

Brief History of the Madrid Psychoanalytical Association (Asociación Psicoanalítica de Madrid)



Psychoanalysis arrived to Spain thanks to the early translation of the works of Sigmund Freud in our country, and to the scientific relationships of Spanish psychiatrists with the German and French Psychiatry, at the beginning of the XX century.

In 1917 Ruiz Castillo, Director of the publishing house Biblioteca Nueva and at the suggestion of Ortega y Gasset, purchased the publishing rights in Spanish for all the Sigmund Freud works written and to be written, and had them translated by Luis López Ballesteros, translation endorsed by Freud himself because of “the extremely correct interpretation of his thinking”. In fact, the translation of the texts of Sigmund Freud to Spanish was the first translation of his work to a foreign language, in what constitutes the largest contribution in Spanish language to the diffusion of psychoanalysis.

The continued and growing edition of the works of Freud allowed them to be spread among the scientific, intellectual, scholar and artistic Spanish speaking circles. A group of artists and writers gathered around the Residencia de Estudiantes even extended an invitation for Freud to visit Spain and give several lectures, while illness prevented the project to come to fruition. However, in October 1928 Sandor Ferenczi comes to Spain and give a lecture in the Residencia de Estudiantes. Dalí and Picasso will be among the writers and artists that, headed by Thomas Mann, will organize a tribute to Freud in his eightieth birthday. Dalí would visit Freud again and painted a portrait of him in his exile in London.



Among the first Spanish psychiatrists interested in psychoanalysis, Ángel Garma could be considered as the first Spanish psychoanalyst. He started his psychoanalytic training in 1927 at the Psychoanalytic Institute of Berlin, being accepted as a member of the German Psychoanalytical Society in 1931. In November of that same year he went back to Madrid and started his activity as a psychoanalyst, while he could not succeed in constituting a Spanish psychoanalytic group despite his wishes – the onset of the Spanish Civil War in 1936 foiled those projects. Garma settled himself in Argentina and, along with a group of pioneers, contributed to the formation of the Asociación Psicoanalítica Argentina.

The first years of the Franco dictatorship, after the Civil War and with Europe ravaged by the II World War, were a dramatic and devastating time in which not only psychoanalysis, but the whole cultural and scientific life seemed to have vanished from Spain. We have to wait until the end of the 40s to see new pioneers reappear and, amid a hostile or indifferent environment, recover for Spain the benefits of psychoanalytic contributions.

Two small groups of psychiatrists and intellectuals, one of them in Madrid and the other one in Barcelona, would start a slow and difficult path to acquire psychoanalytic training and to achieve the reintroduction and development of psychoanalysis in Spain.

Formation of the Madrid group was owed initially to the dedication and enthusiasm of the psychiatrist Ramón del Portillo who, through the mediation of Ángel Garma initiates contacts with the German Psychoanalytic Society and starts his own psychoanalysis with Margarita Steinbach. During his stay in Berlin he proposes Margarita Steinbach to come to Spain as a training analyst for a group of professionals interested in psychoanalytic training. Dr. Steinbach accepts, and in March 1951 she is already working in Madrid.

We know from her correspondence that in 1952 she was carrying on sixteen training analysis. Margarita Steinbach worked with the Madrid group until her premature death in 1954, and set in motion the process for the IPA recognition of the group.

Days before her death, the Spanish governmental authority officially recognises the Asociación Española de Psicoanálisis. Following the decease of Margarita Steinbach, the members of the Madrid group took different paths to continue their training with other psychoanalytic societies in Paris, Switzerland, Argentina. The professionals from Barcelona who were interested in being trained as psychoanalysts headed mainly to the Swiss Psychoanalytical Society.

In 1956, psychoanalysts from Madrid and Barcelona along with Portuguese psychoanalysts constituted the Sociedad Luso-Española de Psicoanálisis (Portuguese-Spanish Psychoanalysis Society), accepted in 1959 as an IPA constituent Society. After the departure of the Portuguese, in 1966 it came to be known as Sociedad Española de Psicoanálisis, with two different groups of psychoanalysts, one in Barcelona and the other in Madrid. The growing development of both groups, and the enlistment in Madrid of members of other psychoanalytic societies decided the Madrid psychoanalysts for the convenience and the possibility of constituting a psychoanalytical association in Madrid, independent of the Sociedad Española de Psicoanálisis. In 1973, at the XXVII IPA Congress, this group is accepted by the IPA.

In 1975 the Spanish political landscape radically changes, with a democratic and public freedoms system being established in Spain which allows for a greater spread and development

of psychoanalysis. The Asociación Psicoanalítica de Madrid would be recognised as a constituent Society of the IPA in its XXXII Congress, in 1981, with the city of Madrid being chosen as the venue for its XXXIII International Congress.

The Asociación Psicoanalítica de Madrid kept growing in dynamism and scientific activity. Training of the new analysts would benefit from the experience of the Madrid analysts and of those analysts that came from other societies, which would result in a pluralist society. Over time, the APM expanded to other places of the Spanish geography, as Valencia, Bilbao, Sevilla, Málaga, San Sebastián, Badajoz, Logroño, Tenerife, Zaragoza, Valladolid... Nowadays it has one hundred twenty-seven members and one hundred eighty-three training analysts.

Currently there are two psychoanalytical societies in Spain, the Sociedad Española de Psicoanálisis and the Asociación Psicoanalítica de Madrid. In addition to the scientific activity of both societies, a number of scientific conferences with an international scope have been held – five French-speaking congresses: Barcelona 1962, Madrid 1964, Barcelona 1980, Madrid 1996, Bilbao 2012; two congresses of the European Federation of Psychoanalysis: Barcelona 1987 and Madrid 2001; two international congresses: Madrid 1983, Barcelona 1997 and four conferences of Castilian-speaking psychoanalysts: Madrid 2012, 2014, 2016 and Sevilla 2018.