

Román Alberca Lorente: chair of psychiatry in 1950

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the circumstances surrounding the competitive examination held in 1950 in which Prof Román Alberca Lorente, president of the Spanish Society of Neurology from 1959 to 1961, became the chair of psychiatry at the University of Salamanca. Some authors cite him as the third chair of psychiatry in Spain, after Antonio Vallejo-Nágera in Madrid and Ramón Sarró Burbano in Barcelona.

This article aims to demonstrate that, while Vallejo-Nágera was unarguably the first Spanish chair of psychiatry selected in such examinations, Román Alberca Lorente and Ramón Sarró Burbano were in fact selected in parallel, at the same time and during the same competitive examination. We consider this important, as several studies have disseminated an erroneous account of Prof Alberca Lorente's selection.

KEYWORDS

Román Alberca, Ramón Sarró, Juan José López Ibor, Antonio Vallejo-Nágera, Chair of Psychiatry in Salamanca, Chair of Psychiatry in Barcelona

Introduction

This study aims to clarify the circumstances surrounding the competitive examinations in which Román Alberca Lorente attained the chair of psychiatry in 1950, as some authors¹⁻³ cite him as the third Spanish chair of psychiatry after Prof Vallejo-Nágera in Madrid and Prof. Sarró Burbano in Barcelona. We intend to demonstrate that, while Vallejo-Nágera was unarguably the first Spanish chair of psychiatry selected through such examinations, at the Faculty of Medicine of Madrid in 1947, Román Alberca Lorente and Ramón Sarró Burbano were in fact selected in parallel, at the same time and during the same competitive examination.

Carlos Castilla del Pino, a distinguished figure in Spanish psychiatry, dedicates a considerable section of his memoirs (published in 1997 and 2004)^{1,4} to certain anecdotes about the history of various chairs of psychiatry at Spanish medical schools, in which he often played a personal role either as assistant to Prof López Ibor or as a candidate. One of these accounts refers to the selection of Ramón Sarró Burbano to the Barcelona chair, after the conclusion of the examinations in Madrid:

A year later, a competitive examination was held for the chair of psychiatry in Barcelona, with the examining board chaired by Pedro Pons and including José Córdoba, Vallejo, and others whom

I do not recall [...] The board voted unanimously for Sarró. López Ibor was not a candidate in these examinations. [...] Alberca withdrew in the second exercise, after a malicious political insinuation made by Pelaz.¹

Due to the authority of Castilla del Pino, this account has been widely accepted in many settings. Therefore, the objective of this study is to demonstrate that, while the author is correct regarding the year the call for candidates was issued (1948) and the composition of the examining board, he does commit several errors, including the reference to his master López Ibor (who did indeed participate in these examinations), the year the competitive examinations were held (1950), and the final outcome: while Sarró Burbano was awarded the Barcelona chair, Alberca Lorente was appointed in parallel to the Salamanca chair, and the assertion that he withdrew from the examination is completely false.

Material and methods

Essential information was gathered through a review of the official documentation constituting the legal framework for the competitive examinations; primary sources were gathered from the electronic databases of the Spanish Official State Gazette (BOE, for its Spanish initials) and the historical collection of its predecessors.^{5,6}

According to the general criteria established by the BOE,^{5,6} the search was conducted as follows:

-Date range: 1 January 1933 to 31 December 1950, inclusive. This date range was established because, as explained below, the first call for candidates for a competitive examination for a chair of psychiatry in Spain was issued in 1933, and, as mentioned previously, Sarró Burbano and Alberca Lorente were appointed to the chairs in 1950.

- Search terms: “Cátedra Psiquiatría” (chair of psychiatry), “Psiquiatría” (psychiatry), “Psiquiatra (psychiatrist),” “Ramón Sarró,” and “Román Alberca.”

