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Pavlov Was "Mugged"  
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Ivan Pavlov and his son, Vladimir, were robbed of all their funds (apparently, between \$1,500 and \$2,000 in cash) soon after they boarded a train in Grand Central Station sometime between July 7, and July 14, 1923. Reports of this robbery in popular and scholarly literature have varied significantly, and obvious fabrication occurred in one of the best known accounts. Hence, Pavlov was "mugged" literally and figuratively. In this article, I tried to establish what actually occurred as well as to address some related circumstances, such as how Ivan Pavlov obtained the money that was stolen.

Historical anecdotes can enrich lectures and textbooks, and indeed, they are often best remembered. So, it is important that they be reported accurately. In some cases, that may be difficult as illustrated by the significant variability in accounts of the mugging of Pavlov in America.

The account in *The New York Times* on July 14, 1923, appears to have been the first published report of the incident, and it was reprinted verbatim in *Science* on July 23, 1923 ("Professor Pavlov's," 1923).

He and his son [Vladimir] had hardly taken their seats on the train in the Grand Central Station when three men set upon the old man and snatched from him his pocketbook containing all their funds, \$2,000. The porter and the son attempted to catch them but were unsuccessful, and the old man and his son left the train perplexed as to what they should do in their predicament. They finally got in touch with Dr. P. A. Levene of the Rockefeller Institute, and since then have been the guests of the institute. ("Russian scientist," 1923, p. 3)

*Time*, July 23, 1923, also reported that Pavlov "was robbed at the Grand Central Terminal of \$2,000" ("Pavloff," 1923, p. 20).

Cannon (1945/1968), whom the Pavlovs visited within days of the robbery, later provided the following description.

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<sup>1</sup> A poster with this title and general content has been accepted for presentation at the 1995 meeting of Cheiron, The International Society for the History of the Behavioral and Social Sciences, to be held June 22-25 at Bowdoin College, Brunswick, Maine. Address correspondence to Roger K. Thomas, Department of Psychology, University of Georgia, Athens, GA 30602-3013 or send email to "rkthomas@uga.cc.uga.edu."

At the Grand Central Station they entered an empty coach of the New Haven train and were followed by three rough-looking men. One stood at the door as a guard. While the son was lifting the luggage up toward the rack, the other two seized Pavlov and quickly searched him. They snatched the wallet from a coat pocket of the defenseless man—he was near his seventy-fourth birthday—and before anything could be done, made their escape. In the wallet was over fifteen hundred dollars, possibly the remnant of the American contribution. (p. 185)

Regarding the "American contribution," Cannon (1945/1968) wrote:

At the time of the Russian Revolution, when it was reported that Pavlov was suffering from inability to get food, I was able to collect about two-thousand dollars which was sent to Professor Robert Tigerstedt at Helsingfors to provide for Pavlov's needs. Pavlov's son, Vladimir, later testified to the great value of this aid sent by American colleagues. (pp. 184-185)

In judging the correctness of the *New York Times*' ("Russian scientist," 1923) and Cannon's (1945/1968) accounts, it is pertinent to note that, according to Cannon, Vladimir "spoke excellent English" (p. 185). According to Babkin (1949), "Vladimir acted as his father's interpreter" (p. 107). It is reasonable to assume that Vladimir helped provide the report to the New York police and/or to the *New York Times* as well as to Cannon about the robbery.

The *New York Times*' and Cannon's (1945/1968) accounts are complementary and consistent and included details not mentioned here. The former was a contemporary news report, and Cannon heard the story from Ivan and Vladimir Pavlov within days of the incident. The possible discrepancy between the two reports regarding whether the Pavlovs were standing or seated (assuming Vladimir was standing to place the luggage on the rack) can be reconciled by a reasonably nonliteral interpretation of the *New York Times*' having said that they "had hardly taken their seats." Thus, it is suggested that the *New York Times*' and Cannon's accounts are the most accurate and that they provide the standard against which other reports should be evaluated.

Before proceeding, the date of the robbery has not been determined, but it is reasonable to assume that it occurred between July 7, 1923, and July 14, 1923, the latter being the date when the *New York Times* article appeared. Pavlov gave an address at the Battle Creek Sanitarium in Michigan on July 7, 1923 (Pawlow, 1923a), one which followed an earlier address at the

University of Chicago on July 5, 1923 (Pawlow, 1923b). The Pavlovs' visit with Cannon occurred prior to the Pavlovs' sailing from New York for home (via Edinburgh at least) either on July 14 according to the *New York Times* article or on July 19 according to Windholz and Koppers (1988; see p. 109). Thus, the mugging must have occurred between July 7, 1923, and July 14, 1923.

Consider, now, some of the other accounts of Ivan Pavlov's being robbed. The most frequently cited account in contemporary textbooks appears to be based on an article in *Time* dated March 19, 1928 ("Conditioned reflex," 1928) as reprinted in Gerow (1988).

Three years ago [note the 2-year error] Pavlov came to America. Confused by rush and roar he sat for a moment on a seat in Grand Central Station, Manhattan. A small handbag containing much of his money lay on the seat beside him and with characteristic absorption in the seething human laboratory around him, he forgot his worldly goods completely. When he rose to go the handbag was gone. It had been taken from under his very nose "Ah, well," sighed Pavlov gently, "one must not put temptation in the way of the needy." (p. 20)

Every sentence in this account either contains fundamental errors or appears to involve outright fabrication.

