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Michel' Angiolo Grima

The man and his times [1729-1798]

Vital life events



Portrait
National Museum of Fine Arts, Valletta. Inv. No. 3145

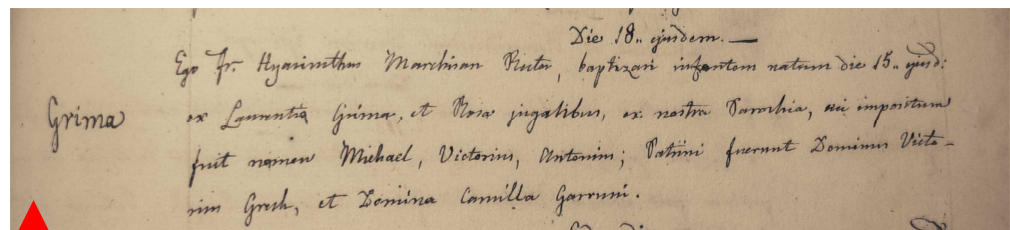
Michael Victor Anthony k/a Michel'Angiolo was the firstborn of eight siblings of Lorenzo [son of Paolo] Grima and Rosa nee d'Anna. Born in Valletta on the 15th September 1729, he was baptised three days later at the Church of Our Lady of Porto Salvo. His siblings included: (1) Magdalena Victoria Patricia [b. 1733]; (2) Paula Francesca [b.1736]; (3) Domenico Antonio [b.1737]; (4) Carlo Raimondo [b.1739]; (5) Magdalena Regina [b.1741] who eventually married the surgeon Francesco Buttigieg; (6) Joanne Vincenzo [b.1743]; and (7) Catherina Theresia [b. 1746].

He lived and practiced in Valletta. In his final months, he was sick in bed for two months and was living with his sister Magdalena and colleague brother-in-law. He drew up

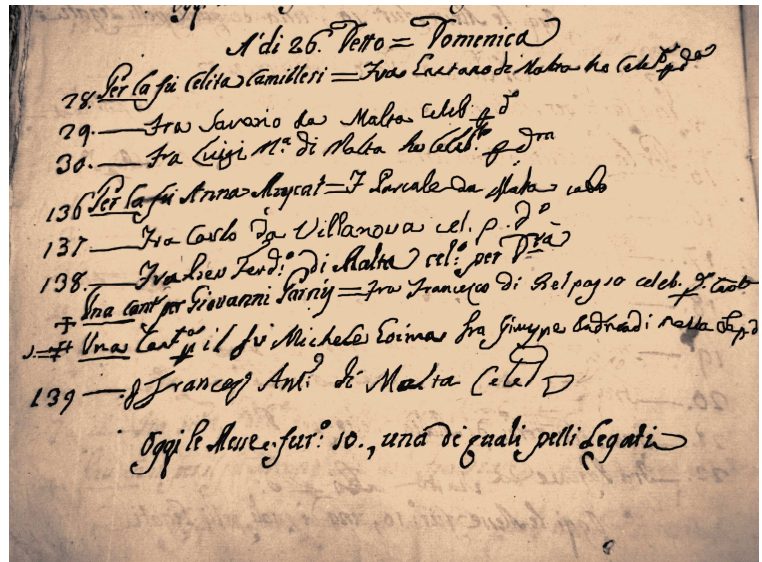
his will on the 20th August 1798 and a codicil on the 21st. He died, aged 64 years, on the 25th August 1798. He is buried in the burial crypt of the Confraternity of the Holy Crucifix in the Church of the Franciscan Minors Observants in Valletta. His funerary High Mass Service was carried out on the 26th August with repeat services the following two days and a "trentina" held a month later.

