



CORONARY ARTERIOSCLEROTIC DISEASE EXISTED IN CHINA OVER 2,200 YEARS AGO

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Recent studies of ancient Egyptian mummies by whole-body multislice computed tomographic scans documented the presence of atherosclerosis in their aorta, as evidenced by calcification, as well as in the femoral, iliac, carotid, and coronary arteries.^{1,2} Therefore, arteriosclerosis and cardiovascular calcification are not unique to contemporary humans. Indeed, coronary atherosclerotic disease is not a modern ailment: it existed in China as far back as 2nd-century B.C.³⁻⁸ Extensive occlusive coronary atherosclerotic disease was found in a 50-year-old Chinese noblewoman — Lady Dai — who died in 163 B.C.⁹ She had a severely occluded left anterior descending coronary artery (Figure 1), which was responsible for her sudden death from an anterior myocardial infarction an hour or so after a meal.³⁻⁸

Lady Dai had several risk factors. First, she had a Type A personality; 138½ musk melon seeds were found in her stomach (Figure 2), and researchers believed she must have gulped down



Figure 2. 138½ musk melon seeds found in her stomach.



Figure 1. Severe occlusive atherosclerotic disease in the proximal left anterior descending coronary artery (inset) of a 50-year-old Chinese noblewoman who died of acute myocardial infarction over 2,100 years ago.



Figure 3. The unearthed herbs that were buried in the noblewoman's tomb. Courtesy of Hunan Provincial Museum, China.

the melon in a great haste.⁶⁻⁸ Second, she was overweight as evidenced by her appearance (Figure 1). Third, she had diabetes and hypertension.⁹ Fourth, as judged from her richly furnished tomb and the fact that she was a noblewoman with many servants waiting on her, she probably did not need to exert herself. Finally, packets of herbal medicines containing cinnamon, magnolia bark, and peppercorns were found in the tomb (Figure 3), suggesting that the noblewoman suffered from angina pectoris during her life.⁶ According to Han medical canons, these medicines were prescribed for patients with coronary heart disease as they still are by traditional Chinese doctors in China today.⁷

Keywords: coronary arteriosclerosis, coronary atherosclerotic disease

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