

ROPELIKE BIRTHMARKS ON CHILDREN WHO CLAIM TO REMEMBER PAST LIVES¹

IAN STEVENSON

University of Virginia

Summary.—Description of birthmarks having the pattern of strands of a rope in a second known case includes some verification of the correspondence between the birthmarks and injuries from ropes on an identified deceased person.

Keil and Tucker (2000) reported the case of a child with birthmarks said to correspond to marks made by parachute ropes on the first husband of the child's mother. The child, when he could speak, made a few statements that Keil and Tucker interpreted as fragmentary memories of the life of this man. He had been an airforce trainee in Burma (now Myanmar) who had died when practicing a landing with a parachute. He had been carried by the parachute into a lake instead of the designated landing field. It was conjectured that the parachute trainee had become entangled in the parachute's ropes, either when he tried to avert landing in the lake or immediately afterward when he drowned. On this interpretation, the ropelike marks on the subject's right leg corresponded to minor abrasions of the parachute ropes on the airman's leg.

The case that Keil and Tucker investigated is unusual in that the subject's birthmarks plausibly corresponded to pressure marks from ropes on an identified deceased person. Other subjects of India and Myanmar who claimed to remember previous lives have had birthmarks attributed to pressure from ropes on a deceased person (Stevenson, 1997). In one of these the subject's birthmark had the pattern of the strands of a rope. Unfortunately, as in nearly all the other cases of this group, no deceased person was found whose life corresponded to the statements of the subject, who in this case claimed to have been a Japanese soldier killed by Burmese villagers, presumably toward the end of the Japanese occupation of Burma (as it then was) in the spring of 1945.

In one other Burmese case, however, the statements of the subject, HW, matched events in the life of a man, NT, who had been murdered in a neighboring village about two years before HW's birth (Stevenson, 1997). NT's murderers, in order to dispose of his body, tied it up with ropes

¹Please address correspondence to Ian Stevenson, M.D., Division of Personality Studies, Department of Psychiatric Medicine, University of Virginia Health System, P.O. Box 800152, Charlottesville, VA 22908-0152 or e-mail (ips6r@virginia.edu).



FIG. 1. Legs of HW at the age of 11. There was a deep groove (constriction ring) in the middle of the left thigh and a smaller groove above the right ankle. There was also a faint horizontal line of increased pigmentation above the left ankle at the same level as the groove on the right leg.

around the ankles and thighs, so that the body was doubled up and could then fit into a gunny sack, which they then put into a dried up well. The police later retrieved the doubled up body of NT and the ropes. HW's mother, who was then $2\frac{1}{2}$ months pregnant with HW, happened to be

passing NT's village on her way home when the police were pulling NT's body and the ropes out of the well. Therefore, a maternal impression may account for the birth defects on HW (Stevenson, 1992). Fig. 1 shows a deep groove on the left thigh and a smaller one just above the right ankle. The left leg had a line of increased pigmentation at the level of the groove above the right ankle. A maternal impression, however, cannot alone account for HW's statements which provided a fairly detailed account of NT's murder, including the disposition of his body. According to HW, NT was still alive after being severely wounded, when his body was being tied up with ropes and put, doubled up, into the sack and then into the well. Not surprisingly, informants for this case believed that HW was the reincarnation of NT. This case and one other, that reported by Keil and Tucker, are the only cases with ropelike birthmarks (of which I am aware) that have some verification of the correspondence between the birthmarks and injuries from ropes on an identified deceased person.

REFERENCES

- KEIL, H. H. J., & TUCKER, J. B. (2000) An unusual birthmark case thought to be linked to a person who had previously died. *Psychological Reports*, 87, 1067-1074.
- STEVENSON, I. (1992) A new look at maternal impressions: an analysis of 50 published cases and reports of two recent examples. *Journal of Scientific Exploration*, 6, 353-373.
- STEVENSON, I. (1997) *Reincarnation and biology: a contribution to the etiology of birthmarks and birth defects*. (2 vols.) Westport, CT: Praeger.

Accepted September 1, 2001.