References

1. Parish Archives [Porto Salvo], Valletta. *Battesimi 1719-1731*, vol. vi, p.499; 1732-1742, vol. vii, p.110,225,297,431,508; 1743-1753, vol. viii, p.43,168; *Matrimoni 1724-1740*, 2.ii.1727, f.42r
2. N. Caruana Dingli. More about Michelangelo Grima (1729-1798). *The Sunday Times [Malta]*, 1st November 1988, p.39



Baptismal record
Parish Archives, Valletta [Porto Salvo]. *Battesimi 1719-1731*, vol.VI, p.499



Funerary Mass record
Franciscan Archives, Valletta. *Messe 1798-1800*, 26.viii.1798

Text prepared by:

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- G.G. Buttigieg



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Bust of Michel'Angiolo Grima held by the Medical School Library.

“Citizen Grima is dead. His talent is well known. He has left, to the surmise of everyone, precious writings beneficial to humanity”

Translation of letter to the Justice of the Peace of the City of the West written by the Commissioner Regnaud de Saint Jean d'Angely [NML: Lib. 13, f.107]

A surgeon's lifestyle

Michelangelo Grima's will drawn up five days before his death shows the surgeon to be a man of sustenance living an unostentatious life.^{1,2} He kept an extensive non-extravagant wardrobe enabling him to appear in public in accordance to his professional status. The inventory lists 41 shirts; eight white and three red handkerchiefs; eight pairs of black velvet trousers. another made of black silk and a further 31 made of white linen; 11 waistcoats made of velvet and leather reaching almost to the knees; 11 undergarments; a cloak; a blue woolen cape; and 12 pairs of black stockings, a pair of white and a further eight used ones. These garments were enhanced by the use of a walking stick topped with a golden knob which was the conventional symbol of the medical profession.

His other non-medically related belongings included silverware [a glove tray; coffee pot; six spoons and forks; six teaspoons; two ladles; two small trays; and a silver seal]; and crockery and glassware [six white cups and saucers; six antique coffee cups with saucers; 6 other cups; 10 crystal glasses for rosolio; six ordinary glasses; 20 glasses with

gilded rings; one crystal flask with tea leaves; six knives with metal handles contained in a box; four earthenware vases; an earthenware teapot; a tin box; a brass oil lamp and tin oil can; a tin chocolate pot; a small box containing weighing scales with a weight; five brass medals; and a metal box.]

His monetary and other precious belongings included 125 Luigi doppie [eq. 2500 scudi]; 62 Luigi singoli [eq. 620 scudi]; 3 Rusponi fiorentini of 3 zucchini each; 4 Rusponi fiorentini of 1 zucchini each [eq. 58.9 scudi]; one gold medal [eq. 208 scudi]; one emerald with diamonds; a pair of gold shirt buttons; and a gold collar stud.

Grima apparently had a strong sense of spirituality. His will commences with calling upon the help of the most glorious Mother of God and commending his soul to the mercy of the Almighty. He was a member of the Confraternity of the Holy Crucifix and had provided for his spiritual needs in earlier years by providing a sum of money to the Confraternity binding it to light 18 candles on the altar of the Most Holy Crucifix, six other

candles on the altar of Our Lady of Sorrows, and to celebrate a High Mass on the anniversary of his death.

In 1764, Grima had been regaled with a horse-drawn carriage by Grandmaster Pinto to enable him go on his rounds more quickly and comfortably.³

On the 6th July 1798, Grima petitioned the Commission of Government to continue to be allowed his pension payment of 24 scudi per month which had been stopped with the advent of the French rule. His petition was put on hold.⁴

Reference

1. Notarial Archives, Valletta: Testamento Ma/51/690 [Not. Paul Caruana], 20.viii.1798 21.viii.1798
2. P. Cassar. The Surgeon Michel'Angelo Grima. *L-Ospedaliere*, 2000, p.43-46
3. NML: Lib.14, f.233 et sec
4. NML: AOM 6524 C, no.184



Ex-votive painting showing a Surgeon with walking stick visiting his patient after surgery for fistula dated 21.v.1765. *Tal-Herba Sanctuary*, Birkirkara, Inv. No. 269

Education and surgical training

Michel' Angiolo Grima appears to have been a well-educated person as evidenced by the large collection of books in his library—a collection of 363 works that besides medical works included a number of literary volumes.

