

# Historical personalities in nursing from the Middle Ages

## Santa Fabiola di Roma

**Santa Fabiola di Roma** was a rich and noble woman who came from the famous Fabi family who lived in Rome. She had two marriages. First, she was married to an immoral, malicious man who was impossible to live with. The marriage was therefore terminated by divorce. The second husband died. Under the influence of St. Jerome, Fabiola gave up everything that earthly life can offer and devoted herself to helping the poor and sick people (St. Jerome was one of the great Church Fathers and the greatest figures in church history. He was born around 347 and worked in Rome, but also in Bethlehem, where he founded monasteries).

Fabiola founded **the first large asylum** in Rome around 380 and dedicated herself to caring for the sick. However, she did not avoid ugly and painful injuries during treatment. In addition, she donated a large sum of money to a church and a religious community in Rome, but also invested in other parts of Italy. All her interest was concentrated on the needs of the church and the care of poor men and others in need.

Fabiola worked with Senator **Pammachio** (he dealt with the field of education). Together they devoted themselves to **charity** work. In addition, Fabiola did not stop concentrating on caring for the sick in her asylum until she died (December 27, 399; however, the sources do not indicate the year of birth). Her grand funeral was an expression of gratitude and respect for this important woman. Saint Jerome wrote a celebratory memorial speech which he sent to her relatives across the ocean.

## Hildegard of Bingen

**Hildegard of Bingen**, later an abbess, was a prominent representative of **folk healing and herbalism**. She was an exceptional woman for her time. She was born in 1098 in a German count family. She had several siblings, some of whom volunteered to become God's servants. Even Hildegard was dedicated to God. At the age of 18, she entered the Benedictine monastery in Disibodenberg, which is located not far from Bad Kreuznach (southwest of Frankfurt am Main). Here, Jutta von Sponheim founded a **girls' class** for 16 consecrated girls, of which she became abbess. After Jutta's death, Hildegard took her place as abbess.

Hildegard had many interests. She devoted herself to science, medicine and knowledge of life in general. She knew **the healing power of stones** and wrote down their properties and methods of application. She compiled **natural recipes** into several books that were ahead of their time. They therefore remained unnoticed for centuries and were discovered at the beginning of the 20th century by an Austrian doctor. **Thus, alternative medicine** was offered to the world, which includes various healing methods - *diet therapy, cleansing treatment, balneotherapy, stone treatment, phytotherapy*. The concept of medicine according to Hildegard is Christian and holistic. The goal of the treatment is physical, mental and spiritual healing in harmony with the cosmos.

Hildegard emphasizes the need for a **general examination of the patient**.

According to her, everything is important - the human organism, the social environment where the patient lives, the way of life, the psychological and spiritual state. Body, soul and spirit must be in harmony. If a harmonizing environment is missing in the body, disease can arise. He often deals with **the feminine principle** in his books. According to her concept, women are powerful and beautiful.



Hildegarda z Bingen

## What are the rules according to Hildegard?

- **Sufficient sleep** - it can be induced by a walk after dinner, a warm lavender bath, positive thoughts during prayer, etc.
- **Prefers good food** - e.g. wheat, spelled, edible chestnuts, fennel. All good foods cleanse the body of substances that cause fatigue. Food is a means of life and serves to restore strength.
- **Movement and peace** - walking for half an hour in the fresh air removes stress, improves the performance of the heart and lungs, etc.
- **Life energy** - four natural elements are necessary for our life: *fire* - from it a person draws body heat, from *air* breath, from *water* blood and *earth* gives us body.
- **Excretion of impurities** - health is mainly harmed by an excessive amount of food and poor nutrition. He recommends drinking cleansing juices.

## Trotula

There are entries in the annals of medieval libraries which indicate that monks once possessed **copies of medical treatises**, the authorship of which is attributed to **Trotula**, a wise woman from the medical school of Salerno. Salerno was a renowned spa and medical resort. The school was founded around 850. Here laymen and women were educated in medicine. The local hospitals had a high reputation.

Trotula was the author of many medical writings, including **Trotula major**. For medical men, he describes the female organism, which represented unavailable information at the time. She described *menstruation, fertilization, pregnancy, childbirth and female diseases*. She paid great attention to the use of herbs, spices and animal oils. She also recommended recovery and rest. She was of the opinion that both women and men can have disorders that affect conception. Her opinion that a man could be responsible for infertility was very bold for its time.

