First Quadruped Man Was Found In Turkey A Hundred Years Ago

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Abstract

It was believed that human quadrupedalism with the related novel syndrome (Uner Tan syndrome, UTS) first described in 2005 was the first to be discovered in the world. However, it was later revealed a boy with a paralyzed leg walking on all fours was already reported in 1901. The boy did not exhibit the whole symptom complex of UTS, however. We will report here a man walking on all fours probably exhibiting UTS, reported in 1914 in the vicinity of the middle Black Sea coast, within the borders of what was then the Ottoman Empire, which means we may need to revise the history of this syndrome.

Introduction

In 2005 I described a novel syndrome with habitual quadrupedal locomotion associated with mental retardation and dysarthric speech, in five of 19 siblings of a consanguineous family residing near Iskenderun, Southern Turkey [1-4]. The syndrome, which came to be called “Uner Tan Syndrome” or “UTS,” sparked world-wide interest, especially because diagonal sequence quadrupedal locomotion had never previously been observed in human beings [5-11]. Apart from one case with a normal brain scan, MRI scans of all the UTS cases exhibited cerebellar hypoplasia, and the patients suffered associated symptoms of cerebellar ataxia [4]. The acquisition of the habitual diagonal-sequence quadrupedal locomotion was explained by the principles of the dynamical systems theory: “stepping and ultimately, walking are not innate or prescribed. Rather they are self-organized and emergent, reflecting an assembly of multiple subsystems within the infant’s history of activity in context.”[12].

A search of the scientific literature available via well known science indexes such as the Science Citation Index and PubMed, and the Google Academic website suggested the habitual walking on all fours first described in 2005 had never been observed previously, except the boy with a paralyzed leg walking on all fours photographed and animated by Muybridge in 1901 [4], but he did not exhibit the symptoms of Uner Tan syndrome.

Case Report(s)

We have found a historical picture of a man walking on all four extremities most probably exhibiting the symptoms of UTS, much earlier than the discovery of the first family in 2005 [1-3]. The man was photographed by the famous British traveler W. J. Childs during his trip in 1914 along the historical Baghdad Road around Havza, a small village near Samsun on the middle Black Sea coast. Illustration 1 shows the man photographed by Childs in 1914 walking on all fours beside his donkey (top), and a modern quadruped man exhibiting UTS symptoms photographed by Tan in 2010, near Adana (bottom). The similarities in the locomotion of both men are clearly seen in Illustration 1. However, there are huge differences in roads and their clothing: the famous Baghdad road was littered with stones and irregularities in 1914’s Ottoman Empire, whereas the road is clear and smooth in 2010’s Turkey. Moreover, the man wears a turban around his head during the days of Ottoman Empire, while the man has no turban around his head during the days of the Turkish Republic.

The quadruped man encountered in 1914 near Havza probably belonged to a Greek family, since many Greek people were resident in Havza during the time of the Ottoman Empire, and Childs said (p 27) the village was in the vicinity of Kara Dagh, which is known to have been a village peopled by Greek (Rum) people. This lends weight to the idea the man was of Greek origin living in a village with a closed Greek population. He possibly belonged to a consanguineous family, since the Greek population tended to live in isolation, suggesting possible interfamilial marriages. UTS is always associated with consanguineous families, as mentioned above, and we know UTS is an autosomal recessive condition, which is most often seen in closed populations such as the Kurdish people in Turkey, and similar to DES, found in the closed...
Hutterites populations.

As seen in Illustration 1, the man from Havza walked with extended strong legs, and according to the rather detailed description of this remarkable man in the Childs' book [13, p. 28], could spring onto his donkey's back. On p. 28, the man is described as follows:

“As we rose out of the next valley a donkey and a figure on the ground beside it attracted my attention. They were in the shadow of a solitary tree growing at the roadside. The donkey stood with drooping head, the picture of patience, but the figure moved in curious fashion, and I went up to look more closely. And now it appeared that I had fallen into the trap of a beggar, one of those mendicants who infest the road and profit by their infirmities. He sprang up and asked for alms, and because these were not immediately forthcoming went on all-fours and showed a number of antics, imitating a dog and goat and other animals to admiration. Then I saw he was without thighs; that the knee-joint was at the hip, the leg rigid, and only half the usual length. With his grim bearded face thrust upwards, and the odd movements of his little legs, he lacked only a stump of tail to make me think I had come upon a satyr in life. At last I photographed him, and gave him three piastres for his trouble.”

Discussion

Above we have reported a man apparently exhibiting Uner Tan syndrome in 1914, at least with regard to habitual quadrupedal locomotion, who lived in the vicinity of Havza near Samsun on the middle Black Sea coast. He probably originated from a consanguineous poor family. He was a beggar similar to some of the modern quadrupeds. One of them, shown in Illustration 1 below, was also a beggar belonging to a poor consanguineous family.

Childs believed the man had no thighs and the knee joint was at the hip, but this seems unlikely. It seems more plausible that Childs did not notice the knee joints because of the tautly stretched legs. Childs does not inform us about the cognitive capabilities of the man such as his intelligence or speech. The report in Childs’s book also accentuates the rarity of the human quadrupedalism, since the author traveled the length of Baghdad road, which extends from Istanbul to Baghdad, and never saw another quadruped human being.

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Authors contribution(s)

Both authors equally contributed to the creation of the article.

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Illustrations

Illustration 1

Quadruped men: a hundred years ago (top) and today (bottom)
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