Grima probably obtained his early education from the *Collegium Melitense* run by the Order of Jesuits in Valletta which had been originally instituted in 1592. The foundation deed for the *Collegium* specified

that besides Philosophy and Theology, other subjects such as Grammar and the Humanities were to be taught. In 1727, the college was turned into an *Academia* with the privilege of conferring academic degrees in philosophy and theology.

In 1743, aged 14 years, Grima joined the School of Anatomy and Surgery at the *Sacra Infermeria* that had been set up in 1676. There he was apprenticed to the surgical staff working in the hospital including the *Chirurgo principale* and *lettore* Gabriele Henin. Henin had been appointed to the post in 1724 after qualifying as surgeon at the Santa Maria Nuova in Florence. He continued giving sterling teaching services until he became gravely ill in 1753.

Grima had great admiration for his mentor. He possessed a set of manuscript notes belonging to Henin which have apparently now been lost. A painting of

Henin by Antoine Favray carries an inscription written by Grima.

The 1729 and 1739 regulations governing the teaching of anatomy and surgery required the attendance of all students at anatomical dissections generally held on Thursdays. Teaching



Spedale di Santa Maria Nuova, Florence

aids included the use of anatomical dissection diagrams commissioned from the French artist Favray in 1741.

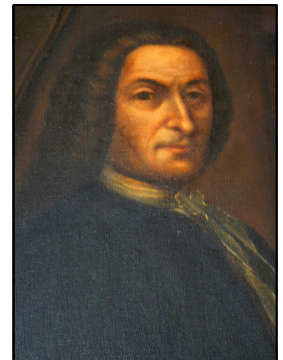
On the 10th May 1750, Grima proceeded abroad at the expense of the Order to Santa Maria Nuova Hospital in Florence. He obtained a doctorate in Philosophy and Medicine from the University of Pisa and was appointed dissector in the Florentine hospital. In 1755, he was asked to treat the Duke of Florida. On the 2nd October 1758, he was



Anatomical drawings attributed to Antoine Favray 1741.

Detail in Gabriel Henin portrait [DOH, Palazzo Castellana] showing an anatomical drawing of the dissection of the back

approved as surgeon by the *Collegio dell'Arte Medica di Firenze*. In 1759, he proceeded to Paris after he had been given permission by the Council of the Order during the previous year to spend three years in that city to complete his studies [NML: AOM 652, f.250v]. The subsequent year, he joined the French Army as a surgeon serving for two years during the Seven Years War working in a hospital in Cassel, Germany before its capture from the French by the German forces in 1762. On the 26th September 1763 he was appointed Chief Surgeon at the *Sacra Infermeria* and on the 27th November 1763 he was further appointed Lecturer in Anatomy and Surgery at the *Sacra Infermeria*. He was licensed to practice medicine in Malta on the 3rd December 1763 [NML: Lib. 14, f.186].



Gabriele Henin—*lettore di anatomia e chirurgia* at the *Sacra Infermeria* 1724-1753

Copy of painting by A. Favray

“Gabriel Henin

Medicinae

Cheirurcicae hocce in

nosocomo decus atq

ornamentum in rebus

anatomicis summus

fuit et primus ad

incidenda mortuorum

corpora et ad ejus

partes publice

ostendendas vixit an.

LVI. Objt idib

Octobris MCCLIV Ab

X Pto Deo. Michael

Angelus Grimius ejus

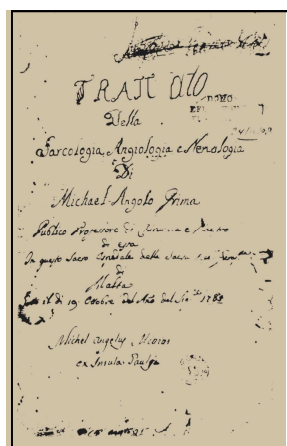
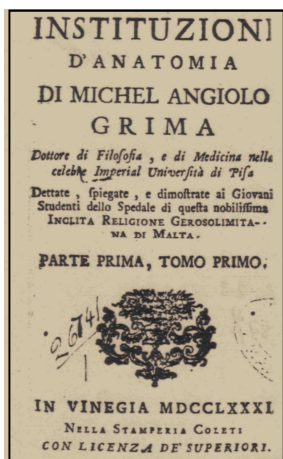
successor scribib.”

