

The life's work of Dr Luis Barraquer Ferré and its impact on the emerging Catalan school of neurology

A. Arboix

Cerebrovascular Disease Unit, Department of Neurology, Hospital Universitari del Sagrat Cor, Universitat de Barcelona, Barcelona, Spain.

ABSTRACT

Dr Luis Barraquer Ferré (1887-1959) was the son and most brilliant student of Dr Barraquer Roviralta, the father of clinical neurology in Catalonia and Spain. As the highest authority on clinical neurology in his time, Barraquer Ferré was both a founding member and first president of the Spanish Society of Neurology. He wrote the first neurology textbook to be published in Spanish, *Tratado de enfermedades nerviosas*. The first volume was made available in 1936, and the second appeared in 1940. Barraquer Ferré's best-known contributions were imparting his father's discoveries and consolidating the Catalan school of neurology through the clinical, paedagogical, and research activities he undertook at Hospital de la Santa Creu i Sant Pau in Barcelona.

KEYWORDS

Barraquer Ferré, Barraquer Roviralta, history, Catalan neurology, neurology, Hospital de la Santa Creu i Sant Pau

Introduction

Luis Barraquer Ferré was born in Barcelona on 16 June 1887. He was the son of Dr Luis Barraquer Roviralta (1855-1928), the founder of Spanish and Catalan clinical neurology; his mother died when young Luis was only three years old.^{1,2} Barraquer Roviralta initially managed to prevent his son from studying medicine as a way of protecting him from the long list of professional and personal difficulties he would have to face: constant and inescapable comparisons to his father, the effort involved in studying neurology, and the hours he would spend caring for severely ill and often ungrateful patients. In addition, neurologists were not as well paid as other doctors or other university graduates.³ This being the case, the young Barraquer Ferré devoted 10 years of his life to a series of commercial endeavours (working in a strap factory and as a salesman in a winery), while also studying accounting, English, and some German.^{3,4}

Nevertheless, Barraquer Ferré still felt intensely drawn to medicine, and he admired his father's hard work and professional and academic accomplishments.

He decided to enrol in medical school but kept the secret from his father until he was able to announce that had passed his first-year classes (1913-1914). He was 26 years

old at the time. Barraquer Roviralta's attitude changed completely when he learned of his son's dedication and calling; he expressed his full support and began to offer guidance and assume a teaching role. Young Luis was now able to end his wine trading and distributing activities and demonstrate the full extent of his motivation.^{1,2} He finished medical school in three years instead of seven by studying and taking his exams year round, including summer and winter holidays.

Barraquer Ferré began his hospital visits as a student intern in June of 1915; he earned his diploma and began practising medicine as a graduate intern toward the spring of 1920. In July of the same year, he was promoted to assistant doctor, and by 1921, he was hired by Instituto de Santa Madrona in Barcelona to direct its neurology department. In 1921, he married Edelmira Bordas de Ferrer.

I should mention that his first study ('*Contribución al estudio de la enfermedad de Beard*', published in the July issue of *Anales de Medicina*) appeared in 1920; he would go on to publish nearly 200. His monograph *Elementos de neuropatología* appeared in 1923, as did his son Lluís, who would later follow the road paved by his father and his grandfather.⁵ When Barraquer Roviralta died in 1928, Barraquer Ferré solemnly swore to continue his



Figure 1 Dr Barraquer Ferré

father's work and make others aware of his numerous contributions so that his father would earn the recognition he deserved from the scientific community.

Clinical and pedagogical work

Dr Barraquer Ferré's clinical and pedagogical work can be neatly divided into five scientific periods.

First period: 1920 to 1930

In the earliest years of his career, he published 18 studies on neurological signs. Barraquer Ferré preferred not to join his father in his scientific studies, basing his decision on 'respect' and a wish to make his own way in clinical research.^{6,7} The two authors presented the results from their clinical observations separately. Dr Barraquer Ferré became the director of the Neurology and Electrotherapy Department on 28 June 1929, and on 4 July he was made a consultant at Barcelona's Hospital de la Santa Creu.

