

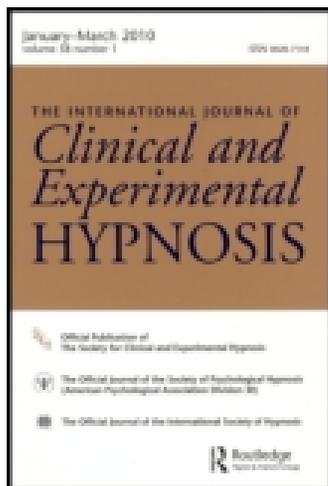
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### The Contributions of Ramón y Cajal and Other Spanish Authors to Hypnosis

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# THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF RAMÓN Y CAJAL AND OTHER SPANISH AUTHORS TO HYPNOSIS

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**Abstract:** The authors review the most important Spanish contributions to hypnosis during the 19th and 20th centuries, with emphasis on the work of Santiago Ramón y Cajal, winner of the 1906 Nobel Prize in medicine. It is widely accepted that he provided a basic foundation for modern neurosciences with his work on neuronal staining and synaptic transmission. What is missing in most accounts of his work is his longstanding interest and work on hypnosis and anomalous phenomena. This article summarizes that lost legacy, discusses other Spanish hypnosis pioneers and gives a brief overview of current hypnosis activities in Spain.

In the second half of the 19th century, many of the founders of clinical psychology and psychiatry (e.g., Braid in England, James in the United States, and Charcot and Bernheim in France) strengthened the case for the scientific and clinical value of hypnotic phenomena. Their theories and those of their disciples had great impact in Europe and stimulated the work of Spanish scientists, especially during the 19th and early part of the 20th century (J. Diéguez Gómez, 2003; González de Pablo,

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2003). As early as 1786, a Spaniard, Florencio Delgado, gave a moralistic presentation of hypnosis to Spain's Royal Society of Medicine (J. Diéguez Gómez), but probably the first original works on animal magnetism (mesmerism) and hypnosis in Spanish appeared around 1849, written by Mariano Cubí, a psychiatrist who also advocated phrenology (Cubí i Soler, 1849). He translated into Spanish Alphonse Teste's *Practical Manual of Magnetism* (Teste, 1845), a reference book for practicing magnetism back then. A contemporary, Pedro Mata (1864), an important author on forensic medicine and psychiatry, wrote a book on alterations of consciousness and supported the early 19th-century writings of the Portuguese Abbot Faria that hypnosis can be explained by imagination and suggestion. From 1880 onward, the classical works on hypnotism of the French schools were translated into Spanish but were not widely read. However, in 1882 a Spanish treatise on hypnotism and suggestion described a method of hypnotic induction based on Braid's ocular-fatigue technique. The method, devised by Eduardo Bertrán, a follower of the Nancy school, consisted of looking straight at a stick painted in black and white stripes (Bertrán, 1894). Juan Giné y Partagás, an influential Spanish pioneer of psychiatry, wrote in support of hypnosis, although without adding new techniques or ideas (1903/1887–1888), as did another physician (Pulido, 1888).

The work of Abdón Sánchez Herrero, professor of therapeutics at the University of Valladolid, deserves special mention. His *Hypnotism and Suggestion* (Sánchez Herrero, 1887) focuses on clinical observation and its philosophical underpinnings. He also built a "hypnotizing machine" consisting of a movable arm with a very bright glass at the end that the patient had to look straight at to provoke ocular fatigue, to be followed by a hypnotic dream (Figure 1).