Text written below portrait by Grima in relation to his mentor

[DOH, Palazzo Castellana]



Anatomical teaching-
Sacra Infermeria



Anatomical lecture notes by
Michel'Angiolo Grima

Medical & Academic Career

After supplementing his formal training in surgery with an intensive traumatic surgery experience in the field of war, Grima returned to Malta in 1763 to be appointed *Chirurgo principale* and *lettore di anatomia e chirurgia* at the *Sacra Infermeria* [NML: Lib.14, f.221; AOM 653, f.307]. The subsequent year in 1764, he was appointed a member of the *Collegio di Sanità* that was set up after the death of *Protomedicus* P.P. Azzopardi. This *Collegio* was composed of three senior physicians—Giorgio Imbert, Giovanni Domenico Baigio and Guiseppe Bigeni—and Michel'Angiolo Grima as the senior surgeon. The *Collegio* was invested by Grandmaster Pinto de Fonseca with the duties and powers previously enjoyed by the *Protomedicus* including that of issuing permits to unqualified shopkeepers to sell medicinal substances [NML: Lib.14, f.308; Lib.429(iv)].

In 1768, Pinto expelled the Society of Jesuits from the Maltese Islands and appropriated all the revenue accruing from the Society's properties in Malta with the aim of setting up a *Pubblica Università di Studi Generali*. Permission to set up this *Università* was forthcoming from Pope Clement XIV on the 20th October 1769 with the institution being formally set up in November 1769. The *Collegio Medico* was set up within this *Università* on the 25th May 1771. Michel'Angiolo Grima was nominated lecturer in Anatomy and Surgery in the newly founded faculty. He also held the post of *Principe dell'Academia dei Medici*. Other members of the *Academia* included Giorgio Locano, Gaetano Azzopardi, Giorgio Im-

bert, Gio Domenico Baigio, Giuseppe Bigeni and Lorenzo Thein. The *Academia* was the body responsible for conducting the student examinations.

Grima was ousted from his lectureship post on the 12th February 1773, re-instated on the 18th February, but removed again after the 15th June 1773.



Shop licence signed by Grima issued to Maria Pace by the *Collegio di Sanità* on the 27 August 1764. NLM Archives AOM 2045

The Medical course of studies lasted five years, the student obtaining a Bachelorship after two years, a Licentiate after four years and the Doctorate after the fifth year. The subjects taught included botany, chemistry, anatomy, surgery and medicine. A license to practice was only given after serving for six years at the *Sacra Infermeria*. The surgical tutor was entrusted to teach anatomy and surgery, to hold weekly anatomical demonstrations, and to ensure that the students assisted at operations. Under Grima's direction, public dissections were reintroduced. To obviate the dictation of lecture notes, Grima published his textbook on anatomy under the title *Instituzioni d'Anatomia*. Further lecture notes exist in manuscript form as *Trattato della sarcologia, angiologia e nervologia*.

The reasons for this dismissal was an attempt by Grandmaster Ximenes to reduce the costs accruing from running the *Università*. In 1775, funds towards re-establishing a school of anatomy and surgery were made available by Bali Fra Clemente Ressegnier. The re-opening of the new faculty was ratified in January 1776, the inaugural lecture being delivered by Grima who was re-appointed to the post of lecturer in anatomy and surgery. Grima retained this post until his retirement on the 2nd April 1797. In his later years, he was assisted by surgeon Giovanni Andreotti. Grima was succeeded to the post by Aurelio Badat.

