

## MESMERISM ONLINE: A BIBLIOGRAPHIC REVIEW

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*There are many books and articles of historical interest about mesmerism in the digital library Google Book Search. Some of them are mentioned under the following headings: histories and overviews, phenomena, medical applications, critiques, explanatory concepts, anti-materialistic views, and miscellaneous materials including topics such as work with special subjects, the relationship of mesmerism and phrenology, and bibliographies. Some of the authors represented in the digital library are Alexander Bertrand, James Braid, J. P. F. Deleuze, Albert de Rochas, J. Dupotet de Sennevoy, John Elliotson, James Esdaile, Joseph W. Haddock, E. F. Henin de Cuvillers, Justinus Kerner, C. A. F. Kluge, Charles Lafontaine, and Franz Anton Mesmer. The collection includes issues of the following periodicals: Archives du Magnétisme Animal, Magikon, Le Magnétiseur, The Phreno-Magnet and Mirror of Nature, and Zoist.*

With the development of digital libraries the availability of historical books and articles has considerably increased. One example is the online library Google Book Search (<http://books.google.com>), which has been discussed in the past in terms of dissociation (Alvarado, 2008) and other phenomena (Alvarado, 2007). In this bibliographical note, I would like to focus on some of the holdings of the collection about mesmerism published during the nineteenth century. My purpose is not to discuss the material in detail, but to offer brief comments so as to bring a variety of books and articles to the attention of readers interested in the history of the subject.

### HISTORIES AND OVERVIEWS

A good general overview of the early history of mesmerism was provided by science populariser Louis Figuier (1819–94) in the third volume of his

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*Histoire du merveilleux dans temps modernes* (Figuier, 1860). The volume's 17 chapters were dedicated to the topic, with the last two focusing on hypnosis. The general focus of Figuier was France, and the first 10 chapters were about Franz Anton Mesmer (1734–1815) and the reception of his work.

The collection also includes several books that combine historical information with discussions of the practice and theory of mesmerism. One of them is the first volume of *Histoire critique du magnétisme animal* (Deleuze, 1813). In the book Joseph Philippe François Deleuze (1753–1835) started with Mesmer, and went on to discuss aspects such as the magnetic fluid, healing, problems and dangers of mesmerism, and personally observed phenomena. Other useful overviews in the collection are *Animal Magnetism: Its History to the Present Time* (1841), *Du magnétisme animal en France* (Bertrand, 1826), *An History of Magic, Witchcraft, and Animal Magnetism* (Colquhoun, 1851), *Isis Revelata: An Inquiry into the Origin, Progress and Present State of Animal Magnetism* (Colquhoun, 1836), *Mesmer et le magnétisme animal* (Bersot, 1864), *Versuch einer Darstellung des animalischen Magnetismus als Heilmittel* (Kluge, 1815), and several other works (e.g., Binet & Féré, 1887/1894; Leger, 1846; Teste, 1840/1843).

German physician and poet Justinus Kerner (1786–1862) discussed Mesmer in his *Franz Anton Mesmer aus Schwaben, Entdecker des thierischen Magnetismus* (Kerner, 1856). The collection also has one of Mesmer's (1814) books, *Mesmerismus oder System der Wechselwirkungen, Theorie und Anwendung des thierischen Magnetismus*.

There is much information about early magnetism in the United States in the account that Charles Poyen (1837) presented in his *Progress of Animal Magnetism in New England*. He wrote: "At the time when the writer commenced lecturing in New England, he found the subject almost universally unknown ... Nineteen months have elapsed since that period; and already Animal Magnetism has sprung, from a complete state of obscurity and neglect, into general notice, and become the object of a lively interest throughout the country" (p. 35).

Many authors presented overviews of different aspects of the mesmeric movement (e.g., Buckland, 1850; Deleuze, 1825/1850; Dupotet de Sennevoy, 1838; Esdaile, 1852; Gregory, 1884; Lee, 1866; Lowe, 1822; Teste, 1840/1843). One of them was Italian Francesco Guidi, who wrote in his *Trattato Teorico-Pratico di Magnetismo Animale*: "Magnetism ... cannot be well defined: it is an unexplained protean; now visible, now invisible" (Guidi, 1854, p. 2; this, and other translations, are mine).

The collection also has many article reviews on the topic (e.g., "Animalischer

Magnetismus,” 1823; “Animal Magnetism,” 1838; Eve, 1845; Herfner, 1844; Knight, 1867, pp. 584–588; “Magnetismo Animal ó Mesmerismo,” 1842; “Mesmerism,” 1843; Ripley & Dana, 1858, pp. 593–598). The author of a paper entitled “Quelques Reflexions sur le Magnétisme Animal” called for research and speculated on the role of imagination to explain mesmeric phenomena (Le Boyer, 1823).

