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Fatemeh Farjadmand, Mohammad Reza Shams Ardekani, Arman Zargaran

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Galen’s Book on Sphygology

Fatemeh Farjadmand\textsuperscript{1}, Mohammad Reza Shams Ardekani\textsuperscript{1}, Arman Zargaran\textsuperscript{1,2,3}

1- Department of Traditional Pharmacy, School of Traditional Medicine, Tehran University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran

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

3- Research Office for the History of Persian Medicine, Shiraz University of Medical Sciences, Shiraz, Iran

Correspondence: Arman Zargaran, Department of History of Medicine, School of Traditional Medicine, Vafamanesh Street, Heravi Sq. Postal code: 1417653761
Email: zargarana@sums.ac.ir
Dear Editor,

We read with the great interest the paper entitled “Johannitius (809-873AD), a bridge between Greek and Persian knowledge of the pulse” (Int J Cardiol 2016;206:112-3) [1]. We think some more details about Galen’s work in pulsology can be necessary to clarify the subject.

Galen (129-217), the Greek physician was one of the main figures in medicine during the history. He is called as the father of systematic medicine [2]. Galen’s writings were as the influential documents on the Persian and Islamic physicians in Islamic golden age (9th to 12th century AD) and cited by them frequently [3]. In early Islamic era, some great translators and physicians started to translate Greek, Persian, Syrian, Indian, etc medical manuscripts to Arabic language (as *lingua Franca*) [1,4].

Johannitius was one of these translators who translate too many Greek manuscripts into the Arabic. One of his translations was a manuscript about sphygmology which was written by Galen. Nowadays, his translation is accessible and based on we can know what Galen knew and wrote about pulse [5]. The title of this translation is “Kitab al-Nabz” (The Book of Pulse) and also “al-Nabz lel-Motealemin” (Pulse for Pupils). This book contains 12 chapters. In this book, Galen described arteries with blood spurts and the relation of them with the heart, how to sense and movement in the vessels, the conditions of the blood movement (speed), definition of terminologies in sphygmology, changing in pulse and the causes, etc [6].

In overall, Galen had a great contribution to the field of cardiology [7]. Besides his mistakes in this field like his claims about transferring the blood between left and right ventricles via the pores in the heart septum; he had too many findings in the field, especially about arteries and pulse. For example he was the first person found the content of the arteries is blood, not air. He also determined the origin of the pulse based on elastic nature of the vessels [8].
It seems that Galen’s book on sphygmology was the first comprehensive book with individual title on pulsology. After centuries, this book has been getting attention by Persian scientists in Islamic era like Avicenna and others. Later, Avicenna (980-1032AD) wrote another book in this field entitled *Resalat-e-Ragshenasi* (Treatise on Pulsology) [9]. In that time, pulsology was always one of the main diagnosis ways that the physicians had to have enough skill in Persian medicine (humeral medicine) [10].
References:
7- Papavramidou N, Tziakas D. Galen on "syncope". Int J Cardiol 2010;142(3):242-4.
**Figure Legend:**

Fig 1. Left: A romanticized image of Galen; Right: the cover of republished copy of “*Kitab al-Nabz*” (The Book of Pulse) by Institute for Studies in Medical History, Islamic and Complementary Medicine.
Figure 1