

The National Library of Malta holds a number of books by Maltese medical authors of the 17th and 18th centuries. These books present various aspects of the theories and exercise of medicine and surgery and of areas of "specialization" of those days.

Twenty-seven publications have been traced and are here surveyed. A number of unpublished medical manuscripts are also extant (such as those of the surgeon Michel'Angelo Grima and physician Giuseppe De Marco) but these have not been included in this paper which is intended to illustrate printed works only.

The books have been grouped in accordance with their subject matter and listed by the year of publication:

<i>Surgery</i>	9
<i>Physiology</i>	8
<i>Anatomy</i>	3
<i>Plague</i>	2
<i>Psychiatry</i>	2
<i>Medicine</i>	1
<i>Dentistry</i>	1
<i>Sexually transmitted diseases</i>	1

Of these works only seven were printed and published in Malta. The remaining twenty books were published abroad i.e. ten in Italy and Sicily; nine in France; and one in London. Malta was then ruled by the Chivalric Order of St. John of Jerusalem whose knights came mainly from France and Italy. It was, therefore, inevitable that Maltese medicine and surgery reflected the influence of medical developments in France and Italy; hence the reason why so many of the books were published in these two countries.

Latin was at that time the language of learned men; it is not surprising, therefore, that sixteen of the books were written in Latin to be followed by nine in Italian and two in French.

Surgery

Maurin, J.F. *Dissertatio Chirurgica Medico-Practica de Vulneribus*, Monspelii, 1745, 70 pp.

Dr. Joannes-Franciscus Maurin was of French ancestry, his family having settled in Malta in 1619. He studied in Montpellier. In this work he describes the different types of wounds and the tissues involved (skin, muscles, ligaments, et). He gives special consideration to penetrating wounds of the cavities of the thorax and abdomen; and to lesions of the various organs and blood vessels that may be involved as well as depressed fractures of the skull. Diagnosis and prognosis are discussed.

Henin, G. *Observatio chirurgico-anatomica*, Messina, 1749, 12pp.

This is the case of a "sarcoma" of the back which Henin removed surgically with the survival of the patient who had come to Malta from Messina to consult the surgeons of the Holy Infirmary about the growth.

Valletta born Gabriel Henin (1696-1754) held the Chair of Anatomy and Surgery at the Holy Infirmary of Valletta. Besides being the Chief Surgeon at this hospital, he was also an oculist and an operator for the removal of stones from the urinary bladder.

Grima, M.A. *Delle osservazioni fatte sopra il corpo vivente d'alcuni animali intorno le ferite penetranti la gran cavità dell'addome. Novelle Letterarie*, No, 29, Firenze, 1754.

In this study Grima describes the experiments carried out by him on living dogs while he was studying surgery in Florence. He showed that surgical removal of the spleen did not cause death and that such an operation was feasible also on human beings when the spleen was injured or diseased. He suggested the term "splenotomy" for the operation.

Michel'Angelo Grima (c. 1731-1798) studied surgery at the Holy Infirmary of Valletta and then at the hospital of *Santa Maria Nuova* of Florence. In 1754 he obtained the doctorate in philosophy and medicine of the University of Pisa and in 1758 was approved as surgeon by the *Collegio dell'Arte Medica* of Florence. In the following year he went to Paris for further studies and joined the French Army as a surgeon during the Seven Years War serving in a hospital at Cassel. He returned to Malta in 1763, was appointed Senior Surgeon and Lecturer in Anatomy and Surgery at the School of the Holy Infirmary. He is the author of at least fifteen published and manuscript works. He retired from the lectureship and the hospital service in 1797.

Grima, M.A. *Del nuovo e sicuro metodo di cucire gl'intestina*, Parigi, 1760, 30 pp.

Grima describes the operation proposed by him for the surgical treatment of lacerations of the intestine. It consisted in cutting away the injured loops of the

intestine and re-uniting the healthy portions in an end-to-end union by means of a spiral suture. He had experimented successfully with this type of suture on living dogs.

Grima, M.A. *Riflessioni del Sig. Michel'Angelo Grima sopra il Taglio laterale che per estrarre la pietra della vesica orinario pratica il Signor Guglielmo Bromfeild* **Giornale Francese di Medicina, Chirurgia e Farmacia**, Firenze, Feb. 1761.

