



ORIGINAL ARTICLE

The personal and professional face of the Basque urologist José Julián Guimón Rezola (1898–1980)^{☆,☆☆}



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Abstract

Objective: To understand certain outstanding aspects of the life of the Basque surgeon and urologist Julián Guimón Rezola. His personal and bibliographic documentary legacy helps reconstruct his works and personal character.

Material and methods: We analysed the written works of Julián Guimón Rezola and a collection of documents, letters, photographs, illustrations and objects from his personal and professional life, accessed through his family. We analysed the content of the author's main publications and related the documents to historic facts.

Results: Julián Guimón Rezola was an upstanding individual, a father, a family man and a nationalist before the struggle, who was dedicated to his work and particularly to teaching and health management. He started his urological career under the direction of Francisco Pérez Andrés in the Santo Civil Hospital of Bilbao. He endured unjust repression for participating in the creation of the Basque University in 1936. Sentenced to life imprisonment, he started a new life as a reclusive surgeon in the prison of Puerto de Santa María. He was pardoned three years later but was deprived of all his offices and disqualified from civil service. He founded his clinic and maintained his training in the United States. He presided over the Medical-Surgical Insurance Group of Bilbao (*Igualatorio Médico-Quirúrgico*) and, on 2 occasions, the Bilbao Academy of Medical Sciences. He was considerably active professionally and focused on social medicine and modern urology. He wrote 104 scientific articles, a number of which were of considerable quality and impact. We observed an evolution in the subject matter of these articles, all with exquisite professionalism and humanity. He corresponded with renowned practitioners and was admitted to the Spanish Royal National Academy of Medicine in 1970. He ended his career with an appointment as honorary professor at the University of the Basque Country 2 years before his death.

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^{☆☆} Dedicated to D. José Guimón Ugartechea (1943–2016), in memoriam.

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PALABRAS CLAVE

Historia de la Urología; Julián Guimón Rezola; Hospital de Basurto; Universidad del País Vasco; Urología española

Conclusions: Surgeon urologist Julián Guimón Rezola was a fundamental figure in Basque and Spanish medicine in the 20th century. He was the victim of a severe reprisal, not so much for political issues but rather for his institutional loyalty. However, he regained his professional and academic prestige. His written works reveal modern medicine with a considerable social foundation and the mind of a brilliant health manager.

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Semblante humano y profesional del urólogo vasco José Julián Guimón y Rezola (1898–1980)

Resumen

Objetivo: Dar a conocer algunos aspectos sobresalientes de la vida del cirujano y urólogo vasco Julián Guimón Rezola. Su legado documental personal y bibliográfico permite recomponer su obra y semblante humano.

Material y métodos: Se analiza la obra escrita de Julián Guimón Rezola y una colección de documentos, cartas, fotografías, ilustraciones y objetos sobre su vida personal y profesional, accedidos a través de su familia. Se analiza el contenido de las principales publicaciones del autor y los documentos se relacionan con los hechos históricos acontecidos.

Resultados: Persona recta, padre de familia, nacionalista antes de la contienda, comprometido con el trabajo y particularmente con la docencia y la gestión sanitaria. Inició su carrera urológica bajo la dirección de Francisco Pérez Andrés en el Santo Hospital Civil de Bilbao. Sufrió injusta represión por participar en la creación de la Universidad Vasca en 1936, condenado a cadena perpetua inició una nueva vida como cirujano recluso en la prisión de Puerto de Santa María. Fue indultado tres años después, pero desposeído de todos sus cargos e inhabilitado para la función pública. Fundó su clínica y actualizó formación en los Estados Unidos. Presidió el Iguatorio Médico-Quirúrgico y también en dos ocasiones la Academia de Ciencias Médicas de Bilbao. Desarrolló gran actividad profesional centrada en medicina social y urología moderna. Escribió 104 trabajos científicos, algunos de ellos de gran calidad y repercusión. Se aprecia una evolución temática en los mismos y siempre exquisita profesionalidad y humanidad. Mantuvo correspondencia con prestigiosos profesionales e ingresó en la Real Academia Nacional de Medicina en 1970. Finalizó su carrera nombrado profesor honorario de la Universidad del País Vasco dos años antes de su fallecimiento.