## St. Zdislava of Lemberk

**Zdislava from Lemberk** was born after 1220, but we do not know the exact date of birth. His birthplace is the town of Křižanov in Moravia (southeast of Žďár nad Sázavou). She died at the beginning of 1252 (another source states 1250) in Jablonné in Podještědí. Her parents were wealthy, educated and very pious. Zdislava had younger siblings – three sisters and a brother. Zdislava, Eliška and Eufemia married Czech nobles and later won much praise thanks to their virtuous life. So says the chronicle of the Židár monastery, in which much has been preserved about the Zdislava family.

Her father, Mr. Přibyslav, was burgrave in Brno, i.e. the first official of the castle administration. He managed the Brno castle and owned extensive land in Moravia. He also had his own castle built in Křižanov. He was in favor of the monasteries and their inhabitants. He was especially fond of the Cistercian order, which he supported in every possible way. He planned to build a church and a monastery in Žďár. However, death prevented him from doing so. He entrusted this task to his son-in-law, Mr. Boček (Eufemia's husband), who was employed as a castellan from Znojmo.

Zdislava's mother, Mrs. Sybila, was lady-in-waiting to Kunhuta, daughter of Filip Švábský. Kunhuta was the wife of King Wenceslas I. Lady Sybil came from the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies and was educated and pious. She was married three times in the Czech Republic. Both spouses devoted their attention to monasteries. With the support of Queen Kunhuta, Sybil supported the Dominican Contemplative Sisters' Convent in Brno. Zdislava grew up in an exemplary family, and her parents provided her with comprehensive care and education.

At the age of fifteen, she married **Havel** from the Markvartic family, who owned the castle of Lemberk in northern Bohemia. The couple also moved here after the wedding. Mr. Havel was interested in religious and political life. He supported the Dominican order, which his mistress liked. He also participated in the work of Anežka Přemyslovna in Prague Na Františku. It is possible that both women - Zdislava and Anežka Přemyslovná - knew each other personally.

Mr. Havel was very understanding of his wife's charitable activities. With the help of her husband, Zdislava had **a church of St. Vavřinec** with a monastery for Dominicans built in Jablonné in Podještědí. She felt a great affection for this order, which is why she joined it as a lay worker. So she could stay married. **She also founded a hospital** here, where she personally cared for pilgrims, the poor and the needy sick. She always shared with them, supported them and lived modestly herself. She was loved by all and called the mother of the poor.

She had **four children**, whom she took good care of. The sons gained an important position in the Czech kingdom. After such an exhausting way of life, where she devoted maximum care to her children, but also to the sick, it is not surprising that Zdislava died very young. She was thin, frail, and in poor health. She apparently died of tuberculosis. She is buried in the church of St. Vavřinec in Jablonné, where she rests to this day.

Her exemplary life was filled with **love for God and people, full of desire to save souls**. Zdislava's personality is imbued with a supernatural power that has been attributed to her. In Dalimil's chronicle (1st half of the 14th century) we read: *"She raised five dead by the power of God, restored sight to many blind people, healed many lame and lepers and performed great miracles on other poor people."*

*Cult of St. Zdislava* – Zdislava was canonized by Pope John Paul II and since the spring of 2002 is the patron saint of the entire Liberec region

## Saint Hedwig of Silesia

**Hedvika of Silesia** was born in 1175 and comes from the family of the counts of Andechs and Diessen. She was the aunt of Elizabeth of Duryňská. Hedvika spent her childhood in a Benedictine monastery in Kitzingen (northwestern part of Bavaria) near Würzburg, where she received a quality education. At the age of twelve, she was engaged to **Jindřich**, who lived in Silesia. His father came from the Piast family, who founded the Polish state. Hedvika was somewhat unhappy about having to move to a Slavic country to join her husband.

She gave birth to six children. She lived her life her own way. Even during her lifetime, people respected her exceptionality. She was not subject to the fashion trends of the time. She was opposed by the constant (even bloody) skirmishes of her own Polish family. She led a strictly ascetic life. She was a vegetarian and only drank water. She walked barefoot all her life, even in winter. She observed long fasts, and also chose complete abstinence from sexual life. Her clothes were no different from maids. From a young age, she did not enjoy wearing beautiful clothes or jewelry.

