



A History of Mental Health Treatment in the Hispanic World

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The Hispanic world entails a number of territories with the Spanish language as a common denominator. The medical and psychiatric care in these territories has had unique particularities linked to the different civilizations that invaded the Iberian Peninsula and the mix of ethnicities that populated the Americas and other territories throughout history. In this chapter, we review from a historical viewpoint how the care of the mentally ill has been shaped by these unique circumstances in Europe, America, and rest of the Hispanic world.

Iberia: Before “Hispania”

The area known today geographically as the Iberian Peninsula was named “Hispania” by the Romans after invading the area around the third century BCE. Under the Roman rule, the Greeks used the term Iberia to designate the peninsula below the Pyrenees. Before the Roman invasion, there had been in Iberia a few Greek colonies like Empúries, who participated in the Greek Olympics like any other Greek city. Also, the Phoenicians had come from the Middle East and had founded colonies in North Africa. One of these Phoenician colonies was Carthage that originated the Carthaginian civilization, a military empire in the Mediterranean Sea. The Carthaginians settled also in Southeast Iberia, founding the city of Qart Hadasht (Cartagena) and Sicily. Despite different colonizers the peninsula was populated by different people mainly the Celts who occupied two-thirds of the peninsula in the West and the so-called Iberians who populated one-third of the peninsula in the East. Among the Celts, there were Astures and Galacos in the northwest and Lusitanians in the west. The Celtiberians were Celtic people with influence from other Iberian people and lived in central Iberia. The Celts spoke Celtic language and had a Celtic

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culture. In Spanish, still there are some Celtic words that we have inherited from the Celtic culture such as “gancho” (hook) or “greñas” (long hair). The Iberians spoke different languages and included a variety of people including the Turdulos (former Tartessians), Turdetanos, Contestanos, and Edetani among others. Between the Celtic and the Iberian people lived the Vascones in central north who spoke Basque, a different language with Indo European roots. Basque language is still spoken today in this area [1, 2].

It is possible that the Celts and Iberians inherited knowledge from Greek medicine as Greek and Phoenician traders visited frequently the peninsula, but the Celts also had a medicine consisting of a mix between the magical and the use of plants for healing. Especially in Northwest Spain, there were different priests, being the druids the most valued. Druids used substances for healing like barley mixed with honey named “hidromiel” and liquor. They were considered the wisest people in their culture. Though Iberians had probably sophisticated medicine, to this day we have not yet been able to decode their writing [1, 2].

Hispania: The Greek-Roman Heritage

The Greek culture was assimilated by the Romans. With the invasion of the Iberian Peninsula by the Romans, the Celts and Iberians learned Latin and assimilated the Greek-Roman culture too. Iberia was called “Hispania” and became one province in the Roman empire. People living in Hispania gradually lost the Celtiberian languages and customs and became Romanized.

The philosophical and medical approach to mental illness in ancient Greece has been inherited to our present tense. For instance, Theophrastus of Eresus moved to Athens at a young age to study at Plato’s Academy. Theophrastus described the different moral characters that people could have. Character was the Greek word for seal. For Theophrastus, character reflected on a predictable pattern of behavior that any person could have. Around the same time, Hippocrates was a Greek physician who lived in the island of Kos between the fifth and fourth century BCE. We don’t know many details about the life of the Greek physician, but after his death the school of medicine was named after him. We know about his existence because he is mentioned in Plato’s dialogues. The Hippocratic School understood all medical problems as an imbalance between the four humors in our body: the blood, the phlegm, the yellow bile, and the black bile. For ancient Greeks, the equilibrium of these humors would result in health or “eucrasia.” In contrast, humoral disequilibrium would result in disease or “dyscrasia.” Like other pathologies, mental illness was thought to result from dyscrasia. Thus, the Hippocratic School established a distinction between “mania” (due to problems with yellow bile), “melancholy” (in relation to black bile), and “frenesis” (a mania with fever). In the first century ACE, the Greek physician Dioscorides published the most popular pharmacopeia of the classic era. A century later, Galen of Pergamum embraced Hippocratic ideas and proposed more aggressive medical treatments such as purging and bloodletting in an attempt to restore eucrasia. Galen also discussed the four different temperaments