Results

When researching the history of chairs of psychiatry in Spain, it is surprising to find references to Emilio Mira as the first chair of the specialty.^{3,7} While he occupied the first chair of psychiatry at a Spanish university, Prof Mira’s title was *profesor agregado* (full professor) rather than *catedrático* (chair) of the position created in 1933 at the University of Barcelona; furthermore, he was

elected by the faculty, rather than through a competitive examination.^{8,9}

The first chair of psychiatry to be appointed by *oposición libre* (open competitive examination) was created on 7 July 1933 by order of the Ministry of Public Education and Fine Arts. The subject was considered “voluntary”¹⁰ and the call for candidates was published in the BOE of 18 November of the same year.¹¹ However, the position was not definitively filled for nearly 14 years, with the process concluding on 25 February 1947 with the appointment of the military physician Colonel Antonio Vallejo-Nágera as the first chair of psychiatry at the University of Madrid.¹² During this long intermission, multiple calls for candidates were issued, as the position had remained unawarded on several occasions^{13,14} due to the influence of such other events as the Spanish Civil War.

Román Alberca Lorente had applied to all calls for candidates since the beginning of the process.¹⁵ These were the famous examinations in which, as Castillo del Pino^{1(p421)} recalls, López Ibor threw his papers in the face of the chair of the examining board, Enríquez de Salamanca, indignant with his alleged partiality. He also relates the shameful behaviour in one of the exercises (the notorious *trincas* or “ganging up”) of the eventual winner of the competition, Vallejo-Nágera, who, aiming to discredit Alberca Lorente, brought up the latter’s political ideology during the Second Republic,^{1(p421-2)} which was clearly discordant with the predominant ideology under the Franco dictatorship. It should also be noted that Emilio Mira, mentioned above, was appointed in 1934 to sit on the examining board due to his status as “full professor” at the University of Barcelona¹⁶; however, in 1935, he was also listed as a candidate, alongside Ramón (sic) Alberca, Dionisio Nieto, José María de Villaverde, José María Aldama, Miguel Prados, José Miguel Sacristán, and Juan José López Ybor (sic), among others.¹⁷

The chair of psychiatry at the University of Salamanca was established in February 1947,¹⁸ followed by the Barcelona chair in January 1948.¹⁹ The competitive examinations for both chairs were held simultaneously, in a single session. The call for candidates was issued by the resolution of the General Directorate for Education of 31 January 1948 and by the order of 31 January 1948; both were published in the BOE on 19 February (Figure 1).^{20,21} The first list of candidates who were “definitively admitted” was published on 18 August 1948,²² and included the