## PHENOMENA

The travelling magnetiser Charles Lafontaine (1803–1892) referred to physiological and psychological effects of magnetism in his book *L'art de magnétiser ou le magnétisme animal* (Lafontaine, 1847/1852). The first were such effects as the closing of the eyes, perspiration, spasms, convulsive tremors, partial or complete insensibility or paralysis, catalepsy, somnolence, attraction, trance, and induction of trance at a distance. The second were thought-transmission, sight with closed eyes and through matter, and ecstasy.

Commenting about magnetic sleep Poyen (1837) stated: “Those who have been put into the magnetic sleep in this country, belong to both sexes, and they are persons of almost every age. The writer of these pages had himself alone the opportunity of observing twenty-eight” (p. 59). Others discussed the memory of the magnetised somnambules. Alphonse Teste (1840/1843) wrote in his book *A Practical Manual of Animal Magnetism*: “From the beginning, most somnambulists recollect with astonishing precision all the events which have occurred to them; sometimes, too, from so long a date back, that they had absolutely lost the recollection of them during the state of being awake” (pp. 58–59). British physician William Gregory (1803–1858) wrote about the same topic: “As a general rule ... the sleeper does not remember, after waking, what he may have seen, felt, tasted, smelled, heard, spoken, or done during his sleep; but when next put to sleep, he recollects perfectly all that has occurred, not only in the last sleep, but in all former sleeps, and, as in the ordinary state, with greater or less accuracy, although usually very accurately indeed” (Gregory, 1884, p. 5).

There is an interesting report of observations of insensibility to induced pain observed at the Asylum for the Deaf and Dumb of Philadelphia. One of the descriptions about phenomena obtained with a 16-year-old boy reads as follows:

When the boy was asleep, several of the party were asked to pinch his flesh as hard as they thought proper, to see whether he would awake; but, though some pressed

their nails so as to imbed them in his flesh, he never moved a muscle. A pin was then thrust through his flesh, making a complete hole in it; but to this he was as insensible as to all the rest. (Buckingham, 1841, pp. 387–391)

French physician Alexandre Bertrand (1795–1831) wrote that some of his somnambules said they could see “the fluid coming out of my fingers” (Bertrand, 1826, p. ix), a phenomenon he attributed to the imagination. Some mesmerised subjects said they “could see an aura, or fluid, passing into, along, and out of the magnet” (Haddock, 1851, p. 168). The collection also has the classic work of Carl Ludwig Reichenbach (1788–1869) on sensitives claiming to see lights around magnets, crystals and minerals, *Physico-Physiological Researches on the Dynamics of Magnetism, Electricity, Heat, Light, Crystallization, and Chemism, in their Relation to Vital Force* (Reichenbach, 1849/1851). While Reichenbach did not mesmerise his subjects, his writings were quoted by many mesmerists (e.g., Ashburner, 1867, pp. 36, 83). Later publications in the collection were about luminous emanations from magnets conducted using magnetic procedures, an example being the paper “Mémoire relatif a certaines radiations perçues par les sensitifs” (De Rochas, 1891).

There were also accounts of clairvoyance (Barth, 1849; Elliotson, 1849). Other authors discussed phenomena such as the production of a variety of effects on mesmerised individuals through silent suggestions (Adams, 1849; Ashburner, 1847).

British physician Joseph Haddock (1800–1861) reported observations of the spiritualistic type with his subject Emma. As he wrote in *Somnolism & Psycheism*: “Frequently during the spring and summer of 1848, Emma would, in the mesmeric state, speak of the scenery and nature of the spirit-world” (Haddock, 1851, p. 181). Similar mediumistic phenomena were discussed in detail by Louis Alphonse Cahagnet (1809–1885) in *The Celestial Telegraph* (Cahagnet, 1848–1854/1851).

The digital library has discussions of phenomena representing the late nineteenth-century neo-mesmeric movement. A well-known representative of this trend was French Colonel Albert de Rochas (1837–1914). In his book *L’extériorisation de la sensibilité* he stated that “the human body ... emits effluvia likely to act on the senses of certain persons” (De Rochas, 1895, p. 47). In this book, he also discussed the “exteriorisation of sensibility,” a phenomenon in which, in magnetised subjects, “the sense of touch, instead of being exerted, as ordinarily, on the surface of the skin, is extended outside of the body” (p. 50). Other publications in the collection that were part of

French neo-mesmerism include *Les courants de la polarité dans l'aimant et dans le corps humain* (Chazarain & Dècle, 1887) and *Traité expérimental de magnétisme* (Durville, 1895–1896).

