

THE LEVATOR PALATI MUSCLE

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An attempt to solve difficulties encountered in the dissecting room by reference to the standard text-books revealed a lack of agreement concerning the origin of the levator palati muscle. Eustachius (1707) was the first to mention this muscle, placing the pharyngotympanic tube 'between the two muscles of the fauces or throat'; there is little doubt that he meant the tensor and levator palati. Soemmering (1796) placed the levator anterior to the carotid canal, at the junction between the bony and fibro-cartilaginous parts of the tube. Blakeway (1914) stated that the levator is not medial to the tube at its origin, and our findings have in the main agreed with his, but not with the current teaching.

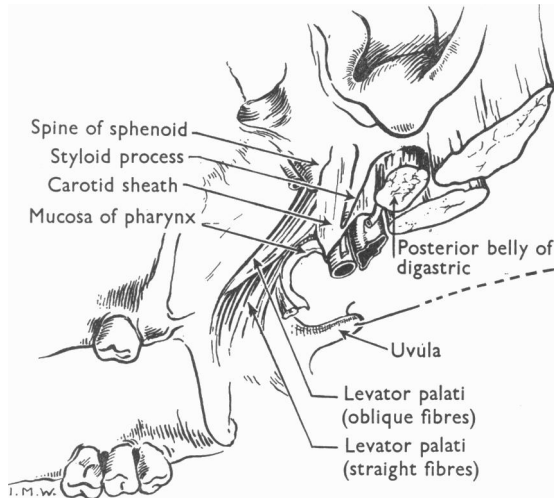


Fig. 1. The soft palate has been retracted and partly detached to display the levator palati.

To verify or disprove these varied opinions, we dissected four foetal and sixteen adult specimens, and have since confirmed our findings in ten further specimens.

We found that the levator palati arises:

(1) By a small tendon from a rough impression on the inferior surface of the petrous temporal bone, immediately in front of the inferior orifice of the carotid canal. The precise relationship of this area to the carotid canal varies in different specimens but is never medial to it.

(2) By a group of fleshy fibres from a sheet of fascia which depends from the vaginal plate and forms the upper part of the carotid sheath (Fig. 1). This origin has not been described before, but could be demonstrated in every case by careful dissection.

(3) By a very few fleshy fibres from the under surface of the fibro-cartilaginous part of the tube. The fibres which arise here are directly continuous with those which arise in front of the carotid canal. Moreover, the fleshy belly of the muscle lies below the tube, and only crosses over to its medial side at the level of the medial pterygoid plate.

Finally, the muscle consists of two parts, an infero-medial consisting of straight fibres, and a supero-lateral consisting of oblique fibres (Fig. 1). The two are separated by a small vessel and some fibrous tissue. In this connexion it is interesting to recall that, according to Baxter (1953), the levator palati develops in two parts from the third branchial arch—one from those cells of the palatal fold which reach the hamular process, and the other from the 'skew' fibres of the tubal portion of the fold.

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