

# ANTONIO DE GIMBERNAT Y ARBOS (1734-1816)

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**Pedro Mestres Ventura**

*Institute of Anatomy and Cell Biology, Laboratory of Electron Microscopy, Medical School, University of Saarland, Homburg Saar, Germany*

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Antonio de Gimbernat y Arbós is probably one of the figures in Spanish medicine about whom more has been written. This is the newest biography about this great historical figure born in Cambrils (Tarragona, Spain), and surely is a special one because it was made by Dr. Mestres, a native Cambrilense, passionate about his land, his people, history in general and that of medicine in particular, a prestigious and renowned anatomist and connoisseur to perfection of Gimbernat's field of work of who for many years has studied his life and work.

This book was born from the commitment to write a new biography of this figure, which arose in 2016 during the symposium held in Cambrils to commemorate the bicentenary of the death of Gimbernat that was organized by Dr. Mestres (Pedro Mestres Ventura, 2016).

The book traces a chronological account of Gimbernat's life that begins with the origins (chapter one) and the character's childhood and youth (chapter two). In these chapters, the author gives us a portrait of Cambrils and Catalan society at the time when Gimbernat, in the bosom of a wealthy family, began his compulsory studies in a fairly planned manner. The third chapter explains Gimbernat's journey to Cádiz, where he enrolled in the Royal College of Surgery of Cádiz (1756), and

where he met another great surgeon who would influence him in his career: Pere Virgili. In the fourth chapter, we can see Gimbernat moving to Barcelona with the help of Virgili to start his work at the Royal College of Surgery of Barcelona. The fifth chapter narrates perhaps the most transcendent years in Gimbernat's professional life, i.e., his stay in several European countries, subsidized by King Charles III of Spain, with the aim of returning to Spain after having learned the most recent advances in the field of anatomy and surgery in order to improve the health of the population. It was precisely in London, on April 25, 1777, where he was able to explain his technical innovation on crural hernia surgery during a lecture of eminent professor John Hunter. The sixth and seventh chapters deal with the most important episodes of Gimbernat's career in Madrid after his European tour. Here we see how he was entrusted with the creation and subsequent direction of the Royal College of Surgery of Madrid, was appointed surgeon of the King's Chamber, and subsequently first Royal Surgeon and, as a result of this, president of all the surgical colleges in Spain. The eighth chapter shows us Gimbernat in decline, losing influence and reputation, especially due to some controversial decisions of a political nature during the Napoleonic invasion; to all this must be added a progressive but significant physical de-

terioration and serious economic problems. The ninth chapter reviews his published and unpublished works, which include the most recognized of all: the *New Method of Operating the Crural Hernia* (1793). Finally, the tenth chapter, titled “Gimbernat in images”, illustrates all known images of the surgeon, whether in drawing, engraving, painting, bust or medallion.

By reading this book, we easily realize that we are dealing with a character with an enormous capacity for work, a great intelligence, a facility for learning, a deep and wide knowledge in many aspects of medicine (including the field of pharmacology), and above all a great commitment to the profession.

The book, besides being recognized for his important discoveries in the anatomy of the human body and his ability to apply them to the improvement of surgical operations, shows us Gimbernat’s capacities as a health “manager”, at a time when “everything was to be done” in this field, improving education and medical training and the structures on which the organization of professionals and medicine itself had to be based.

With regard to the writing of the book, we can say that the book contents a rich bibliography presented in a very accessible way that allows an easy and agile reading of the text. In this sense, the chronological method, while interspersing the most personal aspects with the purely scientific, together with an impeccable contextualization of everything that is narrated (from the socio-political atmosphere of the time, the medical science of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and because of the intrigues between characters and institutions in which Gimbernat participated in the midst of the struggle to impose his criteria and of course, his power and prominence), make this book not only interesting for specialists in Gimbernat’s work, but also for all those interested in medicine in general, as well as in history and biographies.

**Prof. José R. Sañudo**

*Dept. of Anatomy, Faculty of Medicine  
Universidad Complutense, Madrid, Spain*

## REFERENCE

MESTRES VENTURA P (Guest editor) (2016) Honoring Don Antonio de Gimbernat, Anatomist and Surgeon (1734-1816) Cambrils (Tarragona), 19 November. Bicentenary of Gimbernat’s death. *Eur J Anat*, 20 Supplement 1.

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