Her care for the poor was exemplary. She founded **monasteries**, the largest of which was in **Trebnica**. At one time, it was the largest Cistercian monastery in Central Europe. In Wroclaw, she founded the first hospital in 1214 **at St. Ducha** in Silesia, later also **a shelter for lepers**, which she supported with money and donations.

Tragedy for Hedvik was the death of her husband Jindřich. He was buried in the Trebnica monastery. Before long, Hedvika also took refuge here, but she did not live here in cloister - she did not become a nun. Her daughter Gertruda was always here. **His son Henry II** takes over after his deceased father . , which, however, had to resist the invasion of the Mongol hordes. Henry II he fell in battle and with him all his Christian army. As if Hedvika had an inkling of how the battle would turn out, she accepted the news humbly and surrendered. She found so much strength in herself that she comforted her daughter and daughter-in-law by becoming the will of God that must be accepted.

Hedvika died in the monastery in Trebnica on 14/10/1243. She was canonized in 1267. Hedvika's attributes are **bare feet, Cistercian dress, holding a model of the church in her hand.**

## Saint Elizabeth of Thuringia

**Alžběta Duryňská** is another woman who was interested in **poor and abandoned men, women and children**. Her short life was filled with many unpleasant experiences and bitter events.

Elizabeth was born in 1207. She was the daughter of the Hungarian king Ondřej II. and his wife Gertrude of Andechs. At the age of four, according to the agreement, she was sent to be educated at the Thuringian court of Count Heřman I., where she was brought up together with his children. She was betrothed to the son of Heřman I, Count of Lancashire, who, however, died. That is why she was married to the younger brother of her fiancé - **Ludvík**. Elizabeth married very young - at the age of 14 in 1221. However, during her short life (she was 24 when she died), she showed that she was a great and understanding woman. Even though she was a noble by blood, she was completely different from the other nobles who sincerely hated her for her way of life. The young landlady simply dressed, put away her jewelry, and maintained good relations with the servants.

Elizabeth was filled with the consciousness of **a higher mission**. She nobly showed that she was not only looking out for herself, but also noticed the poor and sick people and children, of whom a considerable number lived in her surroundings. She preached that true Christianity consists in service to one's neighbor, i.e. in **helping these poor people**. Elizabeth's help to the poor did not consist only in the provision of alms, as befitted the nobility. Elizabeth felt that she had to do a little more. Her help to those in need was unconditional, daily and exhausting - both in terms of Elizabeth's strength and financially. She also helped people who were in debt. She gave away her possessions, food and money, for example even at a time when there was a great famine in Germany and many people were dying (a great famine appeared in Germany in 1226). Elizabeth also distributed all the flour intended for the nobility to the people.

Furthermore, Saint Elizabeth had a hospital built **in Eisenach** , which she visited several times a day and treated the sick herself. She had great support in her husband. Ludvík understood his wife, agreed with her activities and often stood by her side. Elizabeth tried **to prevent poverty** with her "preventive" measures . She provided and distributed work tools to people who were interested in working but could not find work.

One has to admire Elizabeth's husband, for there is no doubt that Elizabeth's mercy clearly ruined their estate. It is therefore appropriate to repeat that for Elizabeth it was not an ordinary charitable charity, but a **sacrifice of herself**, her time at the expense of her family, her property, her strength and her health.

Her husband Ludvík decided to accompany the crusade to the Holy Land in 1227. Emperor Frederick II himself invited him to take this step. At that time, Elizabeth had an unpleasant premonition that she would never see him again. She didn't want him to leave. It later turned out that her premonition was true. Ludvík did not live to see the Holy Land. He died of the plague before he could board a ship to Palestine.

A cruel time came for Elizabeth. The family, who hated her, insisted that she remarry. She refused, however, because she made a promise that she would never marry again. If she did so, her husband's family would pay her less money. He then left with his children for Marburg, where he acquired a certain fortune. This allows her to found another, bigger **hospital**.

Elizabeth began to be watched and controlled. In one day, she gave away a considerable amount of money to the poor. Therefore, she was put under the tutelage of her clergyman **Konrad of Marburg**. The priest Konrad was not a good man. He even beat or had Elizabeth beaten. Elizabeth accepted beatings as suffering that belongs to the sacrament of God. Even so, Konrád hastened the exhausted Elizabeth's premature death.