This is a detailed description of the operation performed by Grima on the cadaver with the "double gorgeret" – an instrument invented by William Bromfeild senior (1713-92) for the extraction of stones from the urinary bladder through the lateral approach. He concludes that the Bromfeild's instrument and technique represented an advance over William Cheselden's (1688-1752) method and instrument.

Grima, M.A. *Reflexions sur le memoire sur la taille laterale de M. Bromfield (sic)*. **Journal de Med. Chir. et Pharm.** 1761, Vol. XIV, p. 161.

This is the French rendering of the Italian *Riflessioni* (q.v.).

Azzopardi, G. & Bruno, G. *Lettera apologetica contro la dissertazione intitolata 'Nuovo e sicuro metodo di cucire gl'intestini'*, Messina, 1762, 29 pp.

This work is a critical review of Grima's book written by his contemporaries and rivals Dr. Gaetano Azzopardi and Giovanni Bruno, the former being a retired Principal Physician and the latter occupying the same post on the staff of the Holy Infirmary.

The authors argued that Grima was not the originator of the spiral suture of the intestines as this method of stitching had been used by surgeons prior to him.

Dr Azzopardi studied in Malta and then spent four years at Montpellier in the pursuit of the theory and practice of medicine before becoming Principal Physician.

Grima, M.A. *De poplitis aneurismata dissertatio*. Londini, 1773, 16, pp.

Grima discusses the causes, manifestations, classification and treatment of aneurysms of the popliteal artery. It is the result of his observations and experiences during his stay at the Hospital of Santa Maria Nuova at Florence. Though, according to the title-page, the book was published in London no evidence has so far been forthcoming that Grima ever went to Great Britain though he had expressed the wish to be granted a bursary by the Order of St. John to enable him to spend two years in England to enrich his surgical experience.

Grima, M.A. *Della medicina traumatica*, Firenze, 1773, 240 pp.

This treatise deals with the surgical management of fire-arm wounds of twenty-four soldiers under his care at the hospital of Cassel while he was in the service of the French Army during the Seven Years War (1756-63). Grima published this book for the benefit of his students as he held the view that war was "the great school not only of traumatic medicine (surgery) but of the whole of medicine".

Physiology

De Marco, G. *Dissertatio physiologica de respirazione ejusque usu primario*, Monspeli, 1744. 83 pp.

After studying in Malta, Dr. Giuseppe De Marco (1712-1789) went to widen his medical knowledge and experience at Montpellier in 1741. The above *Dissertatio* is the text of his thesis

presented and accepted for his doctorate. It deals with the functions of respiration.

Locano, G.J.B. *Dissertatio physiologica de mechanico feminarum tributo*, Monspeli, 1749, 43 pp.

Dr. Giorgio J.B. Locano studied medicine at Montpellier obtaining the doctorate of that university in 1749 in which year he published this short treatise on the anatomy and physiology of the female reproductive system with special reference to menstruation.

On returning to Malta he spent some time as physician in the navy of the Order of St. John (1754) and was later appointed physician to the Women's Hospital and District Medical Officer of Valletta. He also occupied the Chair of Medicine at our University.

De Marco, C. *De lanarite in secunda, et adversa valetudine adhibenda*, Malta, 1759, 367 pp.

The author discusses the effects of wearing woollen clothing in health and in illness.

The copy at the National Malta Library bears the certificates of the *Censor Librorum* and approval of the three authorities that controlled the publication and printing of books in the Maltese Islands in the 18th century – the State, the Bishop and the Inquisitor. The title page is marked with the stamp of the Holy Office of the Inquisition of Malta.

De Marco, G. *Dissertatio de cocholata*, Malta, 1760, 28 pp.

The use and abuse of the drinking of chocolate forms the subject of this booklet. The author also discusses whether the consumption of draughts of chocolate breaks the ecclesiastical fasting.

JOSEPHI DEMARCO

Medici Melitensis Philosophiæ, & Universitatis Monspelliensis

MEDICINÆ DOCTORIS

DE LANA

Ritè in Secunda, & Adversâ valetudine adhibenda.

OPUS, QUO

Villoz Vestis nudi contactus Præstantia, & Actio Staticæ experimentis per-
spicue, Utilitates fusè demonstrantur, Noxæ diligenter expenduntur.

Adjecta est ad calcem

DISSERTATIO DE USU, ET ABUSU CHOCOLATÆ

In Re Medica, & Morali.



