In the Tomb of Ramose (TT55): The Oldest Art Depicting Goiter in Recorded History

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Abstract

The art work in the Tomb of Ramose "TT55" (c. 1386 to 1349 BC, or from 1388 to 1351 BC) had very apparent thyroid swellings in two guests carved with very fine detail on limestone may represent the earliest depiction of goiters in recorded human history.

Keywords: Goiter; Tomb of Ramose; Medical Art; Ancient Egypt

Introduction

Goiter simply means thyroid enlargement or swelling and the main cause is the lack of iodine [1]. The depicting of thyroid swelling is very common in art throughout history [2] and even in an ancient coin issued over 2200 years ago [3].

Findings

However, during authors’ (SYW and YW) recent tour in Egypt and found an art work in the Tomb of Ramose “TT55” had very apparent thyroid swellings in two guests carved with very fine detail on limestone (Figure 1 upper panel) that became even more prominent after the artist painted on the papyrus paper (Figure 1 lower panel). Ramose was a Governor of Thebes and Vizier during the 18th Dynasty of the ancient Egypt during the reigns of Amenophis III and Amenophis IV (Akhenaton, the heretic king). Amenophis III also known as Amenhotep the Magnificent, was the ninth pharaoh of the 18th Dynasty. According to different authors, he ruled Egypt from 1386 to 1349 BC, or from 1388 to 1351 BC [4].

Discussion

Based on an image in Cairo Museum (Figure 2), Martino and del Tacca suggested that Queen Ankhesenamun showed a large goiter [5]. Queen Ankhesenamun (circa after 1322 BC) was King Tutankhamun’s only bride as handed down in recorded history [6]. While at first glance a certain swelling of the cervical region may seem visible, the quality and style of the small wood- and ivory work does not seem to be clear enough to allow one to claim that the queen had a goiter [6]. The diagnosis of goiter was never-the-less subsequently accepted in an article by Alfaro-Martínez in 2014 [7]. However, the art work of Queen Ankhesenamun (circa 3341 to 3361 years ago) is still about few years to decades behind the portray on the wall in the Tomb of Ramose (circa 3368 to 3407 years ago) assuming the completion of their tombs including the art work were in similar years after their death.

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Figure 1: Art work in the Tomb of Ramose “TT55” (c. 1386 to 1349 BC, or from 1388 to 1351 BC) had very apparent thyroid swellings in two guests (upper panel) that became even more prominent found in a painting on the papyrus paper (lower panel).

Figure 2: Queen Ankhesenamun (right) portrayed giving flowers to Tutankhamun (c. 1342 – after 1322 BC) Cairo, Egyptian Museum. Image in the public domain from Wikipedia, website: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ankhesenamun#/media/File:Anuk.PNG.

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Conclusion

We conclude that the clearly visible thyroid enlargement in the art work on the wall of Tomb of Ramose (circa 3368 to 3407 years ago) is the oldest art piece depicting goiter in recorded human history.

Conflict of Interest

None.

Bibliography

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