Conclusiones: Julián Guimón Rezola, cirujano urólogo, fue una figura fundamental en la medicina vasca y española del siglo XX. Fue severamente represaliado, no tanto por cuestiones políticas como por lealtad institucional. Recuperó el prestigio profesional y académico. Su obra escrita muestra una medicina moderna cargada de gran trasfondo social y la mentalidad de un brillante gestor sanitario.

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Introduction

The city of Bilbao underwent a major demographic transformation at the end of the 19th century and became an industrial city that attracted large numbers of emigrants from all over Spain. In 1898 the construction of the Santo Civil Hospital of Bilbao began because the old Hospital of Atxuri was too small.^{1,2} In 1919, the first medical internship formed by boarding students was created in the Santo Civil Hospital of Bilbao, thanks to the perseverance and prestige of its first director Dr. Enrique de Areilza Arregui (1860–1926). Its aim was to improve hospital care and enable Biscayan professionals of the last academic years to complete their training in Bilbao, with the recognition of the University of Valladolid. In 1922, he created the body of volunteer clinic assistants, which meant the definitive institutionalization of healthcare training and led to the double reform of healthcare and the teaching of medicine in Biscay.

Enrique Areilza's work transcended the intellectual world, getting to be considered the most illustrious of the doctors of the 20th century in Bilbao.³

In 1933, under the direction of Dr. Jesús Arrese Aspe (1879–1943), the members of the charity board were replaced and the hospital was technically reorganized, a nursing school was created and the center was prepared for the establishment of its own Faculty of Medicine. The Basque Government, presided over by the Basque Prime Minister José Antonio Aguirre, inaugurated the first Faculty of Medicine and the Basque University on December 1, 1936. The Civil War led to its ephemeral life and closure with the capture of Bilbao in 1937. Nearly four decades later, in 1970, the Faculty of Medicine was reopened, followed by the School of Nursing and Physiotherapy at the Santo Civil Hospital of Bilbao, which in 1992 was renamed Basurto Hospital and integrated into the Basque Health Service (Osakidetza) preserving its own model of economic management.⁴



Figure 1 Some doctors of the Santo Civil Hospital of Bilbao in the Sociedad Bilbaína on August 4, 1927 (from top to bottom and from left to right): Ángel López, Julio Laguna, Abiño Saldaña, Cesáreo Díaz-Emparanza, Alonso Guereta, Álvarez Ipenza, Ramón Rodríguez-Mata, Jacinto Valero, José Salaverri, Pedro Toledo, Eusebio García-Alonso, Carmelo Irurita, Daniel Errazu, Felipe Léniz, Julián Guimón, Antonio Zulueta, Julio Atucha, Pedro Urruticoechea and Juan Viar.

Material and method

A documentary and biographical review has been carried out, taking as a fundamental basis the texts published by the History Office of the Spanish Association of Urology (AEU), the Seminar on the History of Basque Medicine and others.⁵⁻⁹ The documentary collection of Julián Guimón was accessed by courtesy of José Guimón Ugartechea (1943–2016), professor of Psychiatry at the University of the Basque Country. Archived material was analyzed and organized in folders and boxes: photographs, notes, handwritten notes, typed writings, illustrations, offprints, medical journals, letters, invoices, press clippings and medical records. In the majority of the materials, the owner's handwriting can be recognized. Everything had been carefully organized, labeled and stored for more than three decades.

The documents were dated and analyzed in relation to the well-known facts of his biography, taking as their main reference the information provided by the revised writings and the testimony of José Guimón Ugartechea. Similarly, a bibliographic research of the author has been carried out, and 50 of the 104 articles and conferences published between 1918 and 1976 have been read critically. These articles dealt with surgery, urology, surgical technique, lithiasis, urological cancer and history.

Results

Training and clinical positions (1898–1936)

José Julián Guimón Rezola was born on January 11, 1898 in Vergara. His father, a dentist, liberal and mayor of Eibar, led an austere life and had a reputation for being demanding, upright and fair. Julián Guimón studied at Vergara Public Schools. He completed the Secondary School on his own and finished Baccalaureate at the age of fifteen. He studied his degree at the Faculty of Medicine in Valladolid. He was one year in advance, since he studied simultaneously the preparatory and the first year of the degree. He finished his degree at the age of 21 with twenty-one A's, seventeen honours and an Extraordinary Prize of Degree. He was intern by public competition being the first in Professor Goyena's Chair of Surgical Pathology.

