

# Baquet

Authored by  
**mohammad looti**

September 22, 2025

## RECOMMENDED CITATION

mohammad looti (2025). *Baquet*. PSYCHOLOGICAL SCALES. Retrieved from <https://scales.arabpsychology.com/?p=26797>

## Baquet

**Primary Disciplinary Field(s):** History of Medicine, Early Psychology, Alternative Therapies, History of Science

### 1. Core Definition

The **baquet**, often translated as "tub" or "trough," was a central apparatus employed by Austrian physician Franz Anton Mesmer in the late 18th century as part of his therapeutic system of **animal magnetism**, later known as mesmerism. Introduced around 1780, this large, communal container was designed to facilitate the purported transfer of a universal magnetic fluid, which Mesmer believed permeated all bodies and could be manipulated for healing purposes. It represented a significant innovation in Mesmer's practice, allowing him to treat multiple patients simultaneously in a structured, theatrical group setting.

Physically, the baquet was typically a substantial wooden tub, often elaborately decorated, filled with a complex array of materials. These contents included iron rods, various glass bottles, magnetized metal filings, and crushed glass, all immersed in water. The presence of these diverse materials was intended to enhance the accumulation and distribution of the magnetic fluid. Protruding from the baquet were numerous iron rods, which patients would apply to parts of their body experiencing ailments, particularly those associated with conditions like **hysteria**. Mesmer asserted that by establishing this physical connection, the magnetic fluid could flow from the baquet, through the rods, and into the patient, correcting internal imbalances and promoting healing.

### 2. Etymology and Historical Development

The term "baquet" is French for "tub" or "bucket," accurately describing the apparatus's primary form. Its development was a crucial phase in Mesmer's career, marking a transition from individual, hands-on magnetic passes to a more industrialized, group-based therapeutic approach. Mesmer, having initially gained notoriety in Vienna, moved to Paris in 1778, where his theories of animal magnetism rapidly captivated the elite of French society. The demand for his treatments soon outstripped his capacity for individual sessions.

In response to this overwhelming popularity and the need to scale his practice, Mesmer conceived the baquet as a practical solution for conducting his magnetic treatments on a larger scale. By 1780, the baquet had become a hallmark of his Parisian clinics, transforming his therapeutic sessions into grand, almost theatrical, public spectacles. Patients would gather around the baquet, often holding hands to form a chain, further amplifying, in Mesmer's view, the flow of the magnetic fluid. This communal aspect not only increased efficiency but also intensified the psychological and

social dynamics of the treatment, contributing to the powerful effects observed.

### 3. Key Characteristics

The baquet's design and operational principles were deeply intertwined with Mesmer's theory of animal magnetism. Its key characteristics were multifaceted, encompassing both its physical composition and its intended energetic function. Foremost among these was its capacity to serve as a reservoir and conductor for the universal magnetic fluid. Mesmer posited that the diverse materials within the tub--iron, glass, and water--were particularly adept at absorbing, concentrating, and radiating this vital fluid, which he believed was essential for bodily health and well-being (Britannica, Franz Anton Mesmer).

Another crucial characteristic was the use of iron rods, which acted as conduits. Patients would press these rods directly against affected areas of their bodies, such as their stomach or head, to draw the magnetic fluid into their system. This direct application was believed to facilitate the re-establishment of a harmonious flow of fluid within the patient, thereby alleviating symptoms. The collective and ritualistic atmosphere surrounding the baquet sessions was also a critical characteristic. Patients, often seated in dimly lit rooms with soft music, were encouraged to enter a trance-like state, culminating in what Mesmer termed a "**crisis**"--a convulsive reaction believed to be a necessary part of the healing process, expelling diseased fluids and restoring balance.

### 4. Significance and Impact

The baquet held immense significance in the history of medicine and psychology, primarily as the most iconic symbol of **mesmerism**, a phenomenon that profoundly influenced public imagination and scientific discourse in the late 18th century. It popularized the idea of invisible forces influencing health and disease, challenging conventional medical practices of the time. While scientifically discredited, the baquet's use highlighted the power of suggestion, expectation, and group dynamics in therapeutic contexts, laying an unintentional groundwork for the study of the placebo effect and the mind-body connection in healing.

Moreover, the baquet's public demonstrations and the dramatic "crises" they induced contributed to the cultural fascination with altered states of consciousness. It indirectly influenced the later development of practices such as hypnotism, which emerged from the attempts to understand the non-magnetic, purely psychological effects observed during mesmerism sessions. The widespread popularity of the baquet forced the scientific community to confront novel therapeutic claims, leading to important investigations into the nature of scientific evidence and the distinction between genuine physiological effects and psychological influences. Although ultimately deemed fraudulent in its specific claims, the baquet's legacy underscores the enduring human quest for healing and the complex interplay between belief, ritual, and recovery (Davies, J. D., 2005).

## 5. Debates and Criticisms

Despite its widespread popularity, the baquet and Mesmer's theory of animal magnetism faced substantial skepticism and criticism, culminating in a pivotal scientific investigation. The most significant challenge came from the French Royal Commission, appointed in 1784 by King Louis XVI. This commission comprised eminent scientists and physicians of the era, including **Benjamin Franklin, Antoine Lavoisier, Joseph-Ignace Guillotin, and Jean-Sylvain Bailly**. Their objective was to rigorously examine the existence of Mesmer's magnetic fluid and the efficacy of his treatments.

Through a series of carefully designed experiments, which foreshadowed modern double-blind controlled trials, the commission systematically tested Mesmer's claims. They observed that patients experienced similar effects whether they were exposed to magnetized objects or non-magnetized ones, provided they believed they were being treated. Conversely, when patients were unknowingly exposed to magnetized items without belief, no effects were observed. The commission concluded that there was no evidence for the existence of an invisible magnetic fluid and that any observed effects, particularly the dramatic "crises," were solely attributable to the **power of imagination**, suggestion, and imitation. This landmark report effectively debunked animal magnetism as a scientific phenomenon, leading to Mesmer's eventual decline in influence, though his ideas continued to inspire various alternative healing practices for decades.

### Further Reading

Britannica: Franz Anton Mesmer

Davies, J. D. (2005). Mesmerism, Trance and the Placebo Effect. Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine, 98(3), 116-118.