MELITÆ in Palatio, & ex Typographia C. S. S. MDCCLXXI.
Apud D. Nicolaum Capacium ejus Typographum. X Superior. Sacrat.

Title page of Dr. Jos. Demarco's treatise *De Lana* and his dissertation on the use and abuse of chocolate drinking. It was published in Malta and bears the stamp of the Holy Office of the Inquisition.

Grima, M.A. *Memoire sur la sensibilitè des tendons.* Paris, 1760, 29 pp.

Grima describes several experiments of a physiological kind carried out by him on living animals, among which three dogs, to show that tendons are sensitive to painful stimuli. The experiments were performed in 1755 during his stay at Florence. He also reports the case of a patient whose tendons of his right big toe had become exposed through disease and who felt pain when these tendons were touched with a forceps.

Locano, J.G.B. *De imperio muscolorum in oeconomia animali,* Malta, 1774, 18 pp.

In this treatise the author describes the functions of the muscular bundles of the body.

Grima, M.A. *Della sensibilità dei tendini con l'aggiunta di altre lettere sopra il medesimo argomento di altri autori,* Venezia, 1776, pp.

This publication is the Italian rendering of Grima's French *Memoire sur la sensibilitè des tendons* of 1760 (q.v.).

It is dedicated to the Bailiff Clemente Resseguier who had founded a lectureship in Surgery at the Holy Infirmary of Valletta in 1775 with M.A. Grima as its holder. The *lettere* are laudatory comments from Monsieur Le Cat, *Primo Professore della Francia*, and from Giambattista Franchi, *Primo Professore d'Anatomia in Torino*.

Locano, J.G.B. *De imperio gangliorum in oeconomia animali,* Malta, 1776, 23 pp.

This treatise deals with the anatomy and integrative function of the nervous system. Locano refers to the works of the leading and influential anatomists and physicians of the 17th and 18th centuries.

Anatomy

Locano, G.J.B. *De novo spinalis medulla ductu,* Malta, 1761, 140 pp.

The writer reviews the opinions expressed by various medical authors about the anatomy of the spinal medulla and the base of the brain. He reports the finding of a polyp at the base of the brain during the post mortem examination of a woman who died in the Women's Hospital at Valletta on April 11, 1758.

The bibliography that he cites shows that Locano was a man of great erudition with a wide knowledge of the formost anatomical literature of his time. Among the authors that he refers to are Albrecht von Haller (1708-77), Hermann Boerhaave (1668-1738), Bartolomeus Eustachius (1520-1574) and Gabriel Fallopius (1523-1562).

Grima, M.A. *Due relazioni medico-anatomiche,* Malta, 1764, 12 pp.

Grima reports the findings in two necropsies carried out on two ladies of the Florentine aristocracy in 1756 and 1757. In the first case there was an abscess of the left ovary; in the second instance there was an abscess in the right iliac fossa involving the bowels. This is the only work of Grima to be published in Malta.

Grima, M.A. *Instituzioni d'anatomia,* Venice, 1781, 426 pp.

This book consists of the lectures delivered by Grima to his students at the Holy Infirmary of Valletta. Following a brief historical account of the teaching of anatomy in Europe and in Malta, he describes in detail the

bones, ligaments and joints of the human body. His lectures on the muscles, arteries, veins and nerves have survived in a manuscript which appears to consist of the notes written by a surgical student in 1785.

Plague

Axiaq, L. *De postrema melitensi lue praxis historica*, Palermo, 1677, 101 pp.

Dr. L. Axiaq lived throughout the plague epidemic of 1675-76. He has recorded the clinical manifestations of the disease in the bubonic and pulmonary forms. With regard to the latter form of the illness he was remarkably close to the aetiological truth as we know it today when he stated that the *semina* of the disease entered the human body through the respiratory system in the pneumonic type.

Cavallini, Ph. *Melita liberata a peste*, Rome, 1690, 42 pp.

Philippus Cavallini was a physician in the service of the Order of St. John at the time of the plague of 1675-76. It is not known whether he was Maltese though he calls himself a *medicus Melitensis* in this book. However that may be, he has recorded and edited in this book the correspondence, about the nature of the epidemic, of a Maltese physician, Dr. G. Francesco Bonamico (1639-80), exchanged with the medical academies of Paris, Florence, Pisa, Rome and Valencia in which he described the manifestations of the epidemic which he rightly diagnosed as plague against those who maintained that the illness had no pestilential characters but was simply a "malignant fever".

