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Kluger, N.

2019-08

Kluger , N 2019 , ' A case of keratosis pilaris rubra in a 17th century portrait? ' , Journal of the European Academy of Dermatology and Venereology , vol. 33 , no. 8 , pp. 1450-1451 . <https://doi.org/10.1111/jdv.15561>

<http://hdl.handle.net/10138/313249>

<https://doi.org/10.1111/jdv.15561>

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Article type : Historical Perspective

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Title: **A case of keratosis pilaris rubra in a 17th century portrait?**

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Key-words : arts ; history; keratosis pilaris rubra ; medecine in the Arts; painting ; portrait; skin disease; ulerythema ophryogenes

Figure : 1.

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Conflict of interest: none declared

Funding sources: none

Editor,

The Sinebrychoff art museum located in Helsinki includes paintings by old European masters to be found in Finland from the 1300s up to the mid-1800s [1]. While browsing the museum's permanent exhibition, the portrait of Anna van Schoonhoven by Netherlandish painter Jan Cornelisz Verspronck (1597-1662) in 1645 is more likely to attract the

dermatologist's eye. The portrait depicts a notable sitting from aside, half-turned towards
This article has been accepted for publication and undergone full peer review but has not been through the copyediting, typesetting, pagination and proofreading process, which may lead to differences between this version and the Version of Record. Please cite this article as doi: 10.1111/jdv.15561

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the viewer, her hands on her lap (**Figure 1**). Anna von Schoonhoven was the wife of a burgomaster of Haarlem and aged 35 years old at the time of the painting. She displays a striking facial redness located affecting the cheeks, the chin and extending to both eyebrows. The nose, perioral area and forehead are clearly spared. The facial redness is more pronounced than the “usual” light redness of the cheek that is often painted in many portraits during that period. The redness does not suggest rosacea but rather keratosis rubra pilaris [2]. Keratosis pilaris rubra is characterized by prominent erythema and follicular papules that typically involve the cheeks, eyebrows, ears and chin. It affects mainly women aged between 20 to 40 years of age [2]. Association with scarring alopecia and atrophy of the eyebrows point toward ulerythema ophryogenes (or keratosis pilaris atrophicans faciei) [3]. However, it is difficult to assess in this painting whether distal parts of the eyebrows are thinner or missing. Interestingly a second portrait by Verspronck painted in 1641 and currently exhibited in the Louvre museum shows Anna van Schoonhoven in the same position and with the same localized redness [4], which confirms at least that the facial redness is chronic. Verspronck had a successful career as a portraitist of mostly Catholic sitters in Haarlem. Browsing through his various paintings, one can note that he indeed tended to depict redness on the cheeks in his portraits with various stage of severity. It can therefore be argued against our interpretation that this redness could be simply in relation with the painter’s style. However, we failed to find other portrait with such erythema extending to the eyebrows. Besides, keratosis pilaris rubra has a dominant transmission [2]. One could also wonder whether Verspronck could have painted several relatives from Haarlem that had the same condition.

To conclude, this portrait could be an early representation of keratosis pilaris rubra, and possibly ulerythema ophryogenes. Interpreting the cutaneous signs of painted portraits is a highly enjoyable exercise but remains completely subjective [5].

Figure 1. Jan Cornelisz Verspronck (1609-1662), Anna van Schoonhoven, 1645, Paul and Fanny Sinebrychoff collection / Sinebrychoff Art Museum and Finnish National Gallery / Photography: Finnish National Gallery/Yehia Eweis. Available <https://www.flickr.com/photos/finnishnationalgallery/29467274755/>

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