Background:
In 1869, Douglas Argyll Robertson, while assistant ophthalmic surgeon to the Edinburgh Royal Infirmary, wrote two classic medical theses for the Edinburgh Medical Journal in which he described a miotic pupil that responded to accommodation effort but not to light.

Although most clinicians have long associated his pupil findings with syphilis, Robertson himself did not make this association in his writings. Rather, in his thesis entitled “Four cases of spinal myosis: with remarks on the action of light on the pupil,” Robertson presented cases of miotic pupil in the setting of other causes of spinal cord disease, and he referred to works by Trusseau, Duchenne, Todd, and Brown-Sequard’s “Clinical lectures on paralysis” featured in the Lancet. However, Robertson did note that Stellwag von Carion, in 1856, mentioned tabes dorsalis as a cause of paralytic myosis. Moreover, Robertson’s pupil observation began to appear in several papers per year as a useful clinical sign in syphilis, and when Wassermann’s serologic test became available in 1908, it was found to be frequently positive in people with an "Argyll Robertson" pupil.

While Robertson published infrequently, he was one of the first to describe the pupillary response to belladonna and the calabar bean from tropical Africa (physostigmine) and his comments can be found in his thesis entitled “On an interesting series of eye symptoms in a case of spinal disease: with remarks on the action of belladonna on the iris.” Of interest, Arthur Conan Doyle, a medical student at University of Edinburgh in 1876 and later an ophthalmologist who practiced on upper Wimpole street in London, described pupil abnormalities in three cases of Sherlock Holmes, including one that involved belladonna, "The adventure of the dying detective" written in 1913.