On January 1, 1919, after sitting a public competition on merits, he was designated intern of Basurto Hospital in the Third Clinic of Surgery and Urology, where he began in the urological specialty with Francisco Pérez Andrés (1886–1951). When he finished, he settled as an independent physician in Eibar, where he gathered as he could the necessary set of instruments to perform home interventions in remote villages. In 1922 he was financed by Dr. Ciriaco Aguirre Alberdi (1872–1933), to travel to *Krankenhaus Am Urban* in Berlin, where he learned corpse surgery

with Hans Wildegans (1888–1967), radiology with Hermann Blankenstein (1829–1910), obstetrics with Hugo Karl Liepmann (1863–1925) and hemotherapy with Hans Hirschfeld (1873–1944). He also spent six weeks at the *Hôpital de l' Ile* in Bern to learn about the diagnosis of urological surgery with Professor Hans Wildbolz (1873–1940). When he returned to Eibar, he set up the Arrate Clinic, a small surgical clinic, where he worked for four years. In 1926, financed by his friend Dr Francisco Belausteguigoitia Landaluce (1897–1980),¹⁰ he travelled again to the *Institut für Krebsforschung Berlin-Dahlem*, a monographic cancer research center run by Ludwig Halberstädter (1876–1949), a Jewish German radiologist who pioneered the use of thorium as an oncological therapy.¹¹ He also visited *Allgemeines Krankenhaus*, another prestigious institution in Vienna to learn from the renowned pioneer in oncological reconstructive surgery Anton Freiherr von Eiselsberg (1860–1939).¹²

In 1927 Julián Guimón returned to Bilbao and sat for public competition for a position in the third Clinic of Surgery and Urology of the Santo Civil Hospital of Bilbao. The position was granted to the military doctor Eusebio García Alonso, who later participated in the Civil War as sergeant in the Blue Division. Julián Guimón was named his assistant (Fig. 1). This same year, he received an A for the presentation of his doctoral thesis entitled “*El tratamiento intratumoral del cáncer con Torion X*” (The intratumoral treatment of cancer with Torion X), in Madrid, in front of a tribunal presided over by Sebastián Recaséns Girol (1863–1933), the dean of the Faculty of Medicine of Madrid¹³ (Fig. 2). On April, 1 and 13, 1927, he presented his project for the foundation of a cancer institute in Bilbao at the Academy of Medical Sciences of Bilbao.¹⁴ On April, 26, 1933, he gave the conference “*El porvenir de la lucha sanitaria en Vizcaya*” (The future of the struggle of the health service in Biscay) by radio, following the celebration of the first week of hospitals. It was a conference full of liberal ideas. He joined *Eusko Abertzale Ekintza-Acción Nacionalista Vasca* (EAE-ANV), a Basque political party of nationalist, republican and pro-independence ideology, founded in 1930 by his friend Justo Gárate Arriola (1900–1994) and other Basque intellectuals.

Between 1927 and 1935 he operated on more than 3000 patients. In 1934 he was elected president of the Academy of Medical Sciences of Bilbao for three years. In 1935 he was promoted to the position of Head of Surgical Service and in 1936, after sitting for a public competition, he got the position of Director of the fourth Surgical Clinic in the specialty of Urology. His 31-page work dealt with the median nerve and diabetes in surgery. That same year he was appointed deputy director of Basurto Hospital and left ANV because he disagreed with the communist forces. He was a member of the committee in charge of the organization of the Faculty of Medicine and was nominated for the Chair of Surgical Pathology by the General Board of the Basque University. The classes were only taught from December 9, 1936 to January 8, 1937.

Between 1919 and 1936 Julián Guimón published 65 articles, 18 (27.7%) on urological subjects (incontinence, lithiasis, renal tuberculosis, endovenous urography and traumatism). In 1928, he was named member of the Medical-Surgical Academy of Gipuzkoa for the work “*Retenciones de orina y espina bífida occulta*” (Urinary retention and spina bifida occulta).¹⁵ The quality of writing in his doctoral thesis