## MEDICAL APPLICATIONS

Many authors focused on the medical applications of mesmerism. This included discussions about the control of pain during procedures such as amputations and the removal of tumors (Elliotson, 1843, 1846), and dental operations (Purland, 1859). The author of *The Mighty Curative Powers of Mesmerism* presented cases cured by mesmeric procedures in chapters about rheumatism, neuralgia, toothache, sprains, paralysis, headaches, noises in the head, epilepsy, St Vitus's Dance, inflammations, affections of the eyes, loss of voice, throat and chest complaints, affections of the heart, affections of the stomach, emaciation and debility in children (Capern, 1851).

Physician James Esdaile (1808–1859), reported on his medical use of mesmerism in several publications (Esdaile, 1846a, 1846b, 1852). He concluded in his *Mesmerism in India*:

That in the mesmeric trance the most severe and protracted surgical operations can be performed, without the patients being sensible of pain.

That spasms and nervous pains often disappear before the mesmeric trance.

That it gives us a complete command of the muscular system, and is therefore of great service in restoring contracted limbs.

That the chronic administration of Mesmerism often acts as a useful stimulant in functional debility of the nerves. (Esdaile, 1846b, p. 271)

Several cases of claimed cures were published in the *Zoist*, an English journal devoted to mesmerism some of which volumes are in the collection. Some of the articles were: “Cure of a Large Polypus of the Uterus” (Ashburner, 1851), “Cure of Long-Standing Intense Pains and Other Sufferings and Extreme Debility, with Mesmerism, after the Failure of Endless and Distressing Measures” (Elliotson, 1847), “Cure of Deafness” (Evans, 1849), and “Cures of Severe Female Chronic Ailments, with Mesmerism” (Hands, 1846).

## CRITIQUES

*La Verdad Católica*, a Catholic magazine published in Cuba, had an anonymous article about animal magnetism as seen by the Church. According to the writer, “the Church, a watching sentinel in matters of faith and customs, has expressly

prohibited the consultations made to somnambulism” (O., 1861, p. 111).

The author of an overview of mesmerism published in 1844 in the *Dublin University Magazine* stated that: “Mesmerism ... cannot with any propriety be said to have as yet attained to the rank of a science. Its procedure is not sure: there is something in it still of a shooting-at-random, predictive of an appearance of caprice or inconstancy in the results” (Herfner, 1844, p. 49). Another author was even more negative. In his view, belief in mesmerism was a “stupid delusion” and “the science is a humbug; its practitioners knaves, and its believers dupes” (Reese, 1838, p. 62).

In an editorial in the British medical journal *Lancet*, possibly written by the well-known critic of mesmerism Thomas Wakley (1795–1862), it was stated that mesmerism’s “arrogant pretensions and gross falsehoods have often been detected and exposed” (“Mesmeric Humbug and Quackery,” 1851, p. 155).

Defenders of the animal magnetic movement, such as Elliotson (1843) and Sandby (1848), discussed the opposition of many to the claims of mesmerism, much of which came from physicians. English writer, abolitionist and women’s rights defender Harriet Martineau (1802–1876) wrote in her *Letters on Mesmerism* about the scepticism of physicians:

The systematic disingenuousness of some Medical Journals on this subject, and the far-fetched calumnies and offensive assumptions with which it is the regular practice of a large number of the Faculty to assail every case of cure or relief by Mesmerism, looked very much as if they were in conflict with powerful truth, and as if they knew it. (Martineau, 1845, pp. vi–vii)

Similarly, a writer in *Mechanic’s Magazine, Museum, Register, Journal, and Gazette* stated: “In a subject confessedly so little understood as the physiology of the nerves, the very men who at one moment confess their almost total ignorance of its laws, are found the next obstinately refusing to examine with their own eyes and ears the new phenomena” (H., 1849, p. 150).

There were, of course, many defences of mesmerism. Two examples from France were *Défense du magnétisme animal contre les attaques don’t il est l’objet dans le Dictionnaire des Sciences Médicales* (Deleuze, 1819) and *Le magnétisme animal devant les savants, devant le raisonnement, devant les faits* (Rabache, 1854).

Many of the critiques were expressed in the form of defences of theoretical explanations other than the magnetic fluid. Examples of these discussions in the collection appear in the next section.

