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The History of Immediate Hypersensitivity Reactions

To the Editor:—An unreferenced article by Ovary on the history of immediate hypersensitivity reactions describing the first recorded death from anaphylaxis¹ is referenced in major anesthetic textbooks.^{2,3} This event is said to be recorded in hieroglyphics on an Egyptian ebony plate from 2600 BC and to tell the story of "Menes, son of Sargon the Great, who came to Conquer Egypt but died following a bee sting."

Many tales from ancient Egypt become embellished over the years. The curse of Tutankhamen for example, was fictitious. This tale of anaphylaxis is no exception.

Menes is the name given to the first Egyptian pharaoh (the first king of the first dynasty). Although semilegendary, this figure was based on a native Egyptian who, modern chronologic studies would suggest, ruled about 3100 BC.

The ebony plate found at the entrance to his otherwise empty tomb appears to show a wasp or hornet and was translated by Waddell 1930⁴ to suggest that Menes died from a wasp sting. This has been disputed by many eminent Egyptologists, however, and other interpretations are perhaps more likely.⁵ The earliest "contemporary" account from a Greek historian states that Menes was killed by a hippopotamus!

As for the rest of the story, Sargon the Great, ruler of Akkad (in modern Iraq), lived in the 27th century BC. His son and successor was Narim-Sin. They were a warlike family, but there is no evidence that there was any contact with Egypt at this time, warlike or otherwise. 2600 BC is a period of demonstrable stability and prosperity in Egypt, and there was no evidence of war with anyone during this period. There were no foreign invasions of Egypt until the Syro-palestinian Hyksos rulers of the 17th century BC. (None of these had names like Menes or Sargon.)

The true fate of Menes may never be known. The consensus would seem to be that, in the absence of more factual data, the tale of Menes

dying from a bee sting must be considered a myth, and the remainder of the story as told by Ovary is, at best, inaccurate.

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