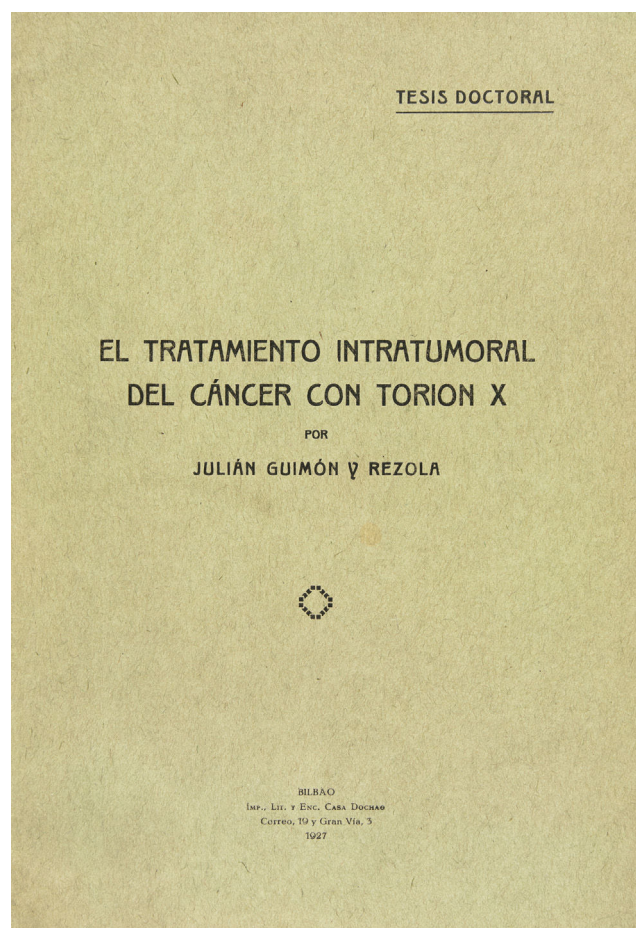


Figure 2 Cover of the doctoral thesis of Julián Guimón, printed in 1927 at Casa Dochao (Correo 19, Bilbao); also published in *Revista Clínica de Bilbao*, June 1927, volume II, number 6, pages 241–271.

and an interesting work on the measurement of operative risk were of note.¹⁶ The description of the cancers in tar workers^{17,18} led to having correspondence with the director of the Company of the Basque Railways, who was interested in the work on irritation and cancer and took the appropriate preventive measures at the briquette factory in Durango (Fig. 3).

Sentencing and imprisonment (1937–1940)

The life of the Basque University was short as it ended with the Francoist army entering Bilbao in June 1937. This year, an event that would totally change Julián Guimón's life took place, he was imprisoned in Basurto Hospital, accused of Military Rebellion, and sentenced to life imprisonment, with the accessory penalty of absolute disqualification during his sentence. The reason for this conviction was, according to his sentence, that “he was appointed and acted as deputy director of Bilbao Hospital, promoting the creation of the Basque University and the appointment of nurses “*emakumes*” (Supplementary material). The court martial for the crime of rebellion was held on June 20 and the sentence was approved and declared final on July 12, 1937. The defendant only testified once, being his testimony brief and

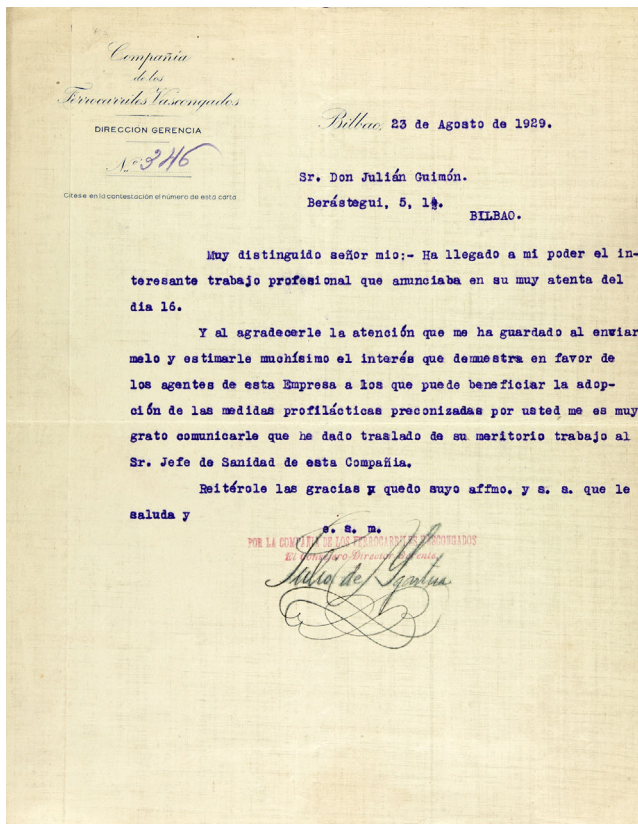


Figure 3 Maintained correspondence with Mr. Julio de Igartúa, manager of the Compañía de los Ferrocarriles Vascongados, who succeeded in taking measures to prevent the genesis of cancer in the workers of the tar factory in Durango (Vizcaya).

coerced. He was taken to the prison of Dueso in Santander and later to Puerto de Santa María in Cádiz where he was to serve a life sentence. He prepared a 15-page document to recapitulate his proceedings in case of a possible revision that never took place ([Supplementary material](#)).