Sánchez Herrero was so afraid of the rejection that his work might trigger that he prefaced his book with a request for protection by the official health authority of those days. We transcribe a segment because it gives an idea of the struggles that hypnotists had to endure at that time:

Preface to Sánchez Herrero's treatise on hypnotism and suggestion:

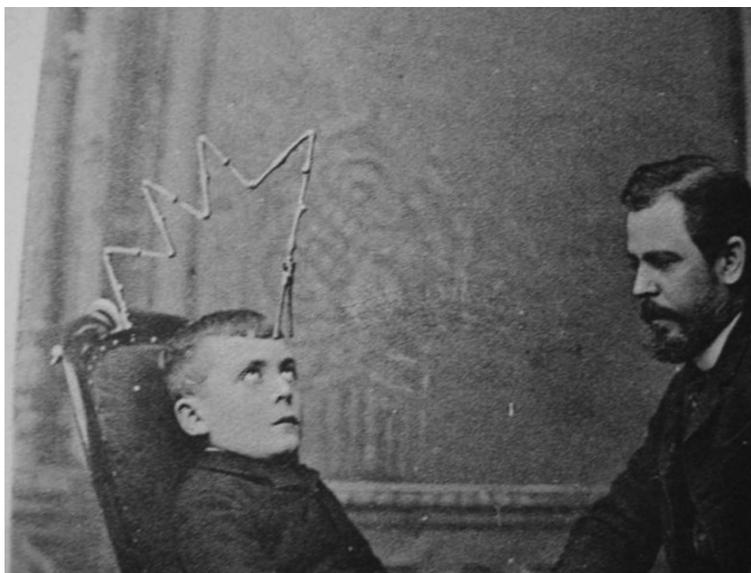
Valladolid, 26<sup>th</sup> July 1887

Honorable Mr. Julián Calleja, General Manager of Public Education

My respected and dear friend,

I am just about to publish a book titled "Hypnotism and Suggestion," with studies on Physiopsychology and Psychotherapy, containing my recent experimental works and my studies on these issues for the last few years.

I abandoned my practice some time ago because of the difficulties of all types I encountered, the slander against me that has been and is still being carried out, and offensive opinions against the position I hold,



*Figure 1. Abdón Sánchez Herrero and his hypnotizing apparatus.*

published on newspapers by people who are supposed to be competent on the subject. . . . I can't avoid mentioning that this book contains facts well known abroad . . . those facts whose existence I state, I have performed and seen many times . . . this book is presented under the sponsorship of the state education chief to prevent any opinion against the dignity and seriousness of this professor in the course of his duties . . .

Reply:

My dear friend . . . I accept with satisfaction the dedication in your book as being that of a good friend. . . . Carry on with no hesitation and no fears of the perpetual gossip . . .

Julián Calleja (Sánchez Herrero, 1887, pp. 4–8)

Around that time, the First International Congress of Hypnotism was held in Paris, organized by Jean-Martin Charcot in 1889 at the Salpêtrière Hospital. Differences of opinion between Charcot's notion that only people who were psychologically disturbed could be hypnotized and the Nancy school, which rejected a pathological explanation and instead based its theory on suggestion, were brought into focus. Several Spanish physicians attended the First International Congress, among them Sánchez Herrero, who presented a paper about his narcohypnosis method (1890). After the congress, several publications by Spaniards appeared, including those by followers of the Nancy school

such as Eduardo Aragón (1892), F. Martínez y González (1900), and Juan José Urráburu (1898), who presented his thesis about hypnosis and its relationship with spiritualism. Up until the decline of hypnosis in Spain around 1930, many translations or original books on hypnosis were published there, usually emphasizing a medical/psychological or a parapsychological/spiritist bent, with some tomes condemning hypnosis on religious grounds (A. Diéguez Gómez, 2003; González de Pablo, 2003).

The work by Julio Camino Galicia, a brother of the famous poet León Felipe, deserves special mention (Figure 2). He was a prestigious military doctor and psychiatrist at the time and had the opportunity to practice hypnosis on war patients wounded physically and/or psychologically (Bandrés & Llavona, 1998). He practiced during Morocco's war of independence and became a pioneer on the treatment of traumatic war stress (see Cardeña, Maldonado, Van der Hart, & Spiegel,



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*Figure 2.* Julio Camino Galicia, pioneer in the use of hypnosis for posttraumatic conditions.