The copy at the National Malta Library belonged, at different times, to Fra Giuseppe Zammit, Director of the School of Anatomy and Surgery at the Holy Infirmary of Valletta; the Rev. Ignazio Saverio Mifsud, a cultured man; and to another owner whose name has been scribbled over and is illegible.

Psychiatry

Imbert, G. *Questio medica eaque therapeutica an aegrotantes imaginarii sola diversitate idearum rejecto omni rimediorum apparatu sanandi sint*, Monspeli, 1723, 67 pp.

Dr. George Imbert (1702-1786) dedicated this treatise on melancholia (depression) to Grand Master Fra Antonio Manoel de Vilhena. The author describes the physical and mental symptomatology of depression and discusses its diagnosis and treatment. Among the remedial measures he advocated was participation by the patient in conversations with friends and in festivals and listening to vocal and instrumental music.

Dr. Imbert had a full medical career rising eventually to the rank of *Protomedicus* of the Order of St. John – a post equivalent to that of Chief Government Medical Officer of to-day.

Bernard, S. *Trattato filosofico-medico dell'uomo e sue principali operazioni*, Catania, 1749, 111 pp.

According to Dr. Salvatore Bernard's concept of the nervous system, the functions of the brain were mediated by the "animal spirits" which reached this organ by means of the nerves which were believed to be hollow tubes. Acute mental disorder was attributed to a commotion of these "animal spirits". He recognised the power of suggestion on human behaviour. In fact he ascribed the unexpected cures from certain diseases, which had not responded



Title page of Lorenzo Hasciac (Axaq)'s account of the plague of 1675-76. Published in Palermo in 1677.

TRATTATO FILOSOFICO MEDICO

Dell' Uomo, e sue principali Operazioni.

OPERA DI SALVATORE

BERNARD

Medico Maltese,

Dedicata

ALL' ALTEZZA EMINENTISSIMA

DEL SIGNORE FR.

D. EMMANUELE

PINTO

DEGNISSIMO GRAN MAESTRO,

E

Principe di Malta, e Gozo, &c.

In Catania nel Palazzo dell' Illustrissimo Senato, nella
Stamperia del Dottor Bisagni 1749.) (*Con lic. de' Sup*

Title page of Dr. S. Bernard's work on the functions of the nervous system published at Catania in 1749.

to various kinds of treatment, to suggestion.

Dr. Bernard (1724-1806) studied medicine at the University of Aix-en-Provence graduating in 1749. He occupied the post of physician at Santo Spirito Hospital at Rabat and later on at the Lazzaretto.

Medicine

De Marco, G. *Tractatus mechanicus de non-naturalibus*, Avenione, 1748, 402 pp.

The author considers the clinical features of various diseases with emphasis on asthma, consumption and ascites. From his references to such brilliant clinicians as Thomas Sydenham (1624-89), Giorgio Baglivi (1668-1706), Archibald Pitcairne (1652-1713) and Richard Mead (1673-1754) he shows that he was well versed with contemporary medical literature.

Dentistry

Cossaeus, J. *Suprema apollinaris laurea seu doctoratus questiones quatuor cardinales*, Monspelli, 1636, 13 pp.

The "Third Question" entitled *An odontalgiae neurotomia?* is the earliest known publication on dentistry by a medical man who calls himself a *Melitensis Artium Magister et Licentiatu Medicinæ* but about whose nationality there are doubts. Is Cossaeus the Latin rendering of Cossai or Cassia or Casha?

The treatment he recommends for dental pain is the surgical section of the nerve "which runs to the teeth through the auditory meatus". The cut was to be made in "the internal and lower part of the ear".

The other questions deal with the superstitious belief in the casting of spells; the need for sexual expression to ensure a healthy life; and whether the medicaments in use in his time were as efficacious as in earlier times.

The work is dedicated to Grand Master Jean Paul Lascaris.

Cossaeus is the author of five other *Quaestiones* which he submitted and defended to obtain his doctorate of the University of Montpellier in 1636 and 1637. They deal with:

- (a) The use of onions for the relief of pain caused by obstructive renal and vesical calculi.
- (b) Treatment by venesection to alleviate the eruption of skin bleedings and to "cool" the blood when its temperature rises.
- (c) The benefit derived from luke warm baths in cases of jaundice.
- (d) The administration of aloe pills in migraine.

