical application in treatment of various ailments. The Gymnasium provided basic theoretical knowledge of pharmacy, but practical skills were acquired during obligatory apprenticeship in municipal pharmacies\(^3\). Having finished his studies in the Gymnasium, the young Jan Hecker did his training in an unknown pharmacy in Gdańsk.

He probably appeared on the radar of the royal court of Władysław IV and his family after the 1632 election, most likely having been recommended to them by one of the courtiers or magnates thanks to his abilities and numerous accomplishments, and soon afterwards he moved to Warsaw.

Hecker was first mentioned in historical sources in 1646, when on 5 September of that year King Władysław IV Vasa, having returned to Warsaw from Lviv, left for Wielkopolska to improve his health. On 8 September 1646, while residing in the village of Głowienka, he granted Hecker a plot of land in a village called Tiegenhof, located in the Malbork Economy, as a token of gratitude for the pharmacist’s efforts to recuperate the king’s health\(^4\).

The village of Tiegenhof (Nowy Dwór Gdański) was located by the Tuga River, in the area of Żuławy Malborskie. Being a small riverside market settlement, it first started to flourish towards the end of the 16\(^{th}\) century, or more specifically in 1568, when it was reached by new settlers – Mennonites, migrants from the Netherlands deriving from the Frisian Anabaptist movement. They used their experience to drain the local wetland and, enjoying the support of Polish monarchs and the castellans of Elbląg, settled in the area for good. In mid-17\(^{th}\) century, Tiegenhof was the site of royal properties subordinate to the Malbork Economy. Land grants in the region, therefore, were particularly valuable – thanks to its agricultural backup, opportunities of development, and, most importantly, its proximity to the centre of royal administration, it was a great reward for the modest pharmacist.

The document in question mentions Hecker’s personal input in the process of treating the King’s ailments, so it can be assumed that he accompanied King Władysław IV Vasa during his journeys and eased his sufferings even before 1646. He went by the title of the “royal pharmacist,” which suggests that he must have taken over the royal pharmacy from his predecessor Hans Merten\(^5\) long before 1646.

Even as a prince, Władysław Vasa suffered from gout and had problems with kidneys. He also struggled to walk when he was slowly gaining “excess weight.” He underwent water treatments in the country and abroad, often travelling outside of Warsaw, he also used compresses, decoctions of exotic herbs, and various balms, which were often produced not only by court medics and pharmacists, but also common frauds and charlatans\(^6\).

\(^4\) AGAD, Metryka Koronna, no. 189, f. 476v–477.
One of the conditions Władysław IV suffered from were strong attacks of gout – in October 1646, Hecker used a balm made by the wife of the court kapellmeister, which he would heat up and rub on the King every half hour. In March 1647, an anonymous villager from Prussia came to the royal court and prepared a special herbal solution mixed with black beer, several cloves, and a spoonful of olive oil; he did so in the presence of Hecker, who would go on to administer the liquid to the King so that he would break a sweat, but such medicine provided to be only a temporary relief and Władysław IV continued to suffer from strong leg pain.

Hecker accompanied the king during the Warsaw Sejm (25 October – 8 December 1646), as well as the following sejm, which assembled on 2 May 1647. In August of the same year, the pharmacist stood by King Władysław IV’s side at the funeral of his only son, Zygmunt Kazimierz, who had died on 9 August 1647 following an attack of diarrhoea, and then travelled with the monarch and his royal court to Prussia and Lithuania (January – March 1648).

Due to the outbreak of the Polish-Cossack conflict in Ukraine, the King decided to return to Warsaw in March. He parted from Vilnius and, traveling via Troki, he arrived to Merecz on 4 May, where he stayed in one of the tenement houses situated at the town’s market square. Having spent an entire day hunting, during the night he experienced a sudden kidney stone attack combined with acute renal colic. Hecker treated the monarch with a hot bath, which temporarily relieved the ailment, but it was soon replaced by a different, much worse condition – growing abdominal pains.

Let us give the floor to the royal doctor of King Władysław IV, Maciej Vorbek-Lettowow, who made the following note in his diary:

> when he fell ill, seeing that Doctor Casparus Krafft could not or would not give him any relief, my Colleague gave him 9 seeds of antimonii praeparati in ovo sorbili (in liquid yolk), not from the pharmacy of His Royal Highness, because Royal Pharmacist Hecker did not have any, but [from] the barber surgeon’s casket [...]8.