Bibliography

Michelangelo Grima published extensively before and after his return to Malta, including:

1. Delle osservazioni fatte sopra il corpo vivente d'alcuni animali intorno le ferite penetranti la grand'cavita' dell'addome [Firenze, 1754] - available in University Library, photocopy
2. Del nuovo e sicuro metodo di cucire gl'intestini allora quando in occasione di ferite o di altri vengano offese od allontanati dalla loro naturale contiguita' [Paris, 1760] - available in Bibliotheca Library. This paper was criticized by contemporaries Gaetano Azzopardi and G. Bruno in "Lettera apologetica contro la Dissertazione intitolata "Nuovo e sicuro metodo di cucire gli intestini" [Messina, 1762].
3. Memoire sur la sensibilitè des tendons [Paris, 1760] available in Bibliotheca Library
4. Réflexions sur la mémoire sur la taille latérale de Bromfield [Paris, 1761] available in University Library, photocopy
5. Riflessioni del sig. MichelAngelo Grima sopra il taglio laterale che per estrarre la pietra della vesica urinaria pratica il signor Guglielmo Bromfield [Firenze, 1761] available in University Library, photocopy
6. Due Relazioni medico-anatomiche [Malta, 1764] available in Bibliotheca Library
7. De poplitis aneurismate [London, 1773] available in Bibliotheca Library
8. Della medicina traumatica altrimenti detta vulneraria [Firenze, 1773] available in University Library
9. Della sensibilita' dei tendini. Dissertazione del dottore Michel Angiolo Grima, coll'aggiunta di altre lettere sopra il medesimo argomento di altri autori [Venezia, 1776] available in University Library, photocopy & microfilm P.S. 710685/247 a.28 (incomplete)
10. Istituzioni d'Anatomia [Venezia, 1781] available in University Library

Other available manuscript notes belonging to Grima include:

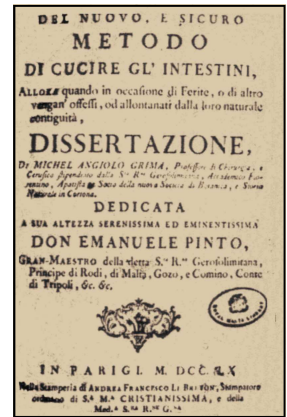
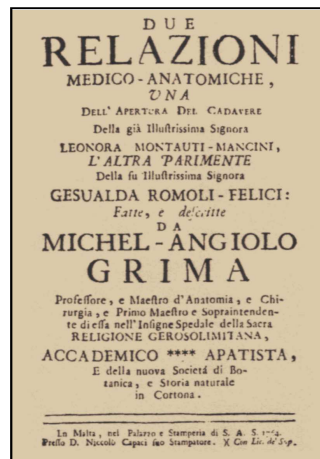
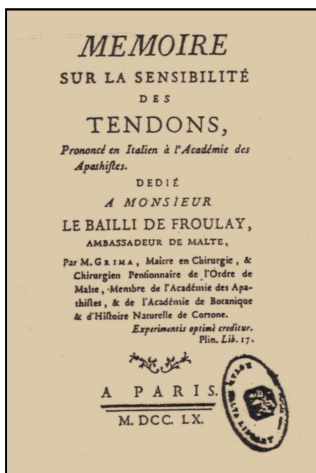
1. Historiae atque observationes tres medico-chirurgicae singularissimae per Michaellem Angelum Grimum exarate, 1758 available in University Library, photocopy of part
2. Trattato della sarcologia, angiologia e nervologia [NML Ms.1203, 260f., 1785] available in Bibliotheca Library

Untraced unpublished works include:

1. De cranii repercussione [1759-60]. Work referred to in a footnote in *Della medicina traumatica*.
2. Sopra l'origine, progressi e vantaggi della chirurgia [1764]. Work referred to as the title of a lecture delivered in the Sacra Infermeria on 10.i.1764 vide: NML Ms.14
3. Untitled Oration delivered at the inauguration of the school of barber-surgeons at the Sacra Infermeria [1775]. Work referred to in NML Ms. 1146.