Julián Guimón worked in prison as a doctor and surgeon, earning the respect and affection of companions, officials and inhabitants of the town. The fact that he was called to intervene urgently a soldier's daughter in Seville was decisive for a review of his case. We do not know which day of 1940 the authorities let him leave without handcuffs and with no need to return. The legacy of that terrible experience were the drawing of his cell with the suitcases he took to Cadiz on the gate fence and the earthenware pitcher, with the signatures of his 47 fellow prisoners and a poem dedicated to him. On May 22, 1943, the Rehabilitation and Accessory Penalties Commission commuted the sentence of life imprisonment to six years' imprisonment because of his good conduct and on December 27, 1944, the relevant Ministerial Order was signed. On June 22, 1950, his criminal record was expunged.

Guimón Clinic and Academy of Medical Sciences (1941–1980)

He returned to Bilbao at the age of 42, with two children and two others who were born later. The Charity Board of the Santo Civil Hospital of Bilbao told him 'that he was

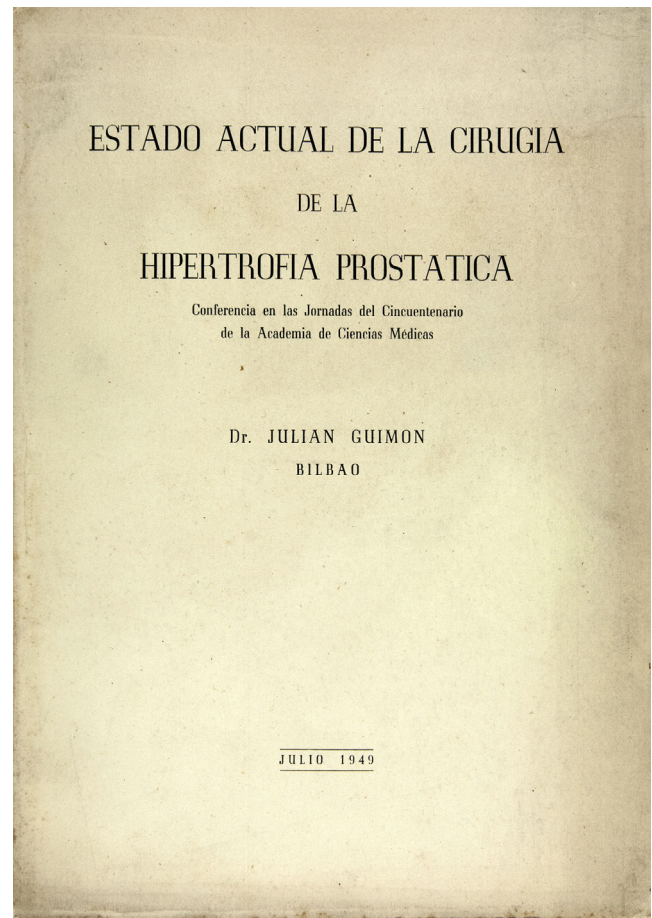


Figure 4 Cover of the Monograph entitled Current State of Surgery of Prostatic Hypertrophy, printed in gravure ARTE, Bilbao. It corresponds to the conference given at the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Academy of Medical Sciences of Bilbao, July 1949.

dispossessed of all his medical charges'. Since he did not have a center to practice his profession, he founded a small clinic with the name of Clínica Julián Guimón Rezola, which he expanded in 1950. In 1947, he traveled to the United States, where he spent several months in some of the most prestigious hospitals at the time. He took advantage of the opportunity to purchase a large amount of medical supplies in New York to renovate his clinic, as evidenced by bills for the purchase of equipment and consumable goods worth more than \$1385.

