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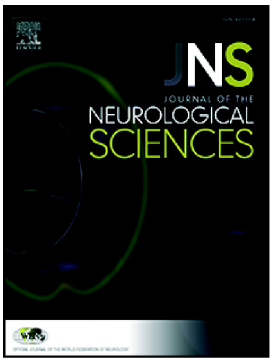

Wrong diagnosis in the supposed self-portrait of El Greco

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ACCEPTED MANUSCRIPT

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Dear Editor:

The diagnosis of ocular or systemic pathology through the study of a work of art can only be presumptive, due to the self-evident difficulty in studying the subjects portrayed.[1-3] Diagnosis is facilitated in paintings that show clear instances of ophthalmic pathology such as large-angle strabismus, traumatism, or changes of the ocular surface. In other instances, the existence of medical records may aid in establishing the artist's diagnosis.[7]

We would like to challenge Bianucci, Marías Franco and Appenzeller's[8] retro-diagnosis of El Greco based on their study of a self-portrait attributed to the artist, also known as *Portrait of an Old Man.* The authors argue that El Greco suffered from congenital enophthalmos, strabismus and probable amblyopia, as well as a neurological disorder.[8]

The correct diagnosis of enophthalmos requires the use of an exophthalmometer to measure them, thus making it impossible to detect them on a frontal photograph or self-portrait alone. There are some indirect signs of enophthalmos, such as marked ptosis or hypoglobus, neither of which are evident in this self-portrait. In particular, there are no signs of either in the subject's left eye. Furthermore, the eyes appear aligned with corneal light reflexes positioned symmetrically. Therefore, enophthalmos can be firmly ruled out from an oculoplastic standpoint.[9,10]

With regards to the diagnosis of a possible lesion in the first peripheral branch of the 8th cranial nerve pair, we refute it on the basis that the subject's eyebrows appear to be raised symmetrically, causing equally symmetric forehead wrinkling. The observed deepening of the superior sulci (sulcus syndrome) is a common age-related condition that results from the atrophy of fatty tissue. By contrast, the margin to crease distance is greater in the right eye than in the left one, suggesting possible blepharoptosis in the former that is compensated for by elevation of both eyebrows (Hering's law).[9,10]

The lower right eyelid shows blunting of the lateral canthal angle, which can signal peripheral facial palsy; however, this contradicts the previous observation that eyebrow height and forehead wrinkling appear normal. The flattening of the cheeks, finely marked nasolabial fold, and labial commissure showing no deviation from its normal position provide further support for rejecting the diagnosis of facial palsy.

The buccal fat pads appear completely or partially atrophied, a physiological event typically associated with old age, extreme malnourishment, or body fat redistribution. We can also appreciate mild bilateral atrophy around the region near the temporal muscle that appears to be more pronounced in the left side due to slight rotation of the head together with the perspective employed by the artist and the predominance of light towards the right side of the painting. The tip of the nose maintains its position.

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