Reference

1. P. Cassar. The works of Michel'Angelo Grima (1731-1798) A bibliography with summaries and notes. *St. Luke's Hospital Gazette*, 1976, 9(1):p.3-20



“In our opinion this dissertation is well written and is a testimony of the erudition of the author and of his talents for his profession”

Translation of comment on Grima's work "Del Nuovo e Sicuro Methodo di Cucire gl'Intestini" made by a reviewer writing in *Le Journal de Medicine*, 1760.

Venesection

Bleeding remained the universal treatment for a panacea of disorders particularly in the presence of fever. Various methods were utilized to "bleed" the patient – these included [1] the application of a number of medicinal leeches; [2] the direct venesection with incision of a superficial vein; or [3] the use of scarificators and bleeding cups. Grima recommended the application of leeches to the temple to reduce the inflammation following orbital injuries. Copious amounts of blood, sometimes amounting to over 16 ounces, were drained occasionally on a daily basis.

Female Surgeons

The career of a barber-surgeon was in the 18th century not a purely male-dominated profession; it had been realized that female professionals were needed to care for the women admitted to the female wards at the *Casetta delle Donne* in Valletta. In 1765 Bali Sigismondo Piccolomini proposed the idea of training female *barberotti* so that by 1782, a number of these had been trained. These included Teresa De Lucca, who on the 8th July 1782 was given the licence to practice the profession of a *barberotta* at Nadur, Gozo [NML: AOM 1194, f.133/140,177/180]. In 1772, a young woman was sent at the Order's expense to study surgery in Florence.

18th century surgery

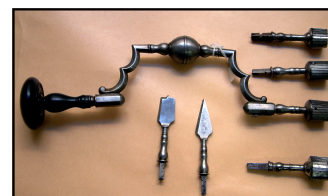
In an age when anaesthesia and sepsis were non-existent, the scope of surgical interventions during the 18th century was limited to essential procedures only. This did not in any way reflect on the expertise of the *medicus chynurgici*—the absence of anaesthesia required the surgeon to fine-tune his expertise to enable him to operate swiftly. Michel'Angiolo Grima was particularly renowned for being able to perform the operation of mastectomy for breast malignancy in three minutes, and that of lithotomy for vesical stones in just two-and-a-half minutes.

Much of what is known about the 18th century surgical practice in Malta comes from the writings published by Grima. Grima's book *Della medicina traumatica* published in 1773 details the management of various types of wounds sustained as a result of injury. Firearm wounds were washed with a solution of water and alcohol after exploring the wound to remove all extraneous material including the bullet. The past measure of pouring boiling oil in the wound was condemned as barbarous and cruel. The wound was then packed with threads, covered with clean linen, and carefully bandaged. Grima further advocated suturing the edges of clean-cut wounds. Suppuration was considered desirable to assist healing [*pus bonum et laudabile*], and various *disgestive* preparations were applied to the wound to assist suppuration. These were made up of a mixture of turpentine, myrrh and egg yolk. Abscesses were drained [*ubi pus evacua*], while suppurating

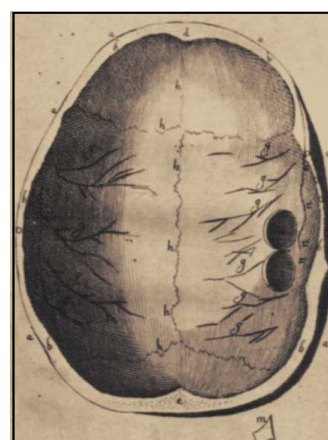
wounds were regularly washed with tepid water or quinine solution. Excessive granulation was cauterized with silver nitrate.