Elizabeth died on November 17, 1231. From the beginning, she was considered a saint by common people. People came to her grave in droves to pay their respects.

**She was declared a saint in 1235.**

Through Elisabeth, in the 13th century in Germany, a Christian conscience is awakened, which has a relationship to social misery and need. A kind of feeling of universal responsibility for the whole society is awakening.

Saint Elizabeth became **the patron of the Teutonic Knights**.

## Saint Agnes the Czech

**Anežka Česká** was born into the royal family of **Přemyslovci**. She was the ninth and youngest child of Přemysl Otakar I and his second wife Konstancia Uherská. She was baptized Agnes, which means "immaculate", "virtuous", "pure". Anežka therefore comes from a Czech-German background (the mother was from Hungary, but of German origin).

The father was a skilled warrior, the mother a foreigner at the Czech court. Anežka apparently did not know much love from her parents. At the age of three, she was betrothed to the son of the Silesian Prince Jindřich Bradatý and his wife Hedvika.

**That's why little Anežka travels to the Cistercian monastery in Trebnica** accompanied by her older sister Anna. She only stayed here from three to six years, because her child groom Boleslav died. Little Anežka takes home beautiful memories of Hedvika and her charity.

After returning home, Anežka was sent to be educated in the Premonstratensian **convent in Doksany nad Ohří**, where she stayed for about three years. She received a general education, namely reading, writing, religion, praying, singing, etc. At the same time, however, she was influenced by the spiritual life to such an extent that she had already "toyed with the idea" of entering a monastery. Přemysl Otakar I promised his daughter Anežka to Jindřich through a skilful foreign policy, the son of Emperor Frederick II. Thanks to political intrigue, the marriage fell through, much to her relief. Agnes resented the marriage ever since, although she was courted by King Henry III Plantagenet of England and even by the widowed Emperor Frederick II. however, she chose another groom: **God**.



Svatá Anežka Česká dává model kostela mistrovi

The rumor that the Czech princess had rejected the emperor's hand and devoted herself fully to God spread throughout Europe and filled the Christian world with admiration for the fearless heroine of Christ that Agnes really was. Her decision was fully supported by Pope Gregory IX, with whom she was in written contact and who fully identified with her religious ambitions. He helped her so that after the death of her authoritative father Přemysl I (+1230) she could follow her own path, which she had decided to follow, i.e. becoming a **nun** and **caring for the sick and needy**.

Anežka's brother, Václav I, loved her very much. Anežka also had considerable support in him. She inherited a large fortune from her mother, and Václav gave her land on the banks of the Vltava in the Old Town. Here she later had the magnificent **monastery of St. Francis of Assisi** for men and women (the so-called **Poor Clares**). With his mother Konstancia, he founded in 1233 near the church of St. Haštala in the Old Town of Prague **Hospital of St. Francis of Assisi**, which was the first of its kind in Bohemia. The church of St. was attached to it as a gift. **Petra Na Poříčí**.

Five nuns who came from Trident entered the new monastery. On June 11, 1234, Anežka and other girls from noble families entered the Convent of the Poor Clares at Na Františku. This ceremony was watched by King Václav I with his wife, seven bishops and the nobility. Agnes thus became not only the first woman to refuse the hand of the emperor, but also the first daughter of the king to join the poor order of St. Clare. Soon Anežka became **an abbess** here. She remained in this position until her death, but, in accordance with her humility, she refused the title of abbess and allowed herself to be called only **elder sister**.

In the hospital of St. Františka also started working with **the male Order of the Cross with the Red Star**, which Anežka founded and entrusted them with hospital administration. She donated part of her property to the order, as did her mother Konstancie.

An area called **Prague's Assisi** grew up on Františka. There were two chapels and three churches here – *St. Francis* (Wenceslas I was buried here), **St. Salvator** and **St. Barbara**.

The Order of Poor Clares lived, according to the principles of poverty, completely devoted to the service of God. Anežka in particular, raised in asceticism from her earliest childhood, kept strict fasts and wore a shirt made of horsehair tightened with a rope. She also whipped herself with straps.

Agnes died on March 2, 1282. According to Palacký, the years 1281 and 1282 were one of the most unhappy periods in the history of Bohemia.

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