

FREDERIK RUYSCH  
1638-1731

Ruysch was born in The Hague in 1638, the son of a secretary in the service of the state. After the untimely death of his father, he became apprentice to an apothecary. In 1661 he passed the examination to have his own apothecary's shop, and in the same year he married Maria Post, daughter of prince Frederick Henry's architect, Pieter Post. The couple had many children. Because of his deep interest in anatomy, Ruysch began medical studies at Leiden, where he attended the lectures of J. van Horne and F. de Boë, Sylvius. In 1664 he received his MD on a dissertation *De pleuritide* under Van Horne. He then set up a medical practice in The Hague, while continuing his anatomical studies.

A dispute between Van Horne and L. de Bils on the existence of valves in lymphatic vessels was settled by Ruysch, who was able to demonstrate the existence of these valves. His research was published in 1665 as *Dilucidatio valvularum in vasis lymphaticis et lacteis*. In 1666 Ruysch became praelector of anatomy for the surgeon's guild in Amsterdam and moved to that city. He held this post until his death. In this capacity he taught anatomy to surgeons and supervised public dissections. In 1672 he also became municipal obstetrician, a post he held until his retirement in 1712, when he was succeeded by one of his sons.

Ruysch became a specialist in forensic medicine when he was appointed doctor of the court of justice in 1679. Six years later he became professor of botany at the Amsterdam Athenaeum Illustre. He lectured on botany to apothecaries and surgeons and published a description of the rare plants in the botanical garden for which he was responsible.

Despite all these activities Ruysch was essentially an anatomist. He developed his own method of injecting specimens of which he was very secretive. His skill was unsurpassed and recognized by contemporaries. His preparations were exhibited in several cabinets in Amsterdam and attracted many foreign visitors to the city. Ruysch described his collections in a ten-volume *Thesaurus anatomicus*. In 1717 his collection of specimens was bought by czar Peter the Great who had it transported to St. Petersburg. A new collection was bought after Ruysch's death by king John Sobieski of Poland who gave it to the University of Wittenberg.

Ruysch's other discoveries are, amongst others, the arteria bronchialis, the thin layer behind the retina of the eye, and a circular muscle in the fundus uteri. Towards the end of his career, Ruysch became a member of the Royal Society, in 1720, and of the Académie Royale des Sciences in 1727. Ruysch died in 1731 in Amsterdam.

### *Primary works*

Bibliography in Lindeboom's article in the *DSB* (see below); Y.G. Arlebout, ed., *Alle de ontleed-, genees- en heelkundige werken van Frederik Ruysch*, 3 vols. (Amsterdam: J. van Waesberge, 1744), with partial Dutch translation and a bibliography by B. Baarda; F. Ruysch, *Dilucidatio valvularum in vasis lymphaticis et lacteis* (1665), facsimile of first ed. with introd. by A.M. Luyendijk-Elshout (Nieuwkoop: De Graaf, 1964).

### *Secondary sources*

P. Scheltema, *Het leven van Frederik Ruysch* (Sliedrecht: Luijt, 1886); G.A. Lindeboom, *De geschiedenis van de medische wetenschap in Nederland* (Bussum: Fibula-Van Dishoeck, 1972) 67-72; A.M. Luyendijk-Elshout, "An der Klaue erkennt man den Löwen": Aus den Sammlungen des Frederik Ruysch (1638-1731', in: A. Grote, ed., *Macrocosmos in Microcosmo: Die Welt in der Stube. Zur Geschichte des Sammelns 1450 bis 1800* (Opladen: Leske und Budrich, 1994) 643-660; M. Spilleth, 'The text in the jar: Reading the anatomical *Kunstkammer*', *Eighteenth Century Life* 19 (1995) 28-37; J.V. Hansen, 'Resurrecting death: Anatomical art in the cabinet of Dr. Frederik Ruysch', *Art Bulletin* 78 (1996) 663-677.  
*DMB*, 1700-1704; G.A. Lindeboom, in: *DSB*, vol. 12, 39-42; J.C. de Lint, in: *NNBW*, vol. 3, 1108-1109.

[L.C.P.]