

Kasuistiken / Casuistries

A Case of Murder by Impalement

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Summary. We report here the case of a young oligophrenic man killed by a psychopath by impalement, using a sharp stick which was thrust into the perineal region, thus causing injuries to abdominal and thoracic viscera.

Key word: Impalement

Zusammenfassung. Wir berichten über einen jungen Schwachsinnigen, der von einem Psychopathen gepfählt wurde. Der Täter hat den Stiel eines Kehrbesens durch die perianale Gegend bis in den Brustraum eingeführt.

Schlüsselwort: Pfählung

Introduction

Death from impalement is rarely, though not exceptionally, observed in the ordinary medico-legal practice, and it is mainly due to accidental causes.

Murder by impalement, however, must be regarded as absolutely exceptional. We consider it worthwhile, therefore, to report the following case we happened to observe in November 1981.

Case Report

In November 1981 a 27-year-old oligophrenic man was found dead in the garden of the mental hospital where he was staying. The corpse was barefoot and wore only a singlet and a cotton shirt despite the low environmental temperature. Nearby there were a pair of cotton underpants, torn at the side, and a roughly sharpened broomstick, 2.5 cm in diameter, broken into two segments, 73.5 cm and 43 cm long, respectively.

The longer segment, the sharp one, was almost entirely covered, except for a 13.5 cm long portion at the point-opposite end, with reddish biologic material, that afterward proved to be blood.

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A first inspection of the corpse revealed, along with recent multiple excoriations on the face and limbs, slight hematic soiling of the perineum, glutea and hands, and a roundish piercing lacerated wound, 2–3 cm in diameter, through the ano-coccygeal rafe.

During necropsy, though in the absence of serious injuries to the head and neck, copious hemothorax and hemoperitoneum were found (about 3,500 cc altogether). Numerous tracks which were heavily infiltrated with blood and involved the retroperitoneal space (on the left, leading from the cutaneous wound previously mentioned) were found starting from the perineal region. Another track started from a laceration of the rectal ampulla, became intra-peritoneal, passed through the mesosigma, and then divided.

In particular, two distinct tracks involved the intestinal face of the liver, passed through the liver itself and ended on the diaphragmatic face, just before the coronary ligament, and in the bare area after having involved the cava's fossa and the cava itself, respectively.

Four distinct lacerated orifices, whose edges were heavily infiltrated with blood, could also be found in the diaphragm, corresponding to the continuation of the abdominal tracks into the thorax in such a way as to pass through the whole right lung and to involve marginally the left one.

These tracks ended respectively on the right side in the 4th intercostal space on the paravertebral line, and in the 7th, 8th, and 9th intercostal space along the posterior axillary line, and on the left in the 9th intercostal space on the paravertebral line.

Within these intercostal spaces a laceration was observed which involved the parietal pleura, the endothoracic fascia, and the intercostal muscles where the tracks ended.

Comment

Further investigations revealed that the victim often took part in passive homosexual practices with other in-patients. On the evening of the crime he probably had such an intercourse with the killer, near the hospital broom store, where any roughly sharpened broomsticks were in fact available.

The following reconstruction of the event seems the most likely:

The active partner, after or instead of normal anal intercourse, introduced the blunt end of a stick (which was later found soiled with fecal material) into the anus of the victim who then revolted and run away, but was soon caught and repeatedly struck in the anus and perineum with another stick, by the sharpened end; this caused the described injuries and the death from acute metahemorrhagic anemia.

The seriousness of the thoracic and abdominal injuries, the length, divergence, and multiplicity of the tracks, together with the circumstantial evidence and the muddled confession given by the assailant, made it possible to rule out a possible suicide or accident during autoerotic practices.