

UFO Chronicle

In Memoriam Antonio Ribera, Spain's Great UFO Pioneer

In a letter published in the September 2001 issue, English researcher Hilary Evans made some comments to my May "UFO Chronicle" about the ongoing controversy over the declassified UFO documents of the Spanish Air Force. Evans pointed out that I had not mentioned the contribution of Vicente Ballester Olmos in pursuing the official declassification process. Well, that is true, but only partially. My previous 1996 column on the Spanish documents, mentioned at the beginning of my article, did cover in detail Ballester Olmos' work. I didn't want to repeat covered terrain, so the May column dealt with other perspectives and contributions to the Spanish scene.

The second point in Hilary Evans's letter had to do with who is Spain's most famous UFO writer. The title should not go to J. J. Benitez, as stated in my article, but to Spain's veteran ufologist and author Antonio Ribera. In terms of sheer number of book sales and general name recognition, there is no doubt that Benitez is far better known than Ribera. Hilary Evans is a great Fortean researcher, but I don't think he's seen lately the bookstore windows in places like Quito or Santiago, as I have. Benitez's books are everywhere on display and many were major bestsellers in the Spanish language market.

Ribera, on the other hand, was undeniably the dean and true pioneer of Spanish ufology. His dozens of books, published over the span of four decades, had enormous influence in forming whole generations of Spanish and Latin American ufologists. He passed away last September 23 after battling various illnesses during recent years. His deep knowledge of the subject and his great humor for those who knew him will be sorely missed. I met him on two occasions: at an International UFO Congress in Tucson, Arizona, in 1991, and



Antonio Ribera (center) at the El Vendrell UFO Conference in Spain in 1991 next to (right) the editor of *Año Cero*, Enrique de Vicente

later that same year at a Spanish conference in the Catalan town of El Vendrell, not far from his home in Sant Feliu de Codines in the region of Barcelona.

Ribera was best known in this country for his contribution to the strange and long-standing affair known as UMMO. His 20 or so books, however, covered just about every aspect of ufology including abductions, official investigations, landing cases, historical and archaeological approaches, etc. Unfortunately, with the exception of one of his UMMO books, none of the others were published in English. But some were translated to various other languages, including even Arabic.

Antonio Ribera y Jordá was born in Barcelona on January 15, 1920, the son of a prominent journalist. He studied at the Technical Institute Eulalia, the Ausias March School, and the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters at the University of Barcelona, although his higher education was interrupted by the Spanish Civil War. He became an English translator during the difficult post-war period, and his knowledge of languages would later be put to excellent use when he became the first Spanish author

to chronicle the UFO events in the U.S.A., England, France and elsewhere. In 1953, he became interested in undersea exploration and was co-founder of CRIS (Centro de Recuperación e Investigaciones Submarinas), the first underwater exploration center in Spain.

In 1958, he founded the CEI (Center of Interplanetary Studies) with three colleagues in Barcelona, which also became the pioneer UFO center in the Iberian Peninsula. His first UFO book, *Unknown Objects in the Sky*, was published in 1961. It was soon followed by dozens of other volumes such as *Flying Saucers in Iberoamerica and Spain*, 1968; his classic, *The Great Enigma of Flying Saucers*, 1975; and several tomes in the 1980s like *Encounters with Humanoids*, *The Machines from the Cosmos*, *Kidnapped by Extraterrestrials*, *Thirty Years of UFOs*, etc. There were of course also his books dealing with the UMMO affair such as *A Perfect Case*, *The Mystery of UMMO*, *UMMO Report to Earth*, and others. He also wrote regularly for Spain's top paranormal magazines *Más Allá* and *Año Cero*, and in its heyday for England's *Flying Saucer Review*.