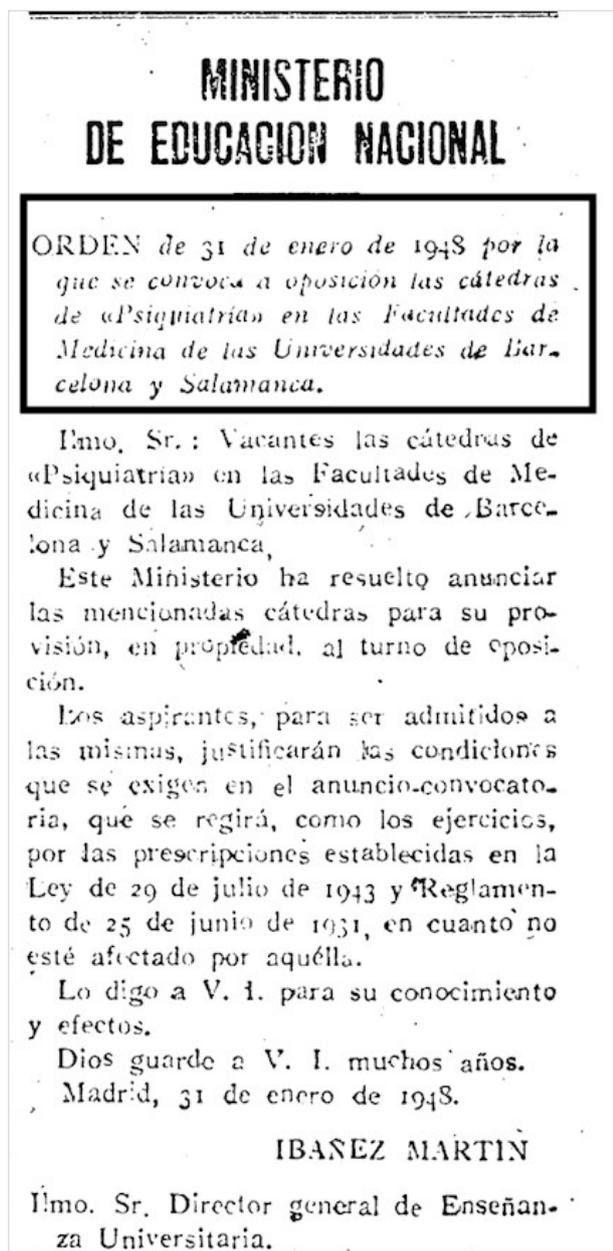


Figure 1. Call for candidates for the chairs of psychiatry at the medical schools of Barcelona and Salamanca. Order of 3 January 1948. BOE of 19 February 1948.²¹

following individuals: Ramón Sarró Burbano, Emilio Pelaz Martínez, Luis Rojas Ballesteros, Román Alberca Lorente, José Solé Segarra, Pedro Malabia Navarro, Saturnino Domínguez Borreguero, Francisco Marco Merenciano, Ramón Rey Ardid, Nicanor Ancochea Hombrevella, and Juan José López Ibor.

Apparently due to administrative issues, the deadline for applications was extended on 11 March 1949,²³ and the definitive list of candidates was as follows²⁴: Ramón Sarró Burbano, Emilio Pelaz Martínez, Luis Rojas Ballesteros, Román Alberca Lorente, José Solé Sagarra, Pedro Malabia Navarro, Saturnino Domínguez Borreguero, Francisco Marco Merenciano, Ramón Rey Ardid, Nicanor Ancochea Hombrevella, Juan José López Ibor, and Luis Morales Noriega.

The final composition of the examining board was as follows²⁵: Antonio Vallejo-Nágera (chair of psychiatry in Madrid, appointed by the National Council for Education), Antonio Piga Pascual (chair of legal medicine, retired), Agustín Pedro Pons (chair of clinical medicine at the University of Barcelona), Luis Manuel y Piniés (chair of general pathology at the University of Salamanca), and José Córdoba Rodríguez (president of the Barcelona Society of Psychiatry). The following were appointed as substitute board members: José María del Corral García (Spanish National Research Council), Leopoldo López Gómez (University of Valencia), Juan Gibert Queraltó (University of Barcelona), Manuel Valdés Ruiz (University of Salamanca), and Narciso Rodríguez Pino (Secretary of the Spanish League for Mental Hygiene). The start date for the examinations was set for 13 April 1950.²⁶

Discussion

After the conclusion of the competitive examinations on 11 May 1950,²⁷ Román Alberca Lorente and Ramón Sarró Burbano were selected as chairs of psychiatry at the University of Salamanca and at the University of Barcelona, respectively (Figure 2). We have been unable to access the minutes of the examining board, and therefore do not know the final scores of each exercise, although Sarró Burbano may have scored better than Alberca Lorente: whatever the outcome, the winning candidate would be entitled to choose their preferred destination, and it is plausible that Barcelona was his first choice. In any case, it is evident that Sarró Burbano and Alberca Lorente were appointed as chairs of psychiatry on the same day in the BOE,^{27,28} making them both the winners of the second round of competitive examinations of this type for a chair of psychiatry in Spain. One curious detail is that Prof López Ibor, one of the candidates (despite the account given by Castilla del Pino),¹ who was already chair of legal medicine⁹ and later became one of the leading representatives of the

speciality in Spain in the latter half of the 20th century, was not appointed to his first chair of psychiatry until 1952,²⁹ precisely at the University of Salamanca, after Alberca Lorente left the position to transfer to the University of Valencia.