2000, for a historical perspective on this topic). His books present his theories about the “intrapyschic” causes of hypnosis and are densely illustrated with iconography and information about the way to induce hypnosis (Camino Galicia, 1919, 1928). Mira (1943) also wrote on the use of hypnosis in the context of war, in this case the Spanish Civil War. Nonetheless, around 1925 serious publications on hypnosis almost completely disappeared in Spain for decades, probably due to the rise of psychoanalysis, the ongoing discussion as to the real “nature” of hypnosis, the association by some of hypnosis with occultism, the use of pharmacological anesthesia, and the Catholic Church’s condemnation of hypnosis (Montiel & González de Pablo, 2003). Some Catholic authors attributed hypnotic effects to satanic intervention, believing that the freedom of the individual was abolished by hypnosis, especially among women and children, and that it could be manipulated in a sinful way (Ardieta, 1901; Franco, 1888). Catholicism remained a dominant force in Spain for much of the 20th century.

### RAMÓN Y CAJAL, HYPNOSIS, AND ANOMALOUS PSYCHOLOGICAL PHENOMENA

Santiago Ramón y Cajal, the 1906 Nobel prizewinner in medicine and physiology (along with the Italian neuroanatomist Camillo Golgi) for his work on the human and vertebrate nervous system, is a towering figure in medicine and the neurosciences (Figure 3). He received honorary



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*Figure 3.* Santiago Ramón y Cajal, 1906 Nobel prizewinner.

doctorates and many scientific prizes besides the Nobel. His beautiful staining of neurons continues to be used in contemporary books, and he laid the foundation for the study of synaptic transmission (“dynamic polarization”). He possessed multiple talents and interests, including a fascination with chess and literature, and wrote some novels and essays of a high literary level, including a tale of a hypnotist who unsuccessfully tries to create a utopia through hypnosis.

He used hypnosis with his own wife in the delivery of his two youngest children with good results. He published this work in Spanish (Ramón y Cajal, 1889), and it was also reported in the *British Medical Journal* (Anonymous, 1889). Although he did not contribute new techniques or theories to hypnosis, he can be seen as an international pioneer in the use of hypnoanalgesia. Ramón y Cajal’s writings on hypnosis were paradigmatic of his scientific intuition and have been corroborated since. He also wanted to understand “altered states of consciousness and their neurological underpinnings,” as well as “some odd psychic phenomena that science had not understood yet,” for which he created a *Comité de Investigaciones Psicológicas* [Committee of Psychological Research] to study “the human reactions that look miraculous but should rather be considered as surprising” (Ramón y Cajal, 1917, pp. 85–86). He and his wife also opened a small nonprofit practice to treat nervous diseases through hypnosis. He reported that he achieved:

... the total transformation of the patient’s emotional state, the restoration of appetite in hysterical-epileptic patients with lack of appetite and emaciated [i.e., anorexics], the sudden cessation of hysterical attacks with loss of consciousness, the radical forgetfulness of painful and tormenting events, and the complete abolition of delivery pain in normal women. (Ramón y Cajal, 1917, p. 192)

Ramón y Cajal thought that Charcot’s investigation on “morbid psychology and hypnosis” was useful to understand many of the “miracles” produced by Mesmer and the magnetizers. However, he stopped the experiments with “neurasthenic, maniac, hysteric, spiritualist” patients in his clinic because of popular rumors about “miracles” happening in the clinic and the arrival of a “swarm of mentally unbalanced and lunatic people” (Ramón y Cajal Junquera, 2002, pp. 413–414). Yet, Ramón y Cajal retained his interest in hypnosis and anomalous experiences (including what are now called psi phenomena). In the last years of life, after he had abandoned his neurological research, he dedicated himself to studying dreams and “depth” psychology. Every morning he wrote down his dreams from the previous night and paid a supposed medium from Zaragoza to carry out experiments about spiritualism, although soon afterwards he realized that she was a fraud. He died on October 17, 1934, 82 years old, tired, and insomniac.

