The Earliest Description of an Autopsy on a Case of Roberts Syndrome Reported in 1672: Some Additions

Erwin J.O. Kompanje*

Department of Intensive Care, Erasmus MC University Medical Center, Rotterdam, The Netherlands

Received 2 April 2009; Accepted 9 April 2009

TO THE EDITOR:

Bates [2003] published in this journal a historical review concerning the autopsy on a case of Roberts syndrome, as reported by the French physician François Bouchard in 1672. He translated the original Latin text, as it appeared in the German journal *Miscellanea curiosa sive ephemeridum medico-physicarum Germanicarum Academiae Caesareo-Leopoldinae Naturae Curiosorum* [Bouchard, 1672], into English. Without doubt the diagnosis of Roberts syndrome is accurate and this case should be seen as the first report of an autopsy on a child with this syndrome, but unfortunately Bates made some incorrect historical assumptions.

First he presumed that François Bouchard was the principal author of the case report and, also that Bouchard had performed the autopsy on the child. However, the article by Bouchard was nothing more than a summary of another, more extensive description of the circumstances concerning the origin and autopsy of the malformed infant boy. This latter article was published in French language, and in order to reach a larger public, Bouchard translated the essential details into Latin, without mentioning the original article.

The original article was written by the French surgeon François Deboze (Bose or De Bose) from Lyon who described the case in 1672 as an appendix to his translation of Johannes Scultetus *Armamentarium chirugicum* (*L’Arcenal de chirurgie de Jean Scultet, ouvrage posthume, . . . renouvelé, . . . divisé en deux parties la première fait voir en 46 tables en taille douce les instrumens . . . la seconde contient 103 observations chirurgicales . . . mis en français par Mre François Deboze, . . . Avec la description d’un monstre humain exposé à Lyon le 5. de mars 1671*), published by Antoine Galien in Lyon in 1672 [Deboze, 1672]. In a more extensive way the case report also appeared in later editions of *L’Arcenal de Chirurgie* (Deboze, 1712). It is not sure if Bouchard was present in Lyon on the moment of exposition, neither if he participated in, nor was even present during the autopsy. Anyway, Deboze does not mention him in any way in the original article. The original article is, as is the article by Bouchard, illustrated with two engravings depicting the child (Fig. 1).

Secondly, Bates mentioned that the child was “. . .exposed in a public street at Leiden” in The Netherlands. In fact, the dead child was exhibited in the *Rue de la Lanterne* on March 5, 1671, at the centre of the French city of Lyon. This mistake is understandable as Lyon and Leiden both translated in Latin as ‘Lugduni’. After a short exhibition in the *Rue de la Lanterne*, the corpse of the child was subsequently transported to “la prison de Roane,” which was, according to Deboze, common practice in these days (“. . .transporté quelques heures après à la prison de Roane, suivant la coutume.”). “La prison de Roane (or Roanne)” was situated in the present “Quartier Saint-Jean” in old-Lyon (5em Arrondissement), aside the courthouse, close to the Cathedral. Becoming aware of the severely deformed child, Deboze asked “Monsieur de Mascarini, Lieutenant Criminal de Lyon” permission to perform an autopsy and to preserve the corpse for his own cabinet. Mascarini gave Deboze permission to perform an autopsy during the next day in presence of other curious physicians and surgeons from Lyon. Deboze discussed the features they discovered during the autopsy with these scholars (“. . .des le lendemain je sis l’ouverte de ce Monstre en presence de quelques Medecins & Chirurgiens curieux de cette Ville: & comme le sujet étoit rare & donnoit matiere de raisonner aux Savans. . .”). As we can read in the 1712 version of Deboze’s article, he preserved the child for his cabinet (“Ce Monstre que Monsieur Bose gardoir dans son cabinet. . .”).

*Correspondence to: Erwin J.O. Kompanje, Department of Intensive Care, Erasmus MC University Medical Center, P.O. Box 2040, 3000 CA Rotterdam, The Netherlands. E-mail: e.j.o.kompanje@erasmusmc.nl

How to Cite this Article:
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank Amélie Guillet, Responsable de la salle de lecture, Archives municipales de Lyon, France, for providing information concerning “La prison de Roane.”

REFERENCES


FIG. 1. Engraving of a newborn with Roberts syndrome from Deboze, 1672.