Rembrandt and TB – How TB influenced fine arts

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Tuberculosis

Threat to mankind already in ancient Egypt:
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Workers on the construction sites of the pyramids: „coughers“
Workers in Nubic goldmines: silico-tuberculosis

Amenophis IV. (Echnaton): TB patient (often ill, acromegalic, kachectic);
died of TB, together with his daughters: end of the first monotheism in human history

Famous victims of TB

Elisabeth von Thüringen
Anton Checkov
Branwell Bronté
Emily Bronté
Frédéric Chopin
John Keats
D.H. Lawrence
Vivien Leigh
George Orwell
Paganini
Edgar Allan Poe
Jean J. Rousseau
Sir Walter Scott
P.B. Shelley
R.L. Stevenson
Famous victims of TB

• Molière (Jean Baptiste Poquelin): died of TB immediately after presentation of „Le malade imaginaire”; 1673

• Watteau: suffered from TB; typical symptoms of the „euphoric TB patient“ (1717/1718)

Tuberculosis

Even in the 21st century, tuberculosis remains the bacterial infectious disease with the largest number of victims:

1.5 million deaths,
9 million new infections,
Every third of the world population is infected.

At the times of renaissance:

1476 Simonetta Vespucci †, girl friend of Guilano de’ Medici

he asked Botticelli to make Simonetta immortal..
Renaissance

Sandro Botticelli, The Birth of Venus (1485/86), Uffizi, Florence

Renaissance

Botticelli’s La Primavera, Venus:

„of fragile, melancholic beauty“

typus of the beautiful tuberculous female = new ideal of beauty

Successors of Botticelli imitated this typus in their female models: tuberculous beauty

Tuberculosis in women: victims of fashion:

corsage
long robes

Tuberculosis = disease of Romanticism („pale death“); typus of beautiful tuberculous female repeated by Preraphaelites
Rembrandt

Rembrandt, Emmaus (1648), Louvre, Paris

Rembrandt, Saskia as Flora (1635), National Gallery, London

Rembrandt, Saskia van Uylenburgh (1635), National Gallery of Art, Washington
Rembrandt, The Lost Son in a Pub (Rembrandt and Saskia, 1634), Gemäldegalerie alte Meister, Dresden
Rembrandt, Abraham and Isaac (1635), Ermitage, St. Petersburg

Rembrandt

Rembrandt $\approx$ Saskia 1637 † Titia

Rumbertus 1635 † Cornelia 1638 †
Rembrandt, Night Watch (1642), Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam

Rembrandt

Rembrandt ∞ Saskia 1642 †
1637 †
Titia 1641 †

Rumbertus 1635 †
Cornelia 1638 †
Cornelia 1640 †
Titus *1641
Magd Hendrikje Stoffels
Rembrandt, Hendrickje at the door (1656), Gemäldegalerie Berlin

Rembrandt

Rembrandt ∞ Saskia 1637 †

Rumbertus 1635 †

Cornelia 1638 †

Cornelia 1640 †

Titus 1641 †

Hendrikje Stoffels 1663 †
Rembrandt

Rembrandt, Selfportrait (1629), Mauritshuis, La Hague

Rembrandt, Selfportrait (1669), National Gallery, London

Edvard Munch

Edvard Munch, Das kranke Kind I (The Sick Child), 1896