His first scientific publication in freedom is a magnificent monograph on "*Estado actual de la cirugía en la hipertrofia prostática*" (The current state of surgery in prostatic hypertrophy) published in July 1949 (32 pages, 248 references and 44 illustrations), possibly his best scientific contribution ([Fig. 4](#)). The iconography that he prepared for this work reveals a meticulous and detailed character, and great knowledge in the different modalities of prostate surgery. Among his unpublished sketches, the design of a hemostasis probe for adenomectomy ([Fig. 5](#)) stands out. Between 1952 and 1972 he published 65 articles, 34 (52.3%) on urological subjects (prostatic hypertrophy, lithiasis, cancer, reconstructive surgery and renovascular hypertension). He collaborated in relaunching the official journal of the

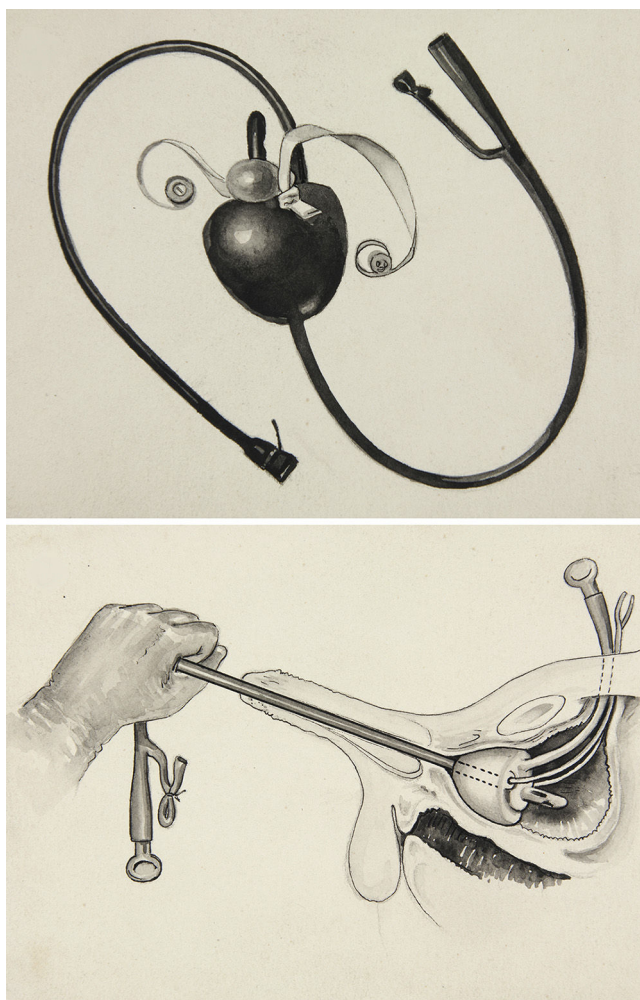


Figure 5 Illustrations not included in the monograph *Current State of Prostatic Surgery* showing nib and charcoal with hemostatic probe design and placement under traction.

Academy of Medical Sciences of Bilbao, the new *Gaceta Médica del Norte*,¹⁹ and also published in *Archivos Españoles de Urología*.^{20–25} The type of surgeries he performed in the 1950s and 1960s were mainly urological, but he also performed general surgery and gynecological interventions. The most practiced surgeries were adenomectomy in its different versions, diverticulectomy, transurethral resection, surgery of renal and ureteral lithiasis and total and partial nephrectomy.

Aware of his public disqualification in the 1950s, he obtained by public competition a position in an ambulatory of the Social Security, which he did not manage to practice. Possibly as a tribute to the economic hardship he and his family had suffered in the previous decade, he opened a free consultation for the patients without resources at his clinic. As the co-founder and president of *Igualatorio Médico-Quirúrgico* (1951–1957), he launched the journal *Anales del Igualatorio Médico-Quirúrgico* in 1953. He became again president of the Academy of Medical Sciences in 1967–68. He joined the Royal Academy of Medicine in 1970, with a speech about his mentor Enrique Areilza. Julián Guimón's institutional collaboration with the Spanish Association of Urology did not take place until he was

