

Giovanni Battista Ermacora

Giovanni Battista Ermacora (1858-1898) was an Italian scientist who showed early brilliance in research into electricity but devoted most of his time to telepathy and other psychical phenomena before his untimely death aged 39.

Life and Career

Giovanni Battista Ermacora was born in 1858 in Fagagna (Udine), to a wealthy landowning family.^[1] He showed early brilliance in science studies at school and in 1881 graduated from the University of Padua in physics and mathematics with a thesis on electrostatic phenomena. In 1882 he published a treatise *I Fenomeni Elettrostatici*, his early work in physics and electricity gaining him recognition as a possible successor to Michael Faraday and James Clerk Maxwell.^[2] In 1883 he was appointed corresponding member of the Accademia dei Concordi of Rovigo, and the following year of the Accademia of Sciences, Letters and Arts of Udine. He was also a member of other societies of natural sciences, electricity and astronomy.

Ermacora also pursued interests in photography, music and astronomy, introducing mechanical innovations. However, his most lasting contribution was to psychical research (see below). He died aged 39, killed by a relative as a result of a family quarrel.

Psychical Research

In 1892 Ermacora published a monograph in a Turin spiritualist magazine with the title *Remarkable phenomena of mediumship observed without professional mediums*. Along with many other European scientists he became interested in reports of séance phenomena associated with Eusapia Palladino, a woman from Naples.

Initially sceptical of reports in her favour by Cesare Lombroso, he joined investigations and came to believe that the phenomena were genuine.^[3]

An attempt with the scientist Gorgio Finzi in 1895 to found an Italian Society for Psychical Research failed. However, the pair then founded the *Rivista di Studi Psicichici (Journal of Psychic Studies)*, which covered similar topics to those covered by the British Society for Psychical Research in its Journal and Proceedings and won praise from FWH Myers as being 'more carefully and critically conducted' than most publications of its type.^[4]

Ermacora had a particular interest in telepathy, which he wrote about at length in various publications. In an article published in the SPR's Proceedings^[5] he presented over seventy experiments, translated and abridged, which he believed were of 'sufficient importance to arrest the attention of modern psychical researchers, and to encourage them to further investigations in this direction'.^[6] His book *La Telepatia*, published posthumously, gave examples taken from *Rivista di Studi Psicichici* and from experimental reports published in the SPR.^[7] The book won praise from an SPR reviewer^[8] and Myers used several of Ermacora's cases in his *Human Personality and its Survival of Bodily Death*.^[9]

Melvyn Willin

Selected Publications

I Fenomeni Elettrostatici (1882). Padova: A. Draghi Libraio-Editore.

I fatti spiritici e le ipotesi affrettate. Osservazioni sopra un articolo del Prof. C. Lombroso (1892). Padova: Drucker.

A veridical message given by automatic writing (1892). *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research* 5, 299-301.

A case report (1893). In F.W.H. Myers' 'Subliminal consciousness'. *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research* 9, 68-70.

Rapport de la commission réunie à Milan pour l'étude des phénomènes psychiques (1893, with A. Aksakof, G. Schiaparelli, C. du Prel et al). *Annales des Sciences Psychiques* 3, 39-64. Paris: Alcan.

Telepathic dreams experimentally induced (1895). *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research* 11, 235-308.

La Telepatia (1898). Padova: Stab. Tip. L. Crescini E C.

Cases reported (1903). In F.W.H. Myers' *Human Personality and its Survival of Bodily Death*. London: Longmans, Green, and Co., (vol. i): 671; (vol. ii): 159-60, 446-47, 624-27.

Literature

Aksakof, A, Schiaparelli, G., du Prel, C. et al (1893). Rapport de la commission réunie à Milan pour l'étude des phénomènes psychiques. *Annales des Sciences Psychiques* 3, 39-64. Paris: Alcan.

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Fodor, N. (1934). *Encyclopedia of Psychic Science*. London: Arthurs Press Limited.

Gale, H. (1899). Review: *La Telepatia*. *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research* 14, 392-93.

Leaf, W. (1895). Review: *Rivista di Studi Psiclici* edited by G.B. Ermacora and G. Finzi. *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research* 8, 171-72.

Myers, F.W.H. (1898). Obituary: Dr G.B. Ermacora. *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research* 8, 244.

Myers, F.W.H. (1903). *Human Personality and its Survival of Bodily Death*. London: Longmans, Green, and Co.

Porro, Professor (1909). Giovanni Battista Ermacora: A pioneer of Spiritism. *The Annals of Psychical Science* viii, 647-56.

Endnotes

Footnotes

1. ^ Alberti, P. (2016). All information in this section is drawn from this source unless otherwise stated.
2. ^ Fodor (1934), 129.
3. ^ Aksakof et al (1893).
4. ^ Myers (1898), 244.
5. ^ Ermacora (1895), 235-308.
6. ^ Ermacora (1895), 236.
7. ^ Ermacora (1898).
8. ^ Gale (1899), 393.
9. ^ Myers (1903), 159-60; 446-47; 624-27.