

CHARLES VI OF FRANCE AND HENRY VI OF ENGLAND: FAMILIAL SARCOIDOSIS IN THE HUNDRED YEARS' WAR

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Charles VI of France (1368-1422) suffered from a severe illness that subsequently led to his identification as 'Mad' (le Fou) (1). His grandson Henry VI of England (1421-1471), also claimed legitimacy as a king of France whilst concomitantly suffering from mental illness (2). Both were key stakeholders in the Hundred Years' War between their two nations, and Henry went on to participate in the English dynastic 'Wars of the Roses'. The madness of both kings has been previously described as a familial schizophrenia syndrome, bipolar disorder, typhus, arsenic poisoning or even porphyria (1-3).

Charles' symptomatology began with an episode in his mid twenties (1392) when he suffered from hair loss, nail loss and fevers (his father Charles VI also suffered similar symptoms) (1). On a riding expedition with his men, he had misinterpreted their actions and subsequently killed four of his retinue. He continued to suffer from insanity for many years, and would go on to suffer from 44 distinct psychiatric episodes including one of glass delusion; in which he felt that his body was brittle and amenable to shattering. Many of his children died early of an

unknown illness and his son Charles VII is also reported as "going mad" in later life;(1) most notably Henry VI of England (Charles' grandson) who became insane in 1453 during his thirties (2, 3).

Such a distinct familial pattern in hair and nail loss then psychiatric illness can derive from several differential diagnoses including familial thyroid dis-



Fig. 1. Charles the VI of France (with a facial plaque on his right cheek) by The Boucicaut Master 1412 © University of Geneva

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ease and systemic lupus erythematosus (SLE); although there is little evidence of goitre and no description of other associated SLE-type symptoms. Inherited metabolic brain diseases would have presented earlier in life.

Sarcoidosis is a granulomatous condition that can present in early adulthood with alopecia and nail changes (oncholysis) as described in this family line. (4) Furthermore brain involvement with neurosarcoidosis is a recognized cause of familial psychosis that can present in adulthood. Familial sarcoidosis could therefore explain many of these symptoms of the Charles VIth line of Valois including those of his father, children and grandson Henry VI of England. It could also account for a previously unnoticed facial skin plaque on Charles VI (Figure 1) just lateral to the right nasolabial fold.

The possibility of familial sarcoidosis afflicting the royal houses of France and England in the tumultuous era of Hundred Years' War and Wars of the Roses may now be the earliest evidence of a case of this disorder.

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