Unfortunately, the Medical Center Alfonso XII in Madrid was bombed during the Spanish Civil War in 1936 and a manuscript that Ramón y Cajal had written on hypnotism, spiritualism, and metaphysics (*Ensayos sobre el hipnotismo, el espiritismo y la metafísica*) just before he died was lost forever. This book contained hundreds of analyses of his and other people's dreams. His research on hypnosis and related phenomena was completely forgotten even by the Spanish obstetricians of the time, including some in his own family. That someone with such a prodigious mind as Ramón y Cajal would become deeply interested in these subjects anticipates more recent empirical work on anomalous experiences (Cardeña, Lynn, & Krippner, 2000).

### RECENT WORK ON HYPNOSIS

Hypnosis began to reappear in Spain in 1958 when Ramón Sarró, a professor at Barcelona's Medical School and former pupil of Freud, organized the first course of psychotherapy with suggestive relaxation techniques and hypnosis (Campos Bueno, 2002; Carpintero, 1987; Gil & Buela Casal, 2001). That same year, the Fourth International Congress on Psychotherapy was held in Barcelona, with Johannes H. Schultz, the developer of autogenic training, and the reputed German hypnotist Berthold Stovkis in attendance (Schultz & Luthe, 1959; Stovkis, 1961). The congress' roundtable dedicated to hypnodontics included such Spanish luminaries as Demetrio Barcia (1961), Pedro Laín Entralgo (1950), José María López Piñero (1963), and José María Morales Meseguer (1966), and it once more awoke interest in hypnosis among Spanish scientists. Around the same time, Alfonso Caycedo (1973), born in Colombia, developed "sophrology" in Spain, a technique based on suggestions, which he differentiated from hypnosis by incorrectly stating that in the latter participants are not conscious. He also organized the Medical Sleep Therapy Society in 1960, which had a great influence throughout Spain. Also during the 1960s, Leopoldo Montserrat (1966) and Santiago Montserrat (1964) spread the word about hypnosis. Because there was no specialized journal on hypnosis, related works appeared in journals devoted to dentistry, clinical medicine, psychotherapy, pain, and related themes.

Currently, clinical hypnosis cannot be used within the Spanish National Health Service (Boletín Oficial del Estado [Official Bulletin of the State] 10/2/1994), although the prohibition does not extend to private practice or to practice in the public sector *pro bono* or outside of regular working hours. The reasons for this prohibition are unknown to us, although we suspect that legislators' biases and lack of scientific knowledge may be the source. Another reason may be that because treatment with hypnosis may initially require more time than an ordinary consultation, the authorities may believe that hypnosis may delay already long waiting periods to receive attention, although in the long

run it may shorten treatment time (Fromm & Nash, 1997; Montgomery, David, Winkel, Silverstein, & Bovbjerg, 2002). In any case, a number of professionals are requesting the reversal of the prohibition, and in some public hospitals hypnosis can be used in specific circumstances (e.g., after the professional has shown it to be an empirically supported adjunct for conditions such as pain) and after informed consent from the patient has been secured. Also, many health professionals continue to use this valuable tool under the umbrella of clinical investigation, as it is a very valuable and empirically supported treatment for a number of conditions (Kirsch, Capafons, Cardeña, & Amigó, 1999; Lynn, Kirsch, Barabasz, Cardeña, & Patterson, 2000).

Works on hypnosis of scientific interest continue to be published in Spanish journals, although they are still limited (203 publications for the last few years according to Medline). We also found 82 books in Spain that deal with hypnosis (Spanish Agency of ISBN), and there are various hypnosis research groups in the universities of Valencia, Madrid, Granada, Barcelona, and Tarragona, among others (Cangas & Pérez, 1997; Capafons, 2001; González Ordi, 2001; Moix, 2002; Sala, 2003; Vallejo & Capafons, 2005), with an increasing interest in historical scholarship (e.g., J. Diéguez Gómez & Diéguez Gómez, 2006; Montiel & González de Pablo, 2003). Clinical teaching at the university level, although limited, is growing in such places as the Universities of Barcelona and Madrid's National University of Distance Learning (UNED) and there have been conferences and workshops at various other sites. Hypnosis is also being used on a regular basis at some hospitals, the number of dissertations on hypnosis is growing, and there are several private, heterogeneous training associations (e.g., Spanish Association for Hypnosis, Erickson Institute, Neurolinguistic Programming [PLN] Institute).

Hypnosis in Spain still has a long way to go, but it is a growing field. It is encouraging that such a luminary as Ramón y Cajal seriously studied it and related phenomena. We would do well to follow his lead and continue raising this useful tool to the scientific and clinical level it deserves.

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### Die Beiträge von Ramón y Cajal und weiteren spanischen Autoren zur Hypnose

José Sala, Etzel Cardaña, María Carmen Holgado, Cristóbal Añez,  
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**Zusammenfassung:** Die bedeutendsten Beiträge aus Spanien während des neunzehnten und zwanzigsten Jahrhunderts werden dargestellt. Ein Schwerpunkt wird dabei auf die Person Ramón y Cajals gelegt, dem Gewinner des Nobelpreises von 1906. Es wird allgemein akzeptiert, dass er mit seinen Arbeiten zur Färbung neuronalen Gewebes und zur synaptischen Transmission für die moderne Neurowissenschaft grundlegende Arbeiten geleistet hat. Was jedoch in den meisten Darstellungen seiner Arbeiten nicht auftaucht, betrifft sein lang andauerndes Interesse an und seine Arbeiten zu Hypnose und anomalen Phänomenen. Dieser Artikel fasst dieses verlorene Erbe zusammen, erörtert weitere spanische Hypnosepioniere und gibt einen kurzen Überblick über gegenwärtige Arbeiten zu Hypnose in Spanien.

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### La contribution apportée à l'hypnose par Ramón y Cajal et d'autres auteurs espagnols

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**Résumé:** Les auteurs ont passé en revue les plus importantes contributions apportées à l'hypnose par des auteurs espagnols au cours des XIX<sup>e</sup> et XX<sup>e</sup> siècles, particulièrement celle de Santiago Ramón y Cajal, lauréat du Prix Nobel de médecine en 1906. Il est maintenant généralement accepté que M. Ramón y Cajal a établi les fondements de la neuroscience moderne, grâce à ses publications sur la coloration neuronale et la transmission synaptique. Ce que l'on a omis de mentionner dans la plupart des comptes rendus de ses travaux, c'est l'intérêt qu'il a toujours porté à l'hypnose, ainsi que ses travaux sur l'hypnose et les phénomènes anormaux. Cet article résume cet héritage perdu, parle d'autres pionniers espagnols de l'hypnose et donne un bref aperçu des activités ayant cours actuellement en Espagne sur le sujet de l'hypnose.

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## Las contribuciones de Ramón y Cajal y otros autores españoles a la hipnosis

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**Resumen:** Los autores sumarizan las contribuciones españolas más importantes a la hipnosis durante los siglos 19 y 20, con énfasis en el trabajo de Santiago Ramón y Cajal, ganador del Premio Nóbel en Medicina de 1906. Generalmente se da por entendido que él sentó bases para las neurociencias modernas con su trabajo sobre teñimientos neuronales y la transmisión sináptica. Lo que generalmente no se menciona es su interés permanente en la hipnosis y los fenómenos anómalos. Este artículo resume esa contribución, discute otros pioneros Españoles de la hipnosis, y da una descripción breve de las actividades actuales concernientes a la hipnosis en España.

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