



Djeho, the Egyptian God's dancer with dwarfism from the thirtieth dynasty

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Abstract

This manuscript presents some artistic and medical considerations about a representation of an individual with apparent dwarfism. He was found in Saqqara by the British Egyptologist James Edward Quibell, in 1910/11. The naked figure of this individual, Djeho, is carved in profile on the lid of his sarcophagus. He has a height of 120 cm and has characteristic clinical features suggesting achondroplasia.

Keywords Dwarf · Achondroplasia · Egypt · Sarcophagus · FGFR3 gene · James Edward Quibell

The artistic evidence of dwarfism has been well documented in ancient Egypt [1, 2]. In particular, a granite sarcophagus with a representation of dwarfism was found in Saqqara by the British Egyptologist James Edward Quibell, in 1910/1911 [1].

Djeho was buried next to his patron Tjaiharpta, the highest financial official during the Reign of Nectanebo II (380–343 BC). According to hieroglyphic inscriptions, Djeho, “son of Petekhons, born of Tawenshe who is called Tenthap”, was “the dwarf who danced in Kemon the day of interment of Apis-Osiris, the great god, king of the

gods”. Indeed, the involvement of dwarfs in 'god's dances' is referred to as far back as the pyramid texts [1, 2].

The profile naked figure of Djeho is carved on the lid of his sarcophagus, possibly life sized (120 cm). His figure shows disproportionate short stature, macrocephaly and normal length torso, with particularly proximal or rhizomelic short limbs. The facial features show prominent forehead and a depressed midface (Fig. 1). These characteristic clinical features suggest achondroplastic dwarfism.

Achondroplasia (OMIM 100,800) is a rare autosomal dominant genetic disorder, affecting both sexes, with a

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Fig. 1 Lid of the granite sarcophagus of the dwarf Djeho (or Teo) the son of Petekhons (Thirtieth Dynasty. Cairo Museum, Egypt). Djeho's burial was probably within no more than a few years of his patron, Tjaiharpta (346–345 BC). Photograph: Courtesy of R. Peters

frequency of about 1 in 15,000. It results from a mutation in the fibroblast growth factor receptor 3 (FGFR3) gene. As for Djeho, a firm diagnosis of achondroplasia may have to await molecular testing of his ancient bones.

Declarations

Conflict of interest The authors states that there is no conflict of interest.

Research involving human participants and/or animals Not applicable.

Informed consent Not applicable.

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