Various instruments to assist the debridement of firearm wounds were depicted in Grima's work. He commented that he had always employed these instruments with good results and gave detailed instructions for the benefit of his students on how to use them. Seven specific instruments are depicted including: four pincers of various shapes to assist the gripping of the musket ball, a cork-screw tipped instrument to enable the lead ball to be secured, and hooks to facilitate the removal of embedded foreign bodies.

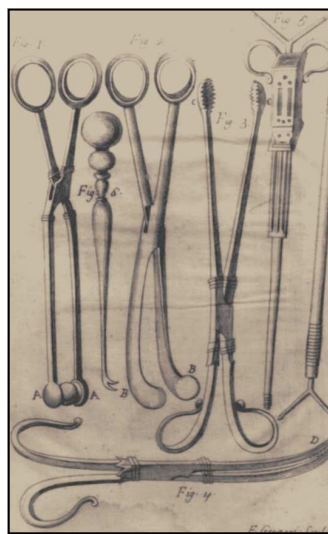
tures of the skull. Various instruments were used to assist the procedure.



Trephination instruments



Limb fractures were reduced and splinted, while in the case of a badly comminuted fracture the loose fragments were removed to allow fusion of the larger bones. Amputation or disarticulation was resorted to in badly crushed bones or in the presence of gangrene, caries, osteomyelitis of the long bones, or popliteal artery aneurysms. Grima had in 1773 further published the treatise *De poplitis aneurismate* wherein he discusses the aetiology, symptomatology, classification and treatment of these aneurysms as observed in the Santa Maria Nuova Hospital in Florence.



Grima also described and illustrated the management of fifteen cases of head injuries managed by himself while serving on the front with the French Forces at Cassel. These injuries had been produced by musket balls, blows from swords and iron bars, and following falls from a height. The management in these cases required trepanning either to drain collections or to elevate depressed frac-



Amputation instruments

Perforating chest injuries were actively managed, while drainage of empyema or haemothorax were also undertaken.

Injuries to the abdominal viscera were rarely actively treated, though musket balls impacted in the liver were extracted. In spite of his reluctance to operate on abdominal viscera injuries, Grima had performed animal experiments to test the use of the *cucitura spirale* to perform end-to-end anastomosis. In his work published in 1760 *Del nuovo e sicuro metodo di cucire gl'intestini*, Grima suggested that this technique could be used in cases of open injuries of the abdomen especially when this is complicated by prolapse and gangrene of the bowels. A year later in 1761, the technique was attempted by the contemporary Maltese surgeon Michele Grillet on a eleven-year old boy suffering from a Meckel's diverticulum complicated by worm infestation. The case was however unsuccessful and ended fatally. Grima's work on intestinal suturing came under criticism by his contemporaries G. Azzopardi and G. Bruno who in their 1762 publication *Lettera apologetica contro la Dissertazione* claimed that Grima's suggestion was not an original one.

Traumatic lesions of the bladder were managed by catheterization. Traumatic lesions of the kidney were considered beyond surgical treatment and generally fatal. Those produced by musket balls were managed by probing the wound to extract the bullet. Grima was particularly skilled in the operation of vesical lithotomy. In his paper *Réflexions*

sur la mémoire sur la taille latérale de Bromfield published in 1761, Grima recorded that he had had the opportunity to practise perineal lithotomy for the removal of bladder stones using William Bromfield's original



Lithotomy instruments

instruments. He compared the Bromfield's method of lithotomy to the Cheselden's approach procedure, and remarked that the latter was more likely to be associated with collateral damage to some branch of the internal iliac vessels and the ejaculatory ducts of the left seminal vesicles. Other Maltese contemporary surgeons such as Giuseppe Grillet preferred the Cheselden's approach. Other urological surgery described by Grima was the removal of a new-growth from the male genitalia. This was managed by tightly tying the penis over a catheter until the organ became gangrenous and fell off. In 1764 Grima is known to have performed successfully a kidney operation on Fr. G. Incurdo from Terranuova who wrote four laudatory sonnets to thank the surgeon.