## EXPLANATORY CONCEPTS

Most mesmerists emphasised the physical nature of the magnetic fluid. James Esdaile (1852) discussed the concept in his *Natural and Mesmeric Clairvoyance*: “Man ... in an abnormal state ... like the electric fish ... can ... project his nervous fluid ... by his will, beyond the surface of his body, and in the direction desired” (p. 234). Deleuze stated: “The magnetiser can communicate his fluid to many objects, and these objects become either the conductors of his action, or proper instruments of its transmission, and produce magnetic effects upon persons with whom he is in communication” (Deleuze, 1825/1850, p. 212). Lafontaine (1847/1852) commented on the “vital or nervous fluid that is essentially necessary to life, which can be communicated to another body to produce the phenomena known by the name of *animal magnetism*” (p. 17). This principle, Lafontaine believed, was affected by the will of the magnetist. It was projected from the magnetiser’s nervous system to the system of the persons being influenced, where it produced different effects.

The concept of a fluid, wrote an anonymous author, seemed too convenient to account for phenomena whose nature are unknown. The idea was considered to be “repugnant to common sense” (“Magnetismo Animal ó Mesmerismo,” 1842, p. 130). Others presented alternative explanations to the concept of a magnetic force. Etienne Félix Henin de Cuvillers (1755–1841) believed that this force was not real, but the product of the imagination. The magnetisers, he asserted in *Le magnétisme animal retrouvé dans l’antiquité*, proposed the concept of animal magnetism “gratuitously, and on their own authority” (Henin de Cuvillers, 1821, p. 134). In another publication, Henin de Cuvillers (1820) argued that animal magnetism as a force did not produce magnetic sleep, “it is the fixed gaze of the magnetiser that fatigues and puts to sleep the person ... ; this is added to gestures and *passes*, which often frighten, or at least cause a vivid emotion ... Up to now it is not necessary to suppose an emission of a material fluid” (p. 76).

English physicians Thomas Laycock (1812–1876) and William B. Carpenter (1813–1885) also discussed the subject. The first felt that mesmerism was an example of ideas becoming a reality in the mind of the mesmerised (Laycock, 1857, p. 136), while the second referred to the influence of susceptibility and belief (Carpenter, 1877, p. 26).

Perhaps the most influential of the nineteenth-century conventional theorists was Scottish physician James Braid (1795–1860). He wrote in his classic book *Neurypnology*:

The phenomena of mesmerism were to be accounted for on the principle of a derangement of the state of the cerebro-spinal centres, and of the circulatory, and respiratory, and muscular systems, induced ... by a fixed stare, absolute repose of body, fixed attention, and suppressed respiration, concomitant with that fixity of attention ... arising from the causes referred to, and not at all on the volition, or passes of the operator, throwing out a magnetic fluid, or exciting into activity some mystical universal fluid or medium. (Braid, 1843, pp. 19–20)

In a later work, Braid (1852) referred to the possibility that, in some individuals involved in experiments of electro-biology, the ideas and suggestions from others could “even in the waking condition ... change physical action, and produce the expected results” (p. 2). Furthermore, such observations showed that, “through the influence of suggestion, existing predominant ideas may be removed” (p. 42).

There are several other examples in this digital library of authors sceptical about animal magnetism as a physical agent (e.g., Estlin, 1843; Eve, 1845; Madden, 1857). A late critique came from English physician Ernest Hart (1836–1898), who wrote in his book *Hypnotism, Mesmerism, and the New Witchcraft*:

I may say ... that the conditions induced ... may be shown to be due to a nervous condition or mental state arising in the individual subject either from physical or mental excitation; and further that such conditions ... are not and never were due to any healing power or to any fluid or magnetic influence or mesmeric or hypnotic power resident in the operator. (Hart 1896, p. 34)

Of course, not all magnetisers agreed with the “imagination” explanation. As stated by one of them:

The influence of the imagination and of the imitative principle seem, at first sight, much more capable of affording an adequate explanation of the facts; but the activity of these principles in the magnetic process is rejected as absurd by every practical magnetiser, as well as by every intelligent opponent of the system; and, besides, many of the phenomena are of such a nature, that they cannot be rationally accounted for upon any such theory. (Colquhoun, 1833, p. 91)

### **ANTI-MATERIALISTIC VIEWS**

In *An History of Magic, Witchcraft, and Animal Magnetism*, Colquhoun (1851) argued for the religious implication of animal magnetism. In his view:



Animal Magnetism ... is eminently calculated to confirm our christian faith, and to increase our rational devotion towards the great Creator and Preserver of all things; for there is no subject of philosophical inquiry which has a more direct tendency to elevate our thoughts to the contemplation of our present endowments and ultimate destiny—to increase our admiration of the power, and wisdom, and beneficence of the Supreme Being, in the creation and government of the universe, and to prepare us for the enjoyment of another, a better, and a more spiritual state of existence. (Vol. 2, pp. 299–300)

Colquhoun (1836) argued further in another work that animal magnetism refuted materialistic ideas. This was the case because its phenomena presented evidence for the soul's existence. These phenomena were “capable of exercising its various functions ... without the assistance or co-operation of any of those material organs, by means of which it usually maintains a correspondence with the external world” (Vol. 2, p. 166).

