



Review Article

Decapitation in reality and fine art: A review



Valentina Nikolić^a, Slobodan Savić^b, Vaso Antunović^c, Slobodan Marinković^{a,*},
Charlotte Andrieux^d, Irina Tomić^e

^a Institute of Anatomy, Faculty of Medicine, University of Belgrade, Belgrade, Serbia

^b Institute of Forensic Medicine, Faculty of Medicine, University of Belgrade, Belgrade, Serbia

^c Clinical Center of Montenegro, University of Podgorica, Podgorica, Montenegro

^d University Sophia Antipolis, Nice, France

^e Academy of Fine Arts and Multimedia, Belgrade, Serbia

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 20 May 2017

Received in revised form 7 August 2017

Accepted 18 September 2017

Available online 27 September 2017

Keywords:

Decapitation

Beheading

Homicide

Brain

Consciousness

Fine art

ABSTRACT

The aim of our study was to examine all types of decapitation from forensic literature, including our own case, and to analyze the presentation of beheading in fine art, popular literature, and music. To do this, over 200 scientific articles in regard to decapitation were analyzed, as well as more than 10,000 artworks, and several hundreds of literary works and music pieces. In addition, a macroscopic examination of a decapitated victim was performed. Finally, a multislice computerized tomography (MSCT) examination of the cervical spine in two live volunteers was undertaken to present the osteological relationships. The forensic and criminal investigation revealed that a female victim was murdered by her jealous husband by applying several strikes with an axe, which resulted in an incomplete decapitation. All the main neck structures were transected, including the cervical spine, except a smaller part of the skin and soft tissue in the nuchal region. The mentioned MSCT examination in both the neutral position and flexion showed that the mandible can also be injured in a higher cervical location of the severance line. Various types of beheading were mentioned, including a homicidal, suicidal, accidental, judicial, internal, pathophysiological, and foetal ones. The status of consciousness and emotions in individuals just before and after decapitation was discussed. Finally, it was found that decapitation was the subject of many artists, and some writers and musicians. In conclusion, we presented a rare case of a homicide beheading performed with an axe. In addition, forensic importance of decapitation was discussed, as well as its great medical, social, anthropological, and artistic significance.

© 2017 Published by Elsevier Ireland Ltd.

Contents

1. Introduction	104
2. Decapitation in reality	104
2.1. Case report	104
2.2. Historical aspect	104
3. Decapitation in art	105
4. Discussion	106
4.1. Types and meaning of decapitation	106
4.2. Psychological, ethical, and biological aspects	108
4.3. Decapitation and art	109
5. Conclusions	110
Disclosure of interests	110
Contribution to authorship	110
References	110

* Corresponding author at: Institute of Anatomy, Faculty of Medicine, University of Belgrade, Dr. Subotića 4/2, 11000 Belgrade, Serbia. Fax: +381 11 2645958.

E-mail addresses: valezoka@gmail.com (V. Nikolić), savkenzi@gmail.com (S. Savić), nh.kccg@gmail.com (V. Antunović), mocamarinkovic@med.bg.ac.rs (S. Marinković), chandrieux@aol.com (C. Andrieux), photoirina86@gmail.com (I. Tomić).

1. Introduction

Decapitation (Latin *de* = away from + *caput, capitis* = head) [1] represents an intentional or accidental separation of the head from the body [2–5]. Beheading has been performed from prehistoric times to the present day [6–9]. It belongs to the gravest type of social and individual aggression, as well as to the corresponding anthropological settings in some historical periods, and to accidental events occasionally [7–17]. Due to that, it has a great forensic, medical, ethical, social and anthropological significance.

The aim of our study was to examine the decapitation reports in relation to the intravital and post-mortem beheading, to homicide, suicide, accidents, and judicial punishment, to the methods used, the underlying motives, and the forensic pathological features. In addition, the internal, pathophysiological and fetal decapitations will be mentioned, as well as the experimental, biological, and mythological ones. A case from our own records will be included into this study as well. Finally, the presentation of beheading in art will also be analyzed and discussed, following an examination of over 10,000 artworks, and hundreds of novels, tales, essays, and music pieces.