Second period: 1930 to 1936

In addition to working at the hospital, Dr Barraquer Ferré held private consultations at Calle Lauria no. 102 in Barcelona. He published 23 studies during this period. In 1934, he signed his first study, which was co-authored by Ignasi de Gispert and Manuel Corachan Llorc. His articles were beginning to appear in prestigious international journals, including *Revue Neurologique*, *La Presse Médicale*, and *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Nervenheilkunde*. During this period, the old Hospital de la Santa Creu was moved and transformed into Hospital de la Santa Creu i Sant Pau in Barcelona's Horta-Guinardó district.^{1,2}

Another milestone came when Barraquer Ferré published the first volume of the textbook *Tratado de enfermedades nerviosas*, co-authored by Ignasi de Gispert Cruz and Emili Castañer Vendrell. The second volume would go to print in 1940. This was the first neurology textbook originally written in Spanish, and it was highly influential in Spain and across Latin America. This book describes the contemporary academic efforts and achievements of the Catalan school of neurology, which Barraquer Ferré had reinforced through his teaching and clinical activities at Hospital de la Santa Creu i Sant Pau.^{2,8} The illustrations in his works were taken almost exclusively from the collection of photographs of neurological signs and macroscopic anatomical pathology taken and guarded both jealously and methodically by his father, Dr Barraquer Roviralta.⁹

Third period: 1936 to 1944

This period was marked by the death of his wife in November 1938, when Barraquer Ferré was 51 years old. Becoming a widower triggered an affective disorder, but he was able to overcome it by remarrying; his second wife was Montserrat Serra Guardiola.² The other major feature of this period was the Spanish Civil War. Given this confluence of personal and societal turmoil, Barraquer Ferré did not publish any further works until 1942, except for two monographs (*Las parálisis* in 1940, and *Las neuralgias* in 1941; the latter was written in partnership with E. Castañer). Between 1942 and 1944, Barraquer Ferré published 9 articles with other co-authors.

Fourth period: 1944 to 1948

The next period was marked by his academic collaboration with his son Lluís Barraquer Bordas. This was a very fruitful time in his professional life, as evidenced by the



Figure 2 Dr Barraquer Ferré during his time as director of the neurology department at Hospital de la Santa Creu i Sant Pau

significant increase in publications. The author published 11 studies in 1944, including 4 co-authored with his son. In 1945, he published a monographic study of syringomyelia, once again with Barraquer Bordas. Their studies of arsenic-induced polyneuropathy and cephalothoracic lipodystrophy were especially relevant.

Fifth period: 1948 to 1958

At this time, achievements of the Catalan School of Neurology, led by Dr Barraquer Ferré, were becoming internationally known, thanks to 40 published works. Notable examples include publications in *Acta Neurologica et Psychiatrica Belgica*, and in *Brain* in 1955; the latter described late-onset myelopathy due to atlanto-axial joint dislocation. In 1952, he published a book dedicated to both his father, Barraquer Roviralta, and his son, Barraquer Bordas, that included a generous selection of their studies.

Table 1 summarises the main published works of Dr Barraquer Ferré.¹⁰

Academic positions and awards

Dr Barraquer Ferré came to hold numerous academic positions. On 1 May 1931, he was named a corresponding member of the Royal Academy of Medicine of Barcelona; 20 years later, he became a numerary member. He was appointed president of the Barcelona Society of Oto-Neuro-Ophthalmology in 1935; in 1950, he was designated as the honorary president of the international congress held