- (e) The evidence that uterine moles are the result of the fecundation of the ova by semen.

Sexually Transmitted Diseases

Cren, F.A. *Tractatus physico-medicus de Americana lue*, Malta, 1762, 207 pp.

Dr. Fortunato Antonio Cren (or Creni) discusses the origin of syphilis or the "American disease" so called according to the view that it was brought to Naples from the West Indies by the sailors of Christopher Columbus in 1492.

The author describes the signs and symptoms and means of propagation of the disease. He condemned the use of crude mercury in its treatment because of the toxicity of this metal.

Dr. Cren's publication elicited a critical *Responsio* or reply by an unnamed writer published in Catania in 1764 (*Responsio ad epistolam in tractatu physico-medico Doctoris Fortunati Antonii Cren editam*, 13 pp).

Comment

These medical publications represent the "highlights" of the knowledge of the "science" and of the exercise of the healing art of the 17th and 18th centuries as expressed by Maltese physicians and surgeons of those periods.

A perusal of their works shows that, in comparison with the medical professionals of to-day, they had less demands on their skills; and a narrower range of responsibilities was laid on their diagnostic acumen and therapeutic interventions. However, the fact that their concepts and remedies have been discarded should not lull the present medical generation into a false sense of superiority – on the contrary they should provide us with a corrective to any unbounded confidence in the many theories and pharmaceutical preparations

and in the medical thought and practice of to-day.

Though these authors are now remembered only in the fringes of history, they were nevertheless the enlightened pioneers who endeavoured to keep high the prestige of the Maltese medical profession and to engage the interest of their contemporaries and to stimulate their minds by means of the printed word and thus promote the health of the population of these islands.

Apart from their medical contents, some of these books are of special interest for a study of the printing and publishing of books in Malta in the 18th century because they were printed in the only printing press existing in the Island – that at the Palace of the Grand Master; and because of the censorship by the government, the ecclesiastical authorities and the Inquisitor to which the manuscript had to be submitted before publication. These censors certified that the work submitted for their examination contained nothing against the teaching of the Catholic Church or any subversive matter regarding the state and the Statutes of the Order of St. John. For instance Dr. Cren's *Tractatus* (q.v.) bears the permission to be printed and published of the Bishop of Malta, Fra D. Bartholomeus Rull; of the Inquisitor Angelo Durini; and of the Vice Chancellor, Bali of the Eagle, Fra Franciscus Guedes as representative of the Grand Master.

In addition to the *Censurum vota* and the *Imprimatur* of the three authorities concerned, Dr. J. De Marco's *De Lana* (q.v.) is stamped with the imprint of the Holy Office of Malta on the title page.

Bibliography

Cassar, P. The Neuropsychiatric Concepts of Dr. S. Bernard, *Scientia* (Malta), 1949, Vol. XV, No. 1, p. 20.

Cassar, P. Request by a Maltese Physician to Read Prohibited Books in the Early 19th Century, *Scientia* (Malta), 1964, Vol. XXX, No. 1, p. 14.

Cassar, P. *Medical History of Malta*, London, 1965.

Cassar, P. The Maltese Surgeon Gabriel Henin. Three Medical Biographies, Malta, 1984.

Cassar, P. French Influence on Medical Developments in Malta, Malta, 1987.

Cassar, P. The Works of Michel'Angelo Grima. *The St. Luke's Hospital Gazette*, Vol. IX, 1974, p. 3.

Cossaesus, J. An fascinatio sit vana superstitio? 1636. An Venus sanitati necessaria? 1636. An odontalgiae nevrotomia? 1636. An eadem sit vis medicamentis quae antiquitus? 1636. An caeparum usus calculosis conveniat? 1636. An in ebullitione sanguinis rubris maculis per corpus erumpentibus vene sectio? 1636. An ictericis balneum aquae tepentis? 1636. An hemicrania pillulae ex aloe? 1636. An molae conceptus requirat utrumque semen? 1637.

Galea, J. Dr. Giuseppe De Marco. A Biographical & Bibliographical Study. *The St. Luke's Hospital Gazette*, Vol. VII, 1972, p. 3.