2. Decapitation in reality

Our case report will be presented first, and then other types of decapitation from the available literature.

2.1. Case report

On February 26th this year, a case of an incomplete decapitation was recorded at our Institute of Forensic Medicine (Fig. 1). Namely, a corpse of a 64-year female victim was transported by police from a nearby village to our Institute for an autopsy.

Five cut lacerations were noticed on her head, including the left side of the face. The highest one involved the left part of the scalp. A lower chop wound occupied the skin, temporalis fascia and muscle, the squamous part of the temporal bone, and the underlying dura and brain parenchyma. The third cut laceration extended from the left zygomatic region to the upper part of the auricle. At this level, the same mentioned structures were cut. The fourth wound extended across the left cheek and below the auricle. The skin, the buccal fat pad, and the buccinator muscle were cut here, as well as the ramus and the adjacent part of the body of the mandible.



Fig. 1. A homicidal decapitation.

The fifth chop wound was located in the lower face area and the neck region, where the wound margins were sharp but not quite regular, indicating that several blows were applied by a sharp object. At this level, the lowest part of the body of the mandible was fractured. The epiglottis and oropharynx were transected, whilst the carotid arteries, the internal jugular veins, the corresponding nerves and neck muscles were cut at three sites. The cervical spine was cut through the intervertebral disk between the 4th and 5th, and the 6th and 7th vertebrae, which was associated with multiple fractures of the vertebral arches. The spinal cord was transected at these two levels as well.

The head and neck were interconnected posteriorly only by a skin flap 7.5 cm wide and by a small amount of soft tissue. There were no other injuries of the victim except on her right hand where several cut lacerations and fractures were detected. The police investigation revealed the victim's husband to have committed this murder with an axe due to his pathological jealousy.

2.2. Historical aspect

Decapitation has been performed for several millennia. Beheading in archaic times mainly referred to the human sacrifice [8,9]. It was especially expressed in Meso-America and South America among the Olmecs, Mayans, Totonacs, Aztecs, Mixtecs, and the members of some tribes [18]. Their priests, who were performing decapitation, had excellent knowledge of the cervical spine and skull base anatomy [8]. In certain cases, beheading was performed to obtain trophies, as well as for skull masks manufacture. Some tribes developed a special method for the shrinkage of the head and face skin of the trophy skulls, which were called "tsantsa" [19,20]. In those times, as well as throughout history, decapitation was also performed in armed conflicts [19,21].

In the Roman Empire, it was only occasionally used for the execution of criminals, but also of some members of the nobility [21,22]. For example, Cicero, the famous Roman philosopher, consul and orator, was decapitated for political reasons, and his head was displayed in the Forum Romanum. In such instances, beheading was regarded as the most honorable form of death.

The Celts were said to have performed decapitation of dead enemies, and hence they had a reputation for being head hunters. Execution by beheading with a sword was practiced in Nordic regions, especially for noblemen's executions. The Chinese, in general, disliked beheading for execution, but this type of punishment was popular in Korea. Later on, however, decapitation was performed more frequently in China, especially in the 19th century [21]. The Japanese samurai used to order a decapitation following a self-disembowelment ("seppuku") [23]. In addition, the samurai commonly beheaded soldiers who had fled from battle. People from India were not inclined to beheading, but their mythology created a story on the decapitated deity Ganesha (see later).

Judicial or capital beheading of criminals or political opponents was performed occasionally in medieval Europe and later on [10,21,22]. Thus, Mary Stuart, the Queen of Scots, was decapitated in the 16th century. The execution was usually performed with an arch-like broad-bladed axe, and less frequently with a blade-heavy two-handed sword. It is interesting that the bodies of the executed individuals, being intact, were often used for the anatomic dissections [6,10,17].

Some executioners in 17th and 18th century England, Germany and France used a beheading device similar to the guillotine. The original guillotine, however, was invented just before the French Revolution, that is, near the end of the 18th century, when physician and Freemason Dr. Joseph Ignacio Guillotine proposed and Dr. Antoine Louis realized a device for execution by

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/4760226>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/4760226>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)