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THE STORY BEHIND MASSAGE IN SPAIN

The history of massage in Spain spans over two millennia and reflects the multilayered cultural heritage of the Iberian Peninsula – from the Iberian tribes to the Romans, the Moors, the Christian Reconquista, and the European Enlightenment. Massage has never been an isolated practice here: it has always been woven into systems of hygiene, medicine, religion, and leisure.

The first mentions of manual practices are associated with the Iberian tribes (Turdetani, Vaccaeii) and the Celtiberians. Archaeological finds in Tarraco (Tarragona) and Emporion (Girona) reveal clay vessels containing oils and scraper-like tools (strigiles) – the precursors of Roman ones.

Massage was used by shamans and healers to treat wounds, relieve fatigue after hunting, and in fertility rituals. Olive oil was the basis (Spain was already a major olive producer). The Romans brought a systematic approach: massage became part of thermal culture. In Spain, ruins of baths have been preserved in Mérida (Emerita Augusta), Tarraco, and Clunia, with separate rooms for «uncia» (oil application) and «friction» (rubbing). Techniques included «apotherapy» (deep kneading), «catatribe» (sand rubbing), and collisia (light tapping). Massage therapists were slaves or freedmen.

Galen (2nd century) described massage as a way to "eliminate toxins" and recover after gladiatorial combat.

After the fall of Rome, massage persisted in monasteries as part of patient care. Visigothic codes (*Liber Iudiciorum*) mention «oil rubs» for the treatment of fever. Knowledge was passed on through monastic scriptoria (especially in Toledo). Massage became more ascetic, without the luxury of thermal baths. The Moors elevated massage to an art form. Hammams (in Cordoba, Granada, and Seville) included: «ghusl» (purification), «tadlik» (massage with black soap), and «zeit» (oils with rose, myrrh, and sandalwood).

Ibn Sina (Avicenna) and Al-Razi introduced the concept of «massage as a balance of the humors».

Frescoes depicting massage scenes have been preserved in the Alhambra. Masseurs (hammam) were a respected profession, often Jews or mudejars.

After reconquering the territories, the Catholic Monarchs retained the hammams, renaming them «baños moriscos». Massage became part of palace hygiene (Alcazar in Seville).

Jewish physicians (Maimonides in Cordoba) integrated Arabic and Talmudic practices: massage during childbirth, for infants, and for gout. The Spanish Inquisition was suspicious of "Moorish" practices, but massage survived in hospitals (Hospital Real in Granada).

In the New World, Spanish missionaries and doctors spread massage among the Indians (mentions in the chronicles of Bernal Diaz).

Vicente Lino Ferrandiz García (1849–1904), the father of modern Spanish massage, created chiromassage – a synthesis of Swedish, French, and indigenous techniques.

In 1888, the "Escuela de Quiromasaje" opened in Madrid. The key idea was: «Massage is anatomy in motion». Massage was later incorporated into medical faculties (Complutense University). The first professional associations emerged.

Throughout the 20th century, new approaches emerged:

- massage for amputations, which emerged as a result of the Civil War;
- balnearios – thermal resorts (La Toja, Archena, Mondoris);
- the opening of spa hotels as a consequence of the tourism boom;
- tantric massage, influenced by the hippie movement;
- prostitution was legalized in the 1980s, leading to the emergence of «massage parlors» as a front;
- in the 1990s, massage was incorporated into physiotherapy.

Already at the beginning of the third millennium, Spanish schools (Instituto de Quiromasaje, Barcelona) opened branches in Latin America, as well as online courses.

COVID-19 accelerated the shift to «home massage» and «mechanical massagers». And interest in the integration of information technology has contributed to the emergence of neuro-massage (based on MRI data), VR massage (virtual reality for training), etc. Among the latest innovations, in 2024, the Ministry of Health announced a pilot project to include massage in a depression prevention program.

The history of massage in Spain is one of cultural synthesis: from Iberian oil to Arabic soap, from Roman friction to Swedish-Spanish chiromassage. Today, Spain is not only a «consumer» but also a «supplier» of massage techniques. And the future of massage development in the country lies in neuroscience, ecology, and digitalization.