

Comment

Early Dutch obstetric atlas

As a result of the foresight of the late Dr Frank Forster,¹ a trust fund was established to enable the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, to purchase rare books for its rare book collection. The latest acquisition, purchased by the fund in 2002, is a rare Dutch obstetric atlas, entitled '*Vroedkundige aanmerkingen en afbeelding eener bezwangerde baarmoeder*', which was published in 1793.²

The obstetric atlas published posthumously, was written by Folkert (Volkert) Snip (1733–1771), illustrated by Maerten Houtman and engraved by de Bakker. Folkert Snip was a pupil of Petrus Camper (1722–1789) the Professor der Anatomie in Gröningen, Holland, and became professor of anatomy and surgery in Amsterdam.

The translation of the title *Vroedkundige aanmerkingen en afbeelding eener bezwangerde baarmoeder*, from Dutch to English is: Obstetric observations, and illustration of a pregnant womb.

The atlas is broadsheet, unbound and cased in a half vellum portfolio (Cover figure). The four plates are dated 1767 and show the dissections of the pregnant uterus, each from a slightly different angle (Figs 1–4).³ The atlas was executed after Smellie's – *A sett of anatomical tables published in 1754*, but before Hunter's – *Anatomia uteri humani gravidi tabulis illustrata* – published in 1774. There were originally five plates commissioned for this rare book, but Snip abandoned the fifth plate which caused a bitter quarrel

with publisher van Tongerlo. Hence, the difference between its execution and publication. Snip's pupil, van Gesscher prepared the work for the publisher J. B. Elwe.⁴

The atlas was purchased from a rare book dealer in the United Kingdom and shipped in a light wooden container. The dealer remarked that although his merchandise was often checked by Customs, it was the first time it had been checked by quarantine!

Fay BOWER

Librarian

Frank Forster Library – RANZCOG

References

- 1 Winspear R. A College benefactor: Frank Forster – obstetrician, gynaecologist, medical historian and bibliophile. *Aust NZ J Obstet Gynaecol* 2004; 44: 3–5.
- 2 Snip F. *Vroedkundige aanmerkingen, en afbeelding eener bezwangerde baarmoeder*. Amsterdam: J. B. Elwe, 1793.
- 3 Snip V. *Vroedkundige aanmerkingen, en afbeelding eener bezwangerde baarmoeder*. In: *Roger Gaskell Rare Books*. Catalogue 31 no. 65. Cambridge: Roger Gaskell, 2002.
- 4 Snip F. *Vroedkundige aanmerkingen, en afbeelding eener bezwangerde baarmoeder*. In: *Nigel Phillips*. Catalogue 28. London: Nigel Phillips, 2003.



Figure 1 Plaat I from the obstetric atlas.



Figure 3 Plaat III from the obstetric atlas.



Figure 2 Plaat II from the obstetric atlas.



Figure 4 Plaat IV from the obstetric atlas.