In the 4th century BC, Hippocrates (460–377 BC) (Figure 1) provided one of the first descriptions of a neck enlargement whose progression was sometimes related to seaweeds’ and some water minerals’ ingestion. The Latin physician Dioscorides (1st century AD) (Figure 2) interpreted it as bronchus’ herniation and called it guttur (the Latin term indicating the throat, later changed goitre). The term thyroid (which means ‘shield’) was coined by Galen (Figure 3) to indicate the cartilage protecting the larynx and was then used to indicate both the cartilage and the gland.

During Medieval Age the surgeons coming from the Schola Medica Salernitana (Italy) (Figure 4) became specialised in thyroid surgery for the goitre treatment and Paracelsus (1493–1541) (Figure 5) recognised the association between cretinism, endemic goitre and congenital idiocy.

Leonardo da Vinci (1452 – 1519) (Figure 6) was one of the first anatomists to represent the thyroid. He thought its role was to fill up the intramuscular neck spaces and to space trachea from the breastbone.

At the beginning of 16th century, even if many hypothesis had been suggested, the aetiology of thyroid diseases was still unknown. A proof of this is a sonnet written by the Italian painter Michelangelo Buonarroti (1475 – 1574) (Figure 7) to his friend Giovanni da Pistoia in 1509, in which he complained that he had acquired goitre because he had kept his neck hyperextended for a long time while painting the ceilings of the Sixtine Chapel.