

Nutrition Therapy in Ancient and Medieval Persia

Fereshteh Nouri,¹ Arman Zargaran,² and Mohsen Naseri^{3,*}

¹Department of Traditional Persian Medicine, Faculty of Medicine, Shahed University, Tehran, Iran

²Department of History of Medicine, School of Traditional Medicine, Tehran University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran

³Traditional Medicine Clinical Trial Research Center, Shahed University, Tehran, Iran

*Corresponding author: Mohsen Naseri, MD, PhD, Traditional Medicine Clinical Trial Research Center, Shahed University, Tehran, Iran. Tel: +98-9122383454, E-mail: naseri@shahed.ac.ir

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Dear Editor,

Current medicine is the last ring of a long chain of progress of medical sciences in various civilizations during history. Among them, Persia was one of the oldest civilizations in history, and dates back to about 10000 years ago (1). Medicine and allied sciences were well-developed in this civilization. In this regard, nutrition was always considered as one of the main issues in Persian medicine (PM) and had a deep history in antiquity. There is extensive evidence in this regard, in the literature, databases such as PubMed and Scopus, as well as search engines including Google Scholar and also in historical documents and manuscripts. In the Achaemenids era (550 to 330 BC), eating and drinking manners were taught to children and they were encouraged to avoid overeating. Kids and youth meals included hunting meat or bread, and vegetables, twice a day (2). Cyrus the Great (559 to 527 BC), the founder of Achaemenid dynasty, believed that moderate and proper nutrition is the basis of maintaining health. He also believed overeating caused all diseases (2). Melanpus, a Persian physician (400 BC), described food fortification by adding iron to the soldier's wine (3). Later, in the Sassanid kingdom (224 to 637 AD), advanced academic medical centers were founded and they achieved significant findings in treatment by food and drugs. Jundishapour Medical University was found as the first teaching hospital in history during this period (4). There were medical manuscripts on nutrition, such as *Almakoul va al-Mashroub* (food and drink) written by Byadq (Sarough), the physician of the court of Khosrow I (Sassanid King; 531 - 579 AD) (5). Furthermore, there is a Pahlavic manuscript belonging to Sassanid era about a conversation between Harith, the Arab physician learned medicine in Jundishapour University, and Khosrow I on dietary recommendations (4, 5).

In the early Islamic time, Persian physicians like Rhazes (865 - 925 AD), Akhawayni (?-983 AD), Haly Abbas (949 - 982 AD), Avicenna (980 - 1037 AD), etc., flourished medical sci-

ences during the 9th to 12th century AD, which is called the Islamic Golden Age (6).

In this era, Persian practitioners believed in 6 principles of keeping health (*Sette Zaroorieh* in Persian Language), and food was mentioned as one of these elements. Also, they widely used nutrition in treatment of diseases and considered it as the first treatment step in the early medieval era (7).

Rhazes, who had specific views on nutrition, believed that: "If a physician could treat a patient with proper food, he achieved bliss" (8). Furthermore, Persian physicians wrote many manuscripts on nutrition during that time, including *al-Aghziah* (the foods; written by Ibn Masawaiyh in 8th and 9th century) and *Manafe' al-Aghzie va daf-o-Mazareha* (Benefits of Food and its Harmfulness) and *Teb al-Moluki* (written by Rhazes in 9th century), *Aghziat al-Marza* (Food for patients; written by Najib al-Din Samarghandi in 12th and 13th century), etc. (7).

Among the physicians that lived in the mentioned era, Avicenna (Ibn-e-Sina), one of the most prominent figures, believed foods had a critical role in human health. He considered nutrition therapy as the most important method for treating diseases and mentioned 4 general methods in nutrition therapy for patients, including: 1. food fasting, 2. food reduction, 3. food modification, and 4. food increase (9,10).

Although, it is believed that nutrition therapy is a current concept in medical issues, it seems that Persian physicians used it to prevent and treat diseases as the main treatment issue from antiquity during the medieval age. It has been shown that nutrition therapy has greater depth in the history.

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