The application of antimony, which had most probably been given to the King in excessive dosage and obtained from unknown source, caused a sudden attack of diarrhoea and weakened the monarch9. Doctors Maciej Vorbek-Lettow and Paweł Podchocimski were brought from Vilnius to help, but there was nothing they could do – King Władysław IV died in Merecz in the early hours of 20 May 1648, at 1:30 AM, after having been administered last rites.

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7 F. Giedroyć, Król Władysław IV, pp. 103–109 – the wife of the kapellmeister was given 1,000 zlotys, and the ”Prussian” peasant – as much as 6,000 zlotys.
9 According to the account of Szymon Szulc, a doctor from Toruń, it was ”crocus metallorum” – a compound of antimony with calcium nitricum, see: F. Giedroyć, Źródła biograficzno-bibliograficzne do dziejów medycyny w dawnej Polsce, Warsaw 1911, pp. 807–808.
Autopsy was carried out in the afternoon of 20 May by: Jan Kacper Krafft, Maciej Vorbek-Lettow, Jan Teuber, Dytrich Vigbort, Jan Lancberg, Hans Merten and Jan Hecker. They observed pyogenic nephritis in the left kidney, inflammation of the stomach and other organs, and extracted one big and several small kidney stones from the right kidney10. All preserved sources unequivocally point to Hecker’s presence in Merecz and to his participation in the treatment and autopsy of the Polish king.

The Royal Treasury owed the pharmacist the amount of 2,000 zlotys for his service since the year 1646. The process of paying the debt lasted until 1652, with Hecker receiving only 1,700 zlotys in several instalments, which is a good indication of how much was earned by pharmacists of the time11. The preserved bills show that Hecker received the annual pay of 1,014 zlotys (paid in quarterly instalments)12. In that period, the pharmacist also occasionally received amounts paid out from the Royal Treasury to cover some of the expenses of the royal pharmacy, usually ranging between 7 and 150 zlotys. Hecker was hardly ever given any bigger amounts, but he did receive 2,200 zlotys and 29 gr on 24 December 1650 and 1,694 zlotys and 13 gr on 9 February 169413.

After the king’s death, Hecker started to serve his successor and brother – Jan Kazimierz. Apart from preparing medication for the monarch, he also carried out other tasks – on 28 August 1650, for example, when the king was setting out for a trip to Białowieża, the pharmacist sold him an ornate “vodka case”14, while on 29 December 1650 he received 7 zlotys for two hook-shaped pharmaceutical appliances which he had bought for his laboratory15. At the beginning of September 1651, the royal pharmacist travelled to Gdańsk to purchase special “sea catkin and other necessities” (inflorescence of willow and hazel growing exclusively by the sea)16.

The royal bills from the years 1650–1653 indicate unambiguously that Jan Kazimierz had a large number of doctors and pharmacists by his side, including journey pharmacist Jerzy Hann and court pharmacist Jan Hecker, who together with several barber surgeons were the closest “medical” entourage of the king and his court17.

11 It was a big amount, big enough to buy a small village in Mazowsze. Rachunki podskarbstwa litewskiego 1648–1652, ed. E. Tyszkiewicz, Vilnius 1855, p. 30.
12 AGAD, Archiwum Skarbu Koronnego (hereinafter: ASK), section 1, no. 305, book 1v, 12v, 31v, 57v, 65v, 72v, 79v (bills from 1 VII 1650 to 31 III 1652); Biblioteka Książąt Czartoryskich w Krakowie (hereinafter: B. Czart), no. 1729, book 10, 24, 37, 44 (bills from 1 IV 1652 to 31 III 1653).
13 AGAD, ASK, section 1, no. 305, book 40v, 46v, 47, 101, 106v.
14 AGAD, ASK, Ibid., book 43v (bills from the years 1650–1652).
15 Ibid., book 47.
16 Ibid., book 101.
Jan Kazimierz appreciated Hecker’s accomplishments in treating his everyday ailments. In 1650, the pharmacist was granted the privilege of life-long ownership of a square in Old Warsaw for the purposes of building a tenement house. In 1651, he was also given exemption from the obligation of participating in the levée en masse, which would generate considerable expenses and the risk of being forced to leave the lucrative royal service. On 18 November 1652, he was granted another privilege – Jan Kazimierz gave him three voloks of land in the village of Wielka Wola (currently a district of Warsaw), while on 23 October 1654 surgeon Bartłomiej Taubenlein's usufruct of the mill in Osiek was ceded to him and his wife.

Jan Hecker died before 1660, because that year his widow Urszula (nee Szperlingen) gave the following information to inspectors from Wielka Wola:

in case of the farm located in this village, currently burned down by the enemy, spread on three voloks of land, which was owned by quondam Mr. Jan Hekier, pharmacist of His Royal Highness, the privilege was presented by Mrs. Urszula Szperlingen Hekierowa, in solidum of her and deceased Mr. Hekier, her husband, valid ad vitae tempora, of current king, His Highness Jan Kazimierz de data die 18 Novembris 1652, salvis oneribus, si quae antea ex hoc praedio et eius adiacentiis et pertinentiis omnibus pendeantur.

It is certain that the royal pharmacist of the Vasa kings had offspring, but their names remain unknown; in the 18th century and even in the second half of the 19th century, the surnames Hecker, Heckier, or Haekier could be found in municipal censuses of Warsaw.

Jan Hecker moved into the Royal Castle in the moment when the construction of the building – the residence of Polish kings – had already been finished during the reign of Władysław IV and its rooms had been assigned their purpose – sejm assemblies, court rooms, offices, not to mention court apartments. Later on, small architectural elements were added – galleries, kitchens, a theatre space, and many other rooms. In the years 1643–1644, the construction of the Zygmunt III Vasa’s Column brought about changes in the surroundings of the castle – the entrance to Grodzka Gate was cleaned up and a new entrance to the Royal Castle was created from the side of the Old Town, through Przedzamkowa Street. Its main element was Świętojańska Gate, located right in front of the gate in Wieża Zygmuntowska, that is to say between the stable and the pharmacy. The gate was constructed from granite in the form of a big portal, with two pilasters supporting a pediment decorated with the coat of

arms of the Vasas and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in a cartouche. The gate passage for carriages and coaches was demolished at the beginning of the 19th century during the liquidation of the Front Courtyard.

The reign of the Vasa kings, therefore, saw the creation of the final and functional element of the future Zamkowy Square, or more specifically its western part, in the form of the Front Courtyard, which connected the tenement houses situated by the Old Town with the structure of the Royal Castle. On its southern side, there was the royal pharmacy, followed by Świętojańska Gate and the remaining brick and partially wooden buildings. The inhabitants of the town and the Castle faced difficulties during the Swedish invasion and occupation of Warsaw (1655–1657), as well as the town’s plunder carried out by Charles Gustav’s army. Soon afterwards, that is between late 1657 and early 1658, the Castle was almost completely rebuilt and started to serve its proper sejm-related, official, and residential functions as early as in the first half of 1658.

The royal pharmacy at the Royal Castle was created on the basis of the workshop of royal alchemist Baltazar Smosarski, the doctor of Kings Zygmunt I Stary and Zygmunt II August, who used it in the 1530s to carry out research and treat both monarchs. His successors, using former and newly acquired privileges, had their rights and obligations and practised their profession without any guild restrictions. The royal pharmacy survived until the beginning of the 19th century, when it moved to Trębacka Street following the collapse of Krakowska Gate and the reconstruction of Zamkowy Square, but was eventually closed in the middle of the century.

Upon taking over the control of the royal pharmacy in the Castle even before 1646, Hecker was introduced to the environment of the royal court and started to live inside the royal residence, which in the years 1597–1619 had been expanded to the area of Zamkowy Square, which until then used to house outbuildings. A part of houses located between Krakowska Gate and the corner of the Congregation of the Mission tenement house had been demolished and a wall with a masonry gate and two doors had been built in their place. The gate, called Świętojańska Gate, led from the narrow end of Piwna Street towards Wieża Zygmuntowska, thus creating two courtyards in front of the façade of the castle – the stable courtyard on the northern side and the pharmacy courtyard on the southern side.