Babkin (1949), author of the best known biography of Ivan Pavlov, erroneously reported the robbery as having occurred in August, 1923, and described it somewhat differently from the account in the *New York Times* and in Cannon's account.

As they were boarding the train, several men surrounded Pavlov and began jostling him on the platform of the car. "Voila, [a footnote here stated that Voila was a diminutive for Vladimir] what are they doing to me?" cried Pavlov to his son. "Never mind, never mind—come inside quickly," Vladimir called back. When at last they recovered from the bustle, the heat, and the crowds, Pavlov put his hand in his inside jacket and found that the \$800 was missing [a footnote here explained that this was the amount that Babkin remembered, but he acknowledged Cannon's report of more than \$1,500, also]. . . . Pavlov had worn a light summer suit, through which his pocketbook could be clearly seen, bulging with money. (p. 107)

A general but not exhaustive search of contemporary text books in the history of psychology revealed that Hothersall (1990, p. 396; 1995, p. 483) relied on the highly suspect *Time* account as reprinted in Gerow (1988). Schultz and Schultz (1992) ultimately

relied on the same 1928 article but as reported by Gerow (1986). Fancher's (1979, 1990) source is unclear. According to Fancher:

All of his money—more than \$800 in small bills—was jammed into a bulky wallet that protruded visibly from his jacket pocket. When Pavlov ventured onto the crowded New York subway, the predictable felony occurred. (1979, p. 300; modified slightly 1990, p. 279)

Except for locating the theft on a crowded subway, Fancher's account is consistent with Babkin's (1949). Hergenhahn (1992) used and quoted Fancher's (1990) slightly modified account.

Windholz and Koppers (1988) relied on Cannon's account of the robbery but in a roundabout way. They cited an article published in the Russian language by Kennon in 1967. There are slight variations due no doubt to the two translations (from English to Russian by Kennon and from Russian back to English by Windholz), but the account in Windholz and Koppers agrees well with Cannon's (1945/1968) account.

Windholz and Koppers (1988) did not refer to Cannon in the context of how Ivan Pavlov may have gained the funds that were stolen in the robbery (see Cannon's speculation quoted earlier). However, they did provide information regarding funds provided to Ivan Pavlov in conjunction with his trip to America that raises interesting questions with respect to Cannon's speculation. For example, Cannon said that about \$2,000 was sent to Tigerstedt to provide for Pavlov's needs, and Cannon speculated that this may have been the source of the money that was stolen from Pavlov. Windholz and Koppers (1988) quoted an excerpt from a translation of a letter that Tigerstedt wrote, apparently between September 8, 1921, and October 31, 1921. "Thanks to the assistance from America, which I can fortunately deliver to him [Pavlov] in the form of food, he is doing very well in a material sense" (Windholz & Koppers, 1988, p. 108). From this, it would appear that Pavlov did not receive the approximately \$2,000 in cash that Cannon said he was instrumental in raising, but Pavlov apparently received a lot of food considering what \$2,000 would buy in 1921!

According to Windholz and Koppers (1988), the Pavlovs received \$1,050 from the Soviet government prior to their American visit. Furthermore, W. Horsley Gantt was reported to be instrumental in raising \$500 that was sent to the Rockefeller Institute and to which the Institute added \$250. Windholz and Koppers reported that Pavlov dated the receipt for this \$750 as June 30, 1922, but noted:

This receipt is erroneously dated June 30, 1922. It was on July 7, 1923, that the secretary of Dr. P. A. Levene

[of Rockefeller Institute and to whom the receipt was signed] sent a memo to E. B. Smith at the Rockefeller Institute enclosing Pavlov's receipt for \$750. (p. 108)

Possibly, Pavlov signed it on June 30, 1923. Presumably he did not sign it on July 7, 1923, because as noted earlier he was in Battle Creek, Michigan, that day giving an address (Pawlow, 1923a). Windholz and Koppers also reported that the Rockefeller Institute came to Pavlov's aid with \$1,000 following the robbery.

The robbery had other implications. The Pavlovs' passports were also stolen, nearly preventing Pavlov from making a presentation at the International Congress of Physiology in Edinburgh. Here, the *New York Times* was premature in its column heading, "Russian Scientist Barred by Britain," and in reporting that, due to his inability to get his visa renewed at the British consulate, Pavlov "will not be able to attend the Edinburgh Congress" ("Russian scientist," 1923, p. 3). The *New York Times* could not have known that the visa would be granted "while he was on the high seas" and that Pavlov would attend and make a presentation (via Vladimir) at the International Congress of Physiology in Edinburgh after all (Razran, 1958, p. 760).

Anecdotes such as this one about the mugging of Ivan Pavlov are likely to appeal to students and teachers in the history of psychology for their human interest components. In addition, the variations in the mugging anecdote indicate the difficulty of doing historical research and the danger of relying on a single source. Published versions of the mugging anecdote revealed variations in all of its major elements. These are summarized as follows with the fact believed most likely to be correct being listed first: (a) time, July, 1923, August, 1923, or some unspecified time in 1925; (b) place, inside the train car, on the train car platform, in the waiting area of Grand Central station, or on a subway; (c) mode of robbery, being physically accosted by two men while a third acted as a lookout versus the robbery going undetected by Pavlov at the time; (d) amount of money stolen, from \$1,500 to \$2,000 versus \$800, and (e) what, if anything, Ivan Pavlov said at the time of the robbery, compare Babkin (1949) with "Conditioned reflexes" (1923). The variations in the mugging anecdote cause one to wonder how other historical anecdotes might withstand scholarly investigation.

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