Writers, such as Haddock (1851) and Ashburner (1867), also related animal magnetism to ideas of the soul. The same may be said about the German physician Johann Heinrich Jung-Stilling (1740–1817), as discussed in his *Theory of Pneumatology* (Jung-Stilling, 1808/1851). French magnetiser Jules Dupotet de Sennevoy (1796–1881) presented animal magnetism as a doctrine capable of elevating man closer to God, as seen in his *Essai sur l'enseignement philosophique du magnétisme* (Dupotet de Sennevoy, 1845). In addition to the above mentioned authors, others in the collection have argued against materialism based on mesmeric phenomena (Chardel, 1826; Wienholt, 1805/1845).

## MISCELLANEOUS MATERIAL

Some publications in the collection present studies or observations of particular individuals. This was the case of *The Seeress of Prevorst* (Kerner, 1829/1845), in which were recorded many observations of Friedericke Hauffe (1801–1829). Suffering from a variety of problems, the “physician prescribed magnetic passes and medicines; but she fell into the magnetic sleep, and prescribed for herself” (p. 45). There are also writings about other magnetic somnambules, such as Ellen Dawson (Barth, 1849), Bruno Binet (Cahagnet, 1848–1854/1850), Alexis Didier (Elliotson, 1849), Emma (Haddock, 1851), Cynthia Ann Gleason (Poyen, 1837), and Loraina Brackett (Stone, 1837).

The interaction of mesmerism and phrenology was commented on by several writers—a topic called phreno-magnetism. As described by a commentator, phrenology postulated that “the brain contains or consists of

a great number of distinct organs, each destined to be the seat of particular moral feelings and separate mental operations,” while in phreno-magnetism “it is conceived that it is possible to magnetise particular cerebral organs, to call forth the evidence of the operation of particular moral qualities, or to excite the action of certain intellectual faculties” (Review of the books *Human Magnetism* and *Letters on Mesmerism*, 1845, p. 223). One observer mesmerised a subject and wrote: “On my touching the region of *Tune*, she broke forth in a strain of melody as sweet as it was loud and clear; and gave a few equally striking indications of the functions of other faculties” (Hall, 1845, p. 8). Other relevant observations in the collection appear in *The Phreno-Magnet and Mirror of Nature*, edited by Spencer T. Hall (1812–1885) (“Private Experiments in Phreno-Magnetism,” 1843; Sunderland, 1843).

Several reviews of books can be found in the collection (e.g., Review of the book *Animal Magnetism and Homeopathy*, 1838; Review of the book *Facts in Mesmerism*, 1841; Review of the book *Illustrations of Modern Mesmerism*, 1846; Review of the book *Mesmerism and Its Opponents*, 1844; Review of the book *Mesmerism in India*, 1847). These are particularly useful when assessing the reception of ideas about mesmerism.

The collection also has a few bibliographies useful for research. German surgeon C. A. F. Kluge (1782–1844) discussed mesmeric literature in a long essay (Kluge, 1815, pp. 16–210). Other works listed many useful titles (*The Bibliography of Progressive Literature*, 1899, pp. 32–35; De Ploucquet, 1809, pp. 2–4; Grasse, 1843, pp. 43–46; Pauly, 1872, pp. 787–799; Rand, 1905, pp. 1059–1067).

Finally, the digital library has issues of relevant specialised journals such as *Archives du Magnétisme Animal*, *Magikon*, *Le Magnétiseur*, *The Phreno-Magnet* and *Mirror of Nature*, and *Zoist*.

## CONCLUSION

These are but a few examples of the contents of Google Book Search about mesmerism. I have attempted to present in this essay both well-known works, and less-known and generally neglected writings. The latter include articles from magazines and medical journals. While I have not covered all possible references or topics in the collection, the resources of this digital library are of great value for the historical study of mesmerism. Readers are encouraged to use the library’s search engine to find additional materials, many of which are to be found in non-mesmeric literature such as medical and general-interest periodicals.

In addition, the collection contains many papers and books on other topics. There are numerous materials about hypnosis, and much that is relevant to the histories of psychology, psychiatry, general medicine, and many other disciplines.

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