The royal pharmacy was located in a one-storey pentagonal building near Świętojańska Gate, on the right side of the inner courtyard. Behind the gate there was a small hall with two rooms, and then the path led to a sizeable backyard, which connected the area with the “pharmacy” courtyard. Through the staircase situated in the hall, one could reach the upper floor and the cel-

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Jan Hecker – a pharmacist from mid-17th century Warsaw

The former housed the apartment of the royal pharmacist, while on the ground floor there were two small laboratories with several ovens. One of those was made of brick and was equipped with chimneys and a relatively large blacksmithing bellows used to stoke up fire, and was therefore used to work on open fire, while the other one had several closed hearths, was made of river stones and equipped with a large pot and heated bath with a retort. Among the equipment used in the laboratories were copper crucibles and pots, as well as numerous tools indispensable in the process of distillation. In the centre of the room there was a masonry bench with openings for mortars used to grind herbal ointments and a table with a marble top for the manufacture of sugars and marzipans, while wooden presses used to press juice, mortars, crucibles, crushers, and copper and brass scales necessary for the everyday pharmaceutical production were placed on the sides. In the rooms of the pharmacy there were wooden counters, cabinets and cases with small drawers, as well as wooden and tin cans and glass containers used to store ready-made medicine.

The pharmacy’s cellar, commonly called a shop, was furnished in a similar fashion, which has been confirmed by the findings of the archaeological research carried out in 1977 in Zamkowy Square, where traces of several vaulted rooms with masonry portals were found. The search carried out in the area of the pharmacy’s ground floor led to surprising discoveries, but only concerning mid-18th century. Several hundred pharmaceutical glass vessels were found in the ground – over 600 items from the pharmacy itself, as well as from several pharmaceutical laboratories. Most of them are jars, big and small bottles or glasses, usually made of stained or tinted glass, but among the found objects there are also several laboratory (chemical) receptacles – numerous retorts, flasks or beakers, as well as carboys, bottles, plates and other stoneware.

It is worth adding that all the items discovered during the archaeological study ended up in a proper place, the Antonina Leśniewska Museum of Pharmacy in Warsaw. In the 1980s, an initiative to recreate the royal pharmacy in the Royal Castle appeared, but for various reasons never came to fruition. Later on, in November and December 2005, a group of archaeologists from Warsaw carried out a survey in the northern corner of the Castle, in the area where an old poplar tree, eventually removed the same year, used to grow, but no valuable items were discovered, save for several old tiles and vessels.

Going back to the 17th century, we should note that the pharmacy rooms existed at the time were modified and modernised several times – first works

were carried out in the years 1601–1603 by architect Jakub Rotondo, supervisor of construction works in the Castle, who “built the masonry door frame by the pharmacy shop.”

In January 1651, large-scale carpentry and painting works were carried out in entire Hecker’s pharmacy, with their total cost amounting to 975 zlotys.

The royal pharmacist used various raw materials in his treatments – starting from herbs, leaves, seeds, and flowers, through roots, fruit, bark, sap, and resin, down to common and precious stones or even raw materials of animal and marine origin. Hecker used them to prepare special medicinal products and imported various types of ready-made medication, often manufactured by amateurs.

Hecker was undoubtedly a professional pharmacist with specialised education and considerable experience and thus received special pay from the Royal Treasury. It was the support of the two Vasa kings, given in the form of social and economic patronage, that proved to be an important factor motivating the protagonist of this article to settle in Warsaw permanently. In his case, this action did not stray far from the typical patron – client relationship observed, among others, in the environment of the officers of the Royal Guard in mid-17th century. It should also be concluded that Hecker’s biography is a good example of the position of royal pharmacists in the society of the Old Warsaw.

It is actually quite easy to evaluate the achievements of Jan Hecker – he was a renowned professional among royal pharmacists and doctors and a highly-esteemed practitioner, but not a theorist, as he did not leave behind any pharmaceutical treatise or medical writing. As a court pharmacist, he was a member of the entourage of the last two Vasa kings, helped remedy the Polish monarchs’ everyday ailments, and received quite valuable privileges in exchange for his merits, which allowed him to set up a family and live in Warsaw.

**Jan Hecker – a pharmacist from the mid-17th century Warsaw – summary**

The article analyses the private life and professional achievements of the royal pharmacist who served the two last kings from the Vasa dynasty – Władysław IV and Jan Kaimierz, namely Jan Hecker (ca. 1605 – before 1660) who was active at the royal courts in mid-17th century. The article is biographical and strives to identify family roots of the royal pharmacist as well as to analyse his professional activity in the Vasa dynasty Warsaw mi-

31 AGAD, ASK, section 1, no. 305, book 48v i 49v.
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lieu. It also follows the stages of building and then functioning of the Royal Pharmacy, in operation in the aforementioned period at the Royal Castle complex in Warsaw.

**Key words:** Warsaw, Royal Castle, Royal Pharmacy, pharmacy, Vasa dynasty