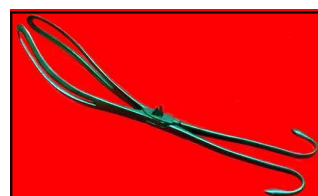
Haemorrhage was controlled by

compression and by ligature using a waxed thread, though the tourniquet was sometimes used in an emergency. Styptic medications were rarely relied upon.

Infected ocular injuries were managed primarily through the application of leeches, but eventually by drainage. Sympathetic ophthalmitis was recognized.

Other surgical procedures described in the late 18th century included cataract surgery, ano-rectal procedures to treat fistula-in-ano and remove foreign bodies; and the excision of new-growths from the breasts and other external parts of the body. Embryotomy was also practiced to facilitate delivery; though the use of the vectis and Levret's obstetric forceps were also probably employed. A postmortem Caesarean section is also recorded having been performed by surgeon Fedele Zammit in 1780.

The most commonly observed complications of injury and surgery noted by Grima included erysipelas, metastatic abscesses, fistulae or sinuses, gangrene and septic exhaustion. Tetanus was recognised as *tension of the nervous system*. Concurrent disease such as venereal disease or scurvy was considered by Grima to delay healing. He recommended that injured patients suffering from syphilis were to receive specific treatment, preferably a decoction of the sarsaparilla plant.



Levret's obstetric forceps

Surgical Instruments in Grima's possession

- Retractor
- Tourniquets [x2]
- Knives [x2 straight; x2 curved; one small incision scalpel; x5 dissecting scalpels]
- Small hook
- Musket-ball extractor
- Musket-ball forceps [one curved; one straight]
- Small pincers [x2 small]
- Trepanation instruments including cylindrical saw
- Various cannulas, probes and spoons for lithotomy [x1 Le Cat cannula; various cannulae and probes; x2 spoons]
- Several lithotomes [x2 Cosimo pattern; x1 Poiteau pattern; x2 old instruments]
- Retractors and hooks for lithotomy [x8 steel retractors; x8 hooks]
- Faubert's trocar and cannula
- Levret's obstetric forceps
- Caustery plates [x8]
- Anel lachrymal fistulae instruments
- Cataract convex scissors and bistouries
- Couching cataract needles
- Eye specula [x2]

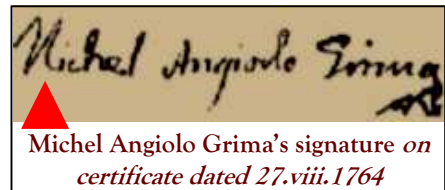
As listed in Grima's will



Portrait depicting Michel' Angiolo Grima held by the Department of Health at the Palazzo Castellana, Valletta. [A modern copy is held by the Faculty of Medicine & Surgery of the University of Malta. Original at the National Museum of Fine Arts, Inv. 3145]



The surgeon visiting his patient - 1765 votive portrait Tal-Herba Sanctuary, Inv. 269



Michel Angiolo Grima's signature on certificate dated 27.viii.1764

MICHAEL ANGELUS GRIMIUS PHYLOS AC MEDICINAE
 IN ALM. IMPER. PISANA ACADEM. DOCTOR IN LYCEO MELITENSE
 ANATOM. MEDICINAEQ. CHIRURGIAE PUBL. LECTOR ATQ. PROFESSOR
 NEC NON SACR. ACADEM. FLORENT. APATHIST GEORGOPHIL. HETRURIAE
 BOTANPHIL. ET REB. ALIAR. NATUR. CORTONES ACADEMICUS
 AET. XLIII.

Text below portrait reads "Michael Angelus Grimius phylos ac medicinae in Alm. Imper. Pisana academ doctor in Lyceo Melitense Anatom. Medicinaeo Chirurgiae publ. lector atq. Professor nec non sacr. Academ. Florent. Apathist Georgophil Hetruriae Botanphil. et rer. Altar. Natur. Cortones Academicus Aet. XLIII."