



Orogastric Feeding: Two Reports from Medieval Persia and Spain (9th - 12th CE)

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Dear Editor,

Although enteral feeding and nutritional delivery by enema are well known to exist since ancient times, the old history of gastric feeding is less investigated. Most reports of the history of gastric feeding mention Capivaccus as the first one who reported the use of orogastric feeding in 1598 (1,2).

However, our recent investigation shows that there are at least two reports of orogastric feeding in the 9th and 12th centuries from medieval Persia and Spain.

The first report is from Ali ibn Sahl Rabban al-Tabari (838 - 870 CE), a notable Persian Muslim physician, scientist, and philosopher. His most popular medical text, *Ferdous al-Hekma fi al-Tib* (Paradise of Wisdom in Medicine), is one of the oldest medical texts written in Islamic civilization. This book is known as the first written medical encyclopedia that compounds all the branches of medical sciences (3-5). Tabari in the fifth chapter of the sixth volume of his book, which is titled “on the symptoms and treatment of poisoning” (Figure 1), says:

“In rabies, since the patient escapes from the water and does not drink water, a reed with empty duct can be entered from the patient’s throat to the stomach head; then the head of this reed can be filled with water” (6).

The second report is from Ibn Zuhr (7) popularly known as Avenzoar (1091 - 1162) who is a famous physician and philosopher of medieval Muslim Spain. He explains the method of gastric feeding in a chapter on “paralysis in esophageal muscle” in his famous manuscript “*Kitab al-Taysir fi al-Mudawat wal al-Tadbir*” (the book on easy treatments). This therapeutic manual was translated into Latin by John of Capua in the 13th century (8,9). He describes this method for orogastric feeding in detail:

“.....So the patient cannot eat any drug to cure, or any food to nourish him. If the patient is not treated, he will die

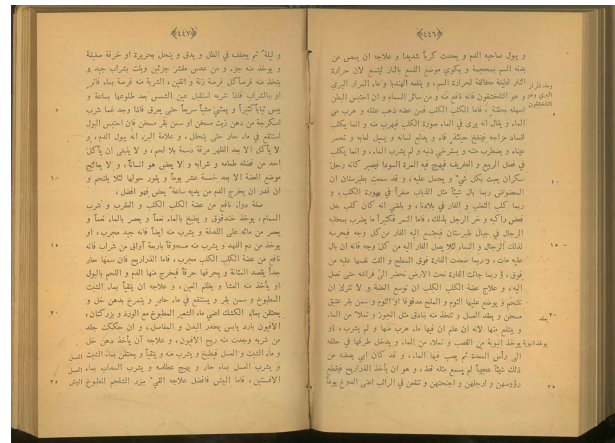


Figure 1. The chapter of “on the symptoms and treatment of poisoning” from *Ferdous al-Hekma fi al-Tib* (Paradise of Wisdom in Medicine) by Ali ibn Sahl Rabban al-Tabari (838 - 870 CE), kept in Iran Parliament Library, record number: 12 - 7464. (Link: <http://dlib.ical.ir>).

from cachexia and weakness and there is no way except to feed him in another way.

In this way, a golden or tinny tube is entered into the patient’s throat and pushed forward slowly. One side of the tube should be wide allowing being hold by the physician. It causes nausea in the patient while entering the esophagus; so, enter a little amount first; then pull it out and advance again when the patient gets adapted. It is followed by infusing milk or other suitable liquids to feed the patient until the cause of the main disease is cured”.

These reports show that orogastric feeding has at least a six hundred years older history than what was previously assumed. It seems that investigating Muslim medical manuscripts can provide us with accurate information on the human gradual achievements in the field of medicine through history.

Footnotes

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