that humans could have. As such, individuals could be sanguineous, phlegmatic, choleric, and melancholic. The four different temperaments set the base of all personality. Today psychologists differentiate between temperament as biologically based vs. character which is more environmentally influenced. After the fall of the Roman Empire, a group of Germanic people named the Visigoths from the area of Sweden invaded the Roman province of Hispania and created for the first time a judicial unity in the Iberian Peninsula. The Visigoths abandoned their Germanic languages and embraced Christianity and Latin. Due to the Visigoths, the most popular Spanish names are now Germanic like Alvaro, Gonzalo, Fernando, Carlos, Sancho, Lope, or Rodrigo. Also we have inherited Germanic vocabulary in the Spanish language from these Visigoths, like the words “guerra” or “tregua” [3–7].

Al-Andalus: Islamic Medicine in Iberia

Following the triumph of Christianity in the Western world, classic medicine fell in Europe. In contrast, Islam became the dominant religion in the East. Muslim doctors continued the legacy of Greek physicians at the Islamic hospitals named *bimaristans* or *maristans* (Persian word for hospital). In the eighth century, the Visigothic Hispania was conquered by the Umayyad caliphate and Hispania or Spania was renamed as Al-Andalus (land of the vandals). Eventually Cordoba became the capital of this Umayyad empire. In Baghdad, Avicenna published in the eleventh century ACE the *Cannon of Medicine*. The book used an Aristotelian classification for the different medical afflictions. This book became the standard medical textbook in the Islamic empire. Some important physicians of Al-Andalus were the Sephardic physician Maimonides, father of medicine in the Jewish world, or the surgeon Albucasis among others. In Al-Andalus, the official language was Arab and people abandoned the Latin language. The Spanish language today entails a big amount of Arab words as part of its Muslim legacy [8–15].

From the Middle Ages to the Modern Era: The Creation of Hospitals for the Mentally Ill

Some Christian territories resisted the Muslim invasion and preserved their religion and the Latin language. They preserved the ideas of taking the Visigothic territories from the Umayyad empire under the Christian rule. They saw themselves as the direct descendants of these Germanic Visigoths that had once ruled the Iberian Peninsula. In these territories, a Romance language derived from Latin emerged between the ninth and eleventh centuries ACE. This Romance language was the origin of the Castilian. Other languages however emerged from Latin such as Asturian, Galician-Portuguese, Catalan, and Aragonese. Eventually Castilian became the dominant language among all these different territories. Because of that, Castilian is today also known as Spanish. This period of reconquering the Iberian Peninsula named La Reconquista took about 800 years and ended with the

conquering of the Nazari kingdom of Granada by the Catholic monarchs in 1492. The same year Christopher Columbus arrived in the Island known today as the Dominican Republic. After the reconquering of Toledo by Alphonse VI of Castile, a number of humanists from all over Europe came to the city to translate the Islamic texts. Avicena's *Cannon of Medicine* was translated into Latin and became the most popular textbook in the Latin West until the mid-seventeenth century. However during the Middle Ages, due to lack of accessibility to Greek medicine, a spiritual approach was often taken to approach mental illness in the Hispanic kingdoms and rest of Europe [11].

During the Reconquista, a number of hospitals opened in Castile, Aragon, and Navarre (Hispanic kingdoms) in different territories to take care of outcasts, pilgrims, and the poor. In the end of the Middle Ages, the first hospital for specific treatment of the mentally ill was founded in the city of Valencia. One day in February of 1409, Father Joan Gilabert Jofre, a priest of the Mercedarian order was walking to the cathedral of Valencia to prepare his sermon when he saw a group of bullies beating up a man with mental illness in the street. Father Jofre stopped these people from harming this person. The following week he preached in the cathedral against the physical and sexual abuse that homeless people with severe mental illness experienced. Father Jofre proposed the construction of a hospital for the protection and care of people with mental illness. The sermon was heard by the bourgeois Lorenzo Salom who collected the funds for the construction of the new hospital. In 1410, the hospital of *Santa Maria d'Innocents, Folls e Orats* (Saint Mary of the Innocents, Mad and Demented) opened its doors. The name of the hospital, *Santa Maria d'Innocents, Folls e Orats* (Saint Mary of the Innocents, Mad and Demented), implies a classification of different mental pathologies. In Valencian language, *innocent* or *ignoscent* was a term used for people with intellectual disabilities. The Spanish translation would be *inocente* (in English innocent). *Foll* in Castilian Spanish could be translated as *loco* (in English mad or crazy). This term was likely used for people with mania or psychoses who would say "crazy things." *Orat* in Old Castilian Spanish could be translated as *dementado* (in English demented), a term used at the time for anyone deprived of reason or judgment [4, 16–20].

Following the foundation of the hospital in Valencia, the hospital of Holy Cross in Barcelona started to receive patients with mental illness in 1412. In 1419, the General Hospital of Jesus Christ in Cordoba also attended patients with mental health problems. In 1425, Alfonse V of Aragon, the new king of Aragon from the house of Trastamara, founded The Hospital of Our Lady Grace in Saragossa. This hospital soon started to welcome patients from all over the Iberian Peninsula (today Spain) and from different nations. In 1436, Marcos Sanchez Contreras founded the hospital of Saint Cosme and Saint Damien for the mentally ill in Seville. In 1445, the hospital of Saint Mary in Lerida also hosted patients with mental illness. The General Hospital of Palma de Mallorca also started to receive mentally ill patients in 1456. In 1483, the *Nuncio* (Vatican Diplomat) Francisco Ortiz travelled to Toledo and used his personal wealth to found the Hospital Nuncio in Toledo for the mentally ill. In 1489, the city of Valladolid also saw the foundation of a Hospital for the Innocents and Mad and in 1511 the Royal Hospital of Granada also received

patients with mental illnesses. At the beginning of the modern era, the mentally ill in the Iberian Peninsula received standard medical care [4].

The diagnoses and treatments used in these hospitals were influenced by the classic Greek medicine that had reentered the Christian world through Islam. Therefore mania, melancholy, and frenesis were frequent diagnoses. The treatment also was focused on restoring the humoral balance. As such, purging, bloodletting, diet, and exercise were the common treatments. Chaplains would provide spiritual care and there were also workshops for occupational therapy and rehabilitations. The goal of the stay was always to cure the patient but those with chronic afflictions could reside in the hospital. If families could not pay, the cost of the stay was funded through charity. This model of medical care for the mentally ill was revolutionary in Medieval Europe and anticipated the Moral treatment of the Enlightenment [4, 16–25].

The Medical Approach in Pre-Columbian America

Before the arrival of the Spaniards to the new continent, the Aztecs, Mayans, and Inca people had developed relatively sophisticated medical treatments for their time. They had shamans and healers who used a combination of plants, dances, charms, and religious rituals with the goal of helping people with medical and mental afflictions restore health. In a magical way, shamans could inspect corn kernels or animal's guts to establish prognoses. They had obstetric experts to assist in deliveries and surgeons to cure and sew wounds. Therefore magical and somatic treatments were frequently intertwined. The use of psychedelic plants and fungus was also frequent in their rituals and healing practices. Psychedelic medicine has survived to this day. To date, psychedelic medicine is perhaps the biggest legacy of pre-Columbian medicine. Today psychedelics are widely considered in psychiatry for the treatment of depression, anxiety, and other mental afflictions. In addition, there is an underground psychedelic culture in society which entails trips to Peru, Mexico, and other Latin American countries in the search of shamanistic psychedelic treatments [26].

Medical and Mental Health Care in the Americas: The Foundation of the First Western Hospitals

The Greek classic model of medical care in the Iberian Peninsula was brought to America soon after the arrival of the first Spaniards. As such, already in 1503, Friar Nicolas Ovando founded in Santo Domingo the Hospital of Saint Nicolas of Bari. In 1524, and Hernan Cortes founded the Hospital of Jesus Nazarene in 1538 (Ayala-García, 2014).

Though all general hospitals regularly assisted people with mental illnesses, the first hospital for the treatment of people with mental illness in America was founded by Bernardino Alvarez in 1567. Bernardino was a former soldier who became a friar

at the end of his life. After entering the clergy he volunteered at the hospitals of Mexico-Tenochtitlan. Seeing how there were not enough hospitals in the city to attend all patients who needed medical care, he used his personal wealth to found the hospital of Saint Hipolito. The local archbishop Alonso Montufar gave permissions for using the land next to the church of San Hipolito with the condition of using the same name. Bernardino proposed that patients deprived of reason should share time and space with those who had normal judgment as he believed virtue could be learned. Priests assisted with occupational activities and spiritual care. The first known physician to work in Saint Hipolito was José de Cabas. The treatment of the hospital was mainly European based. Thus, bathing and purging were often prescribed as remedies to treat mental illnesses. This hospital attended patients from all the different ethnicities at the time including people with mental illness of African, Native, and European origin. Saint Hipolito remained in use until 1910 [27–31]. The same model of Greek classical medicine was brought to the Philippines where the native treatments for medical problems were also used [32, 33].

The Contribution of African Medicine in the Americas

Despite the existence of hospitals, there was in general a scarcity of European physicians in the Americas. Many African people were brought by Europeans to work as slaves in the new continent. As part of the slave trade, different African plants in the form of seeds came as well. Some of these plants were used for healing purposes. A number of magical healing rituals with the use of plants emerged in the Americas concomitantly with European and Native American medicine. These African medical practices persist to this day. Voudon or Voodoo, Santeria, Gullah, Shango, and Tambor das Minas are examples of these kinds of practice. African priests and healers found in the Americas some of the same plants they had used in Africa. At the same time they learned how to use Native American plants with the help of Spanish Jesuit Priests [34].

The Crisis in the Nineteenth Century and the Birth of Modern Neuroscience

After Napoleon invaded Spain and the beginning of the peninsular war, Francisco de Miranda, Simón Bolívar, Antonio José de Sucre, José de San Martín among others declared the independence from the Iberian Peninsula leading to the establishment of a number of independent republics in the Americas. During the peninsular war, Napoleon troops bombed the hospital of Saragossa, at the time the most important psychiatric hospital in Spain. Many patients with mental illness died during the bombing. Father Monal, a catholic priest, found refuge for those who survived the bombing. The quality of medical care for the mentally ill declined in the Iberian Peninsula following the French invasion. Following the Spanish independence from France, the new government ordered ecclesiastical confiscations. The problem is

that the hospitals for the mentally ill became organized by the public local administrations who lacked resources. As a result, the care for the mentally ill declined. In both Spain and Latin America, the nineteenth century was dominated by frequent and disastrous fraternal civil wars. The golden years of psychiatric and medical care in the Hispanic world came to an end. Nonetheless, the new ideas that came from North Europe like phrenology and mesmerism arrived in Spain and Latin America too. It is important to note that despite the health crisis in the Hispanic world some scientists became international leaders. Perhaps the most significant example is the figure of Santiago Ramón y Cajal who probed the neuron theory, described the dendritic spines and the direction in which neurons communicate with each other, developed a model for memory formation and anticipated neuroplasticity. In the early twentieth century, he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Medicine together with Camilo Golgi. As such, Cajal can be considered as the father of modern neuroscience and a prominent historical scientific figure in the Hispanic world [4, 19, 35].

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