Román Alberca Lorente became director of the psychiatric hospital in Murcia in 1928, when he was 25 years old,² and continued working there when he was appointed as chair of psychiatry in Salamanca. Upon request, he was allowed to take the position of chair from Murcia, and was inaugurated on 7 June 1950.³⁰ However, he never practised in Salamanca, as the Valencia chair was established a week later³¹; candidates were invited to apply for transfer on 26 July 1950,³² and Alberca Lorente was appointed to the role on 23 October 1950.³³ He appears to have given his inaugural lecture on 2 December 1950,^{30,34} but the first position for a full professor under the chair was not officially created until the 1952-1953 academic year; thus, Alberca Lorente worked alone for the first years, with the collaboration of some colleagues not associated with the chair.³⁵

Alberca Lorente occupied the chair of psychiatry at the University of Valencia for the rest of his life; to our knowledge, his only attempt to move position was in a contest to transfer to the chair of psychiatry at the University of Madrid, which was left vacant after the retirement of Vallejo-Nágera. The call for candidates was published in late 1958,³⁶ and a committee was established in 1960 to select the winner. The committee members were Carlos Jiménez Díaz, Ramón Sarró, Manuel Bermejillo, Luis Rojas Ballesteros, and Fernando Enríquez de Salamanca.³⁷ The eventual winner was Juan José López Ibor³⁸; Alberca Lorente requested an appeal, which was declined.³⁹

González Duro⁴⁰ suggests that López Ibor was not eligible for the position, as: "No candidate could be put forward who had not actively worked as chair of psychiatry for at least two years, if another candidate did meet this condition."^{40(p296)} Castilla del Pino⁴¹ gives a similar account: "When Vallejo retired, two years later, López Ibor also took possession of the chair of psychiatry, snatching it from Román Alberca, the chair in Valencia, who was his senior. It turned out perfectly."^{41(p229)}

However, Gómez Santos⁴² suggests that the two years' active service as chair of psychiatry were only required after a certain date, which did not affect López Ibor's candidacy. He recounts that after consulting with the

ORDEN de 11 de mayo de 1950 por la que se nombra Catedrático de la Universidad de Salamanca a don Román Alberca Lorente.

Ilmo. Sr.: En virtud de oposición,

Este Ministerio ha resuelto nombrar a don Román Alberca Lorente Catedrático numerario de «Psiquiatría» de la Facultad de Medicina de la Universidad de Salamanca, con el haber anual de entrada de doce mil pesetas y demás ventajas que le conceden las disposiciones vigentes.

Lo digo a V. I. para su conocimiento y efectos.

Dios guarde a V. I. muchos años.
Madrid, 11 de mayo de 1950.

IBÁÑEZ-MARTIN

Ilmo. Sr. Director general de Enseñanza Universitaria.

ORDEN de 11 de mayo de 1950 por la que se nombra Catedrático de la Universidad de Barcelona a don Ramón Sarró Burbano.

Ilmo. Sr.: En virtud de oposición,

Este Ministerio ha resuelto nombrar a don Ramón Sarró Burbano Catedrático numerario de «Psiquiatría» de la Facultad de Medicina de la Universidad de Barcelona, con el haber anual de entrada de doce mil pesetas, tres mil pesetas anuales más, conforme a lo determinado en la vigente Ley de Presupuestos, y demás ventajas que le conceden las disposiciones vigentes.

Lo digo a V. I. para su conocimiento y efectos.

Dios guarde a V. I. muchos años.
Madrid, 11 de mayo de 1950.

IBÁÑEZ-MARTIN

Ilmo. Sr. Director general de Enseñanza Universitaria.

Figure 2. Two orders of 11 May 1950 appointing Román Alberca Lorente and Ramón Sarró Urbano as chairs of psychiatry at the University of Salamanca and the University of Barcelona, respectively. BOE of 18 May 1950.^{27,28}

legal advisor to the Ministry, Carlos Jiménez Díaz, [...] who was in favour of the seniority of Román Alberca over López Ibor as an instructor; he

decided as president of the committee to establish a set of parameters to qualify both candidates, with López Ibor scoring 32 points and Román Alberca 25. Therefore, López Ibor was appointed as the chair.^{42(p168-9)}

For readers interested in the life of Román Alberca Lorente, we recommend the summary in the works by Sáez et al.² and Fernández et al.,⁴³ which include the main biographical and academic data. Alberca Lorente was a founding member of the Spanish Society of Neurology, in 1949,⁴³ its second vice-president, from 1953 to 1955, and finally president, from 1959 to 1961^{44,45}.

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