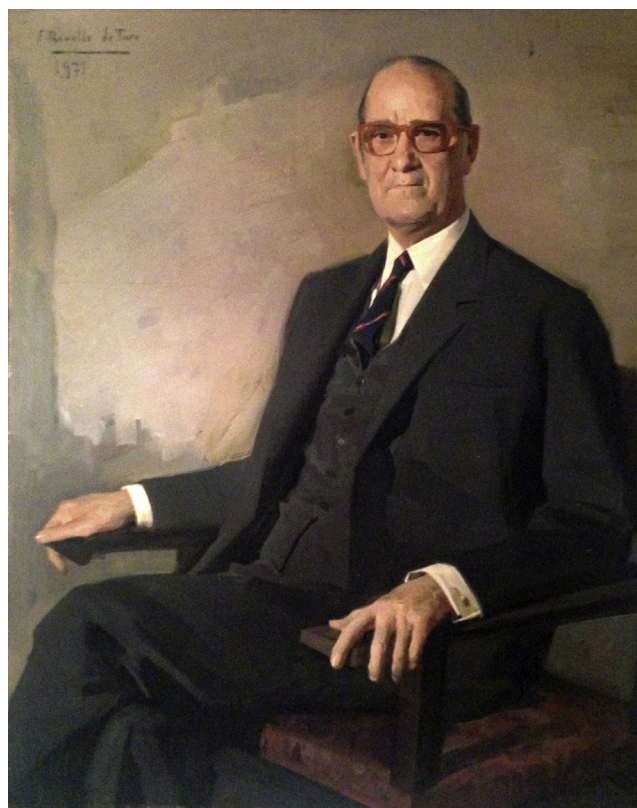


Figure 6 Julián Guimón oil portrait made by the artist from Málaga Félix Revello de Toro (1926–) in 1971.

71 years old when on January 24, 1970, almost at the end of his career, he prepared and moderated a round table on testicular cancer. This fact reveals the official austracism of his career throughout Franco's dictatorship. On the other hand, he maintained interesting correspondence with nationally renowned urologists such as Juan Díez-Yanguas Iza (1923–2002), Luis Cifuentes Delatte (1907–2005), Pedro Páramo González (1929–1999) and Rafael Benlloch Navarro (1921–2013).

In 1974 he gave the inaugural speech of the 1974–1975 academic year of the Royal Academy of Medicine of Bilbao, on congenital renal and ureteral malformations.²⁶ In 1975 he wrote his last article "*Cirugía en caseríos vascos*" (Surgery in Basque farmhouses) recalling his professional exploits of the 1920s.²⁷ In the academic year 1977–78 he was honoured as Honorary Professor of the University of the Basque Country for the same merits he was once sentenced to life imprisonment. The man of green eyes died in Bilbao in 1980 surrounded by his children and loved ones (Fig. 6). His surgical instruments are exhibited at the Basque Museum of History of Medicine and Science in Leioa (Vizcaya).

Discussion

Public workers in the Republican zone and those who left their jobs in times of war were prosecuted, and frequently imprisoned or disqualified from getting their jobs back. As a consequence, many political and professional revenges were planned. In Madrid, the 'Court of Political Responsibilities' was established. It was dominated by Falangists and was in charge of determining who should

be publicly restored or punished. This Court asked the College of Physicians of each Spanish province for a list of doctors who 'have distinguished themselves during the preparation or development of the red subversion by high level positions or exceptional administrative or managerial functions'.²⁸ There were many investigations carried out on urologists who did not serve on the rebel side for working in Republican territory. After the Civil War, the certificate of exemption from political responsibility was an inexcusable condition to be eligible for academic jobs or public assistance positions.²⁹ The intellectuals who did not show sympathy for the regime were called upon to swear allegiance to the fundamental principles of the national movement and many underwent repression or exile.³⁰

José Julián Guimón Rezola had great organizational skills and discipline in his work and had an excellent formation. The vocation of working in institutional service and the desire to carve out an important career determined his first professional years. He was condemned and stripped of his office for dual loyalty to the lawful Government of the Republic of Spain and the Basque Government. In spite of his serious problems, he was able to recover professionally with integrity. Having joined ANV was the pretext of his conviction, but the real cause was his loyalty to the Basque institutions and identity. His professional maturity was marked by the ostracism he had to face as a result of the retaliation he suffered, relying only on the protection and recognition from the Basque society in the post-war period. The Spanish Association of Urology recognized his professional prestige only at the end of his working life. His social vision of Medicine remained constant throughout his professional journey and can be felt in several of the speeches he gave ([Supplementary material](#)). His written work reflects the characteristic character of a great entrepreneur, the tireless apprentice who characterizes a good teacher. He was one of the most important medical figures of Basque and Spanish Urology of the 20th century.

Conflict of interest

The author declares that he has no conflict of interest.

Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data associated with this article can be found, in the online version, at [doi:10.1016/j.acuroe.2018.02.003](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.acuroe.2018.02.003).

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