Table 1. Major works by Dr. Barraquer Ferré

- Valor semiológico de la contracción ideomuscular: discurso de recepción en la Real Academia de Medicina y Cirugía de Barcelona. Barcelona: Real Academia; 1922.
- Elementos de neuropatología. Barcelona: Instituto de la Mujer que Trabaja; 1923.
- Contribució a l'estudi de la inervació central facial. Barcelona: Badia; 1925.
- Arterio-block o endoarteritis obliterante generalizada. Barcelona: Ars Medica; 1927.
- Lesiones traumáticas de la médula y de los nervios. Barcelona: Oliva de Vilanova; 1928.
- Nova utilitat del mètode epidural. Barcelona: Occitania; 1928.
- Contribución al estudio de las atroñas musculares. Barcelona: Políglota; 1929.
- Contribución al estudio y tratamiento de la parálisis infantil. Barcelona: Revista Médica; 1929.
- Sobre la lipodistrofia céfalo-torácica: síndrome Barraquer-Simons. Barcelona: Hospital de la Santa Cruz y San Pablo, servicio de neurología; 1930.
- Lesiones de compresión encefálica. Barcelona: Políglota; 1930.
- La clínica y los modernos medios radiográficos de exploración en neuropatología. Barcelona: La Tipográfica; 1931.
- Experiencias de cirugía craneal decompresora. Barcelona: Políglota; 1931.
- Tumors del sistema nerviós. Barcelona: [s.n.]; 1932.
- Lipodystrophie progressive: syndrome de Barraquer-Simons. París: Masson; 1935.
- Notas neurológicas: servicio de neurología. Barcelona: E. Duran Albanell; 1933-1936.
- Tumores yuxtamedulares y consideraciones generales diagnósticas. Barcelona: Acta Médica Ibero-Americana; 1935.
- Tratado de enfermedades nerviosas. Barcelona: Salvat; 1936.
- Contribution à l'étude de la physiopathologie des lobes frontaux. París: Masson; 1939.
- Las parálisis. Barcelona: Salvat; 1940.
- Las respuestas reflejas a la estimulación de la planta del pie en el recién nacido: significación del signo del abanico y del reflejo de prensión, en el recién nacido. Barcelona: [s.n.]; [194?].
- Las neuralgias. Barcelona: Salvat; 1941.
- Problemas de diagnóstico neurológico. Barcelona: Salvat; 1944.
- Etiopatogenia de la siringomelia. Valencia: [s.n.]; 1945.
- Parálisis infantil: poliomielitis anterior aguda. Barcelona: Modesto Usón; 1945.
- Contribución al conocimiento de la fisiopatología y semiología de los lóbulos frontales. Barcelona: Publicaciones Médicas; 1946.
- Relaciones entre epilepsia y 'status dysraphicus'. Zaragoza: Berdejo Casañal; 1945.
- Neuralgia facial. Zaragoza: Berdejo Casañal; 1946.
- Doce breves neurológicas. Bilbao: Eléxpuru Hermanos; 1947.
- Algunos temas de actualidad sobre parálisis infantil. Madrid: Garsi; 1950.
- Contribution a la symptomatologie du système nerveux périphérique. [s.l.]; [s.n.]; 1950.
- Origen y evolución de algunos temas de neurología: discurso de recepción en la Real Academia de Medicina y Cirugía de Barcelona. Barcelona: Real Academia de Medicina y Cirugía de Barcelona; 1951.
- Estudios de neurología clínica. Barcelona: José Janés; 1952.
- La locura (con J. Fretet). Barcelona: Salvat; 1954.
- Manual del examen clínico para el diagnóstico neurológico (translated by R. Wartenberg). Barcelona: Modesto Usón; 1958.

in Barcelona and Palma de Mallorca. In 1949, he joined forces with Dr Belarmino Rodríguez Arias and Dr Antoni Subirana Oller to found the Spanish Society of Neurology, based in Barcelona. Barraquer Ferré was its first president, and he was later named its honorary president.¹¹ Barraquer Ferré was also selected as an honorary member of the Société Française de Neurologie in 1949; in 1950, he was made a corresponding member of the Société Médicale des Hôpitaux de Paris. In 1952, he was named a corresponding member of both the American Academy of Neurology and the American Neurological Association.

Dr Barraquer Ferré's skill as a teacher of neurology was instrumental in the careers of the following doctors: Gresa, I. de Gispert, Corachán Llord, Castañer Vendrell, Aliberth, Carulla, Alamán, Montinyó, Torruella Pausas, Barraquer Bordas, Torra Parera, Casellas, Ruiz Lara, Torruella Font, Marí Batlló, Beá Montagut, R. Pigem, Cañadell, González Monclús, R. Bassols, Ruiz Ogara, Vila Badó, Samsó Dies, Unterharnscheidt, Vallejo Mejía, G. Moya, E. Varela de Seijas Slocker, Mallart, Peres Serra, Soldevila, Sagimón, Durán Obiols, Candía, Figuerido, Muntaner Marqués, Codas, Ruiz Lara, Verger Garau, Codina Puiggrós, and others. Through these efforts, he consolidated the Catalan School of Neurology, which began at Hospital de la Santa Creu i Sant Pau and spread to major hospitals in the city of Barcelona.^{12,13} It subsequently reached the capital cities of other Catalan provinces in the last third of the 20th century.¹⁴⁻¹⁶

In 1957, Dr Barraquer Ferré retired from his duties at Hospital de la Santa Creu i Sant Pau and served thereafter as its emeritus director.

He died on 21 February 1959 and was laid to rest in the parochial cemetery of Sant Climent de Llobregat in Barcelona province.

Conclusions

Of the many important highlights in the life's work of Dr Barraquer Ferré, we find two to be especially relevant. Firstly, he struggled to gain recognition for the research undertaken by his father, Dr Barraquer Roviralta, the founder of Catalan and Spanish clinical neurology. Secondly, he consolidated and made a name for the Catalan School of Neurology which his father had inaugurated at Hospital de la Santa Creu i Sant Pau in Barcelona.

Conflicts of interest

The author has no conflicts of interest to declare.

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