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Surgery of The Alimentary Tract

VOLUME TWO

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CHAPTER 5

The Pancreas

ANATOMY

The pancreas is a soft, yellowish, elongated, hammer-head-shaped organ which lies deep in the epigastrium and left hypochondrium, extending transversely across the posterior abdominal wall from the concavity of the duodenum to the hilum of the spleen (Fig. 584). Because of its finely lobulated surface it resembles one of the larger salivary glands in appearance. Its average dimensions in the adult are 15 cm. in length by 3.1 cm. in width by 1.2 cm. in thickness.

The pancreas is situated between the lamina of the transverse mesocolon in a retroperitoneal position behind the peritoneal floor of the lesser peritoneal cavity, on the level of the second lumbar vertebra (sometimes the first and third); the stomach is in front, the duodenum to the right and the spleen to the left. The aorta, vena cava, celiac plexus, thoracic duct and diaphragmatic crura are immediately behind it.

Lesions of the pancreas cannot extend posteriorly; they extend forward into the lesser peritoneal sac.

Divisions

The pancreas, for descriptive purposes, may be divided into four anatomic divisions: the head, the neck, the body and the tail.

The *head*, or right extremity, has an inferior projection called the uncinata process, which gives it a globular shape and lies cradled in the concavity of the duodenum. The inferior margin of the uncinata process extends some distance below the general level of the rest of the gland. The right margin of the head is intimately apposed to the duodenum which actually grooves that portion of the substance of the gland. The terminal common bile duct passes through the substance of the head of the pancreas before entering the descending portion of the duodenum. The posterior surface of the head of the pancreas is in apposition with the inferior vena cava, the right ovarian or spermatic vein, the right renal vessels and the aorta.

The superior mesenteric vessels emerge from behind the neck of the pancreas and sometimes pass over the anterior surface of the lowermost portion of the inferior tip of the uncinata process. The antero-inferior surface of the head is covered by the first portion of the transverse colon.

Normally a good line of cleavage can be developed between the head of the pancreas and all these important structures, but inflammatory changes or malignant infiltration may destroy these lines of cleavage and make the dissection difficult or impossible.

The *neck* is a narrowed portion of the pancreas extending from the head to

Surfaces

The anterior surface of the body is flat, and is covered by the posterior parietal peritoneum which separates it from the posterior wall of the stomach, forming the lesser peritoneal sac. An acute inflammation of the pancreas may cause peritonitis and an effusion, which at first is limited to the lesser sac. If the epiploic foramen is affected simultaneously by inflammatory adhesions, the exudate may be confined to this region and give the physical signs of a tumor.

The inferior surface is covered by the posterior parietal peritoneum just before the latter turns forward to form the superior leaf of the transverse mesocolon; as a result, the inferior margin of the pancreatic body is closely related to the duodeno-jejunal junction on the right side and to the splenic flexure of the colon on the left.

The posterior surface of the body and tail of the pancreas lies astride of the aorta at the point of origin of the inferior mesenteric artery. It also passes over the left renal pedicle and the left kidney.

Pancreatic Ducts

These consist of the main pancreatic duct (canal of Wirsung) and the accessory pancreatic duct (duct of Santorini).

The *main pancreatic duct* begins at the tail of the pancreas and runs thence toward the head of the organ, passing nearer its posterior than its anterior aspect.

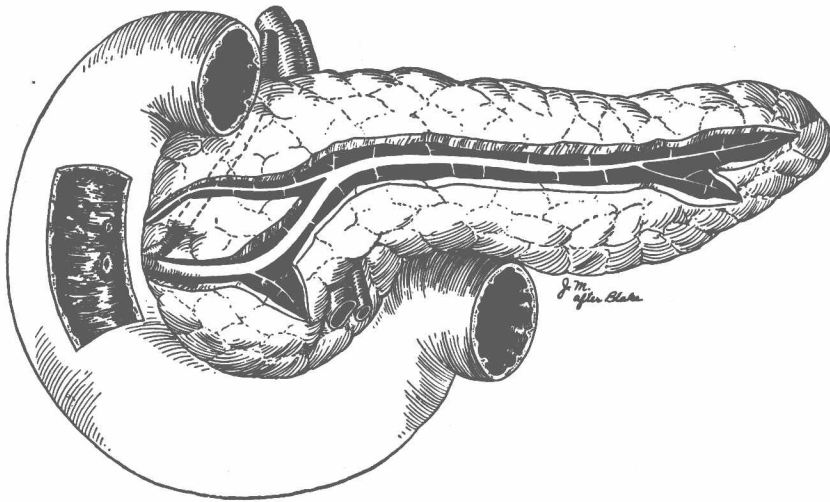


Fig. 585. Usual course and distribution of the pancreatic ducts. The papilla of Vater and the accessory papilla are shown. (Rienhoff & Pickrell: Arch. Surg., Vol. 51.)

After passing the neck, the duct turns downward, backward and to the right in the head and runs to the left side of the common bile duct. It enters the duodenal wall together with and parallel to the common bile duct, with which it unites while running obliquely in the walls of the duodenum and with which it empties by a common opening upon a papilla of mucous membrane about 10 cm. from the pylorus (Fig. 585). The opening is covered from above by a fold of mucous membrane. The main pancreatic duct may be recognized by its white color. Its diameter, near its termination, is between 2 and 3 mm. It usually drains the entire tail, body, neck and part of the head of the pancreas.

The *accessory pancreatic duct* may join the main duct near its termination, or may empty into the duodenum by a separate opening. It usually is much shorter than the main duct and courses through the ventral and cephalic portions of only the head of the gland.

Rienhoff and Pickrell⁴⁹ dissected the pancreatic and extrahepatic biliary ductal systems of 100 human beings and found that the accessory pancreatic duct was absent in only one instance, and that it communicated with the main duct in 89 of the subjects. In 61 per cent of their dissections the main duct drained the caudal portion of the head of the pancreas, leaving the remaining small portion of the head to be drained by the accessory duct. In 7 per cent the accessory duct drained the entire cephalic portion of the head while in 4 per cent it drained the greater portion of

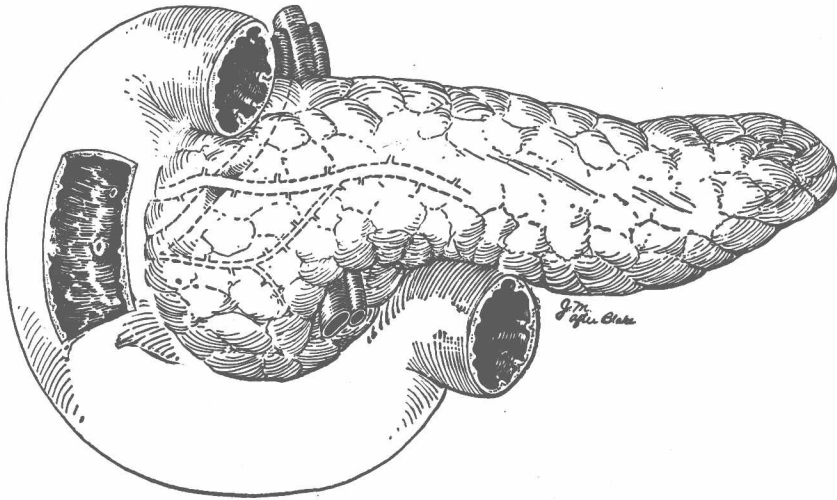


Fig. 586. Less common course of pancreatic ducts in which the duct of Santorini constitutes the major duct. (Rienhoff and Pickrell: Arch. Surg., Vol. 51.)

the head, leaving only the dorsal and caudal portions of the head to be drained by the main duct (Fig. 586).

Ampulla of Vater

The ampulla of Vater is a dilatation at the entrance of the common bile duct and pancreatic duct into the duodenum. The common bile duct and the main pancreatic duct may enter the duodenum through separate openings into a common papilla, or these two ducts may communicate with each other before emptying into the ampulla. Rienhoff and Pickrell⁴⁹ found that in their subjects the variations in this anatomic arrangement of the ampulla occurred in the incidence shown in Figure 587.

Sphincter of Oddi

The sphincter of Oddi controls the opening and closing of the outlet of the ampulla into the duodenum. It consists of muscle fibers that surround each duct, some of which surround both ducts. There is difference of opinion as to whether contraction of the sphincter simultaneously closes both ducts and thus prevents a common channel or whether it only closes the duodenal opening of the ampulla which when closed still permits a common channel for free communication between

the pancreatic and common bile ducts. Doubilet and Mulholland¹⁹ reported that the latter was found to be true in 48 of 49 patients who were operated upon.

Papilla of Vater

The papilla of Vater (duodenal papilla) is an elevation of the duodenal mucous membrane at the point at which the ampulla of Vater empties into the duodenal lumen. It is most often situated on the posterolateral wall of the descending portion of the duodenum, but its position is variable. It can be distinguished only with

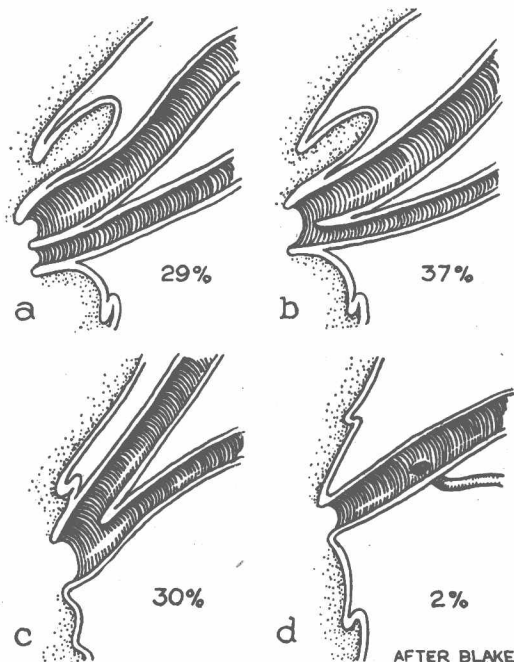


Fig. 587. Variations in terminations of the common bile and main pancreatic ducts. (Rienhoff and Pickrell: *Arch. Surg.*, Vol. 51.)

difficulty by inspection of the internal surface of the duodenum, and is most easily identified by performing a choledochotomy and passing a probe down the common duct to the ampulla, after which transduodenal search for the papilla will reveal the tip of the probe protruding through the ampullary opening at the apex of the papilla.

Arteries

The pancreas receives its arterial supply by two branches from the gastroduodenal, two from the superior mesenteric and one from either the splenic, hepatic or celiac artery, as well as from a variable number of smaller tributaries of the splenic, hepatic and gastroduodenal arteries (see Fig. 146, p. 205).

The gastroduodenal artery arises from the hepatic artery in the gastrohepatic ligament at a point about 2 cm. above the superior margin of the pancreas and approximately in the same vertical plane as the pylorus. It runs downward and medial to the common bile duct to pass over the anterior surface of the head of the pancreas and posterior to the first portion of the duodenum to terminate in the right gastroepiploic and the superior pancreaticoduodenal arteries. The anterior

superior pancreaticoduodenal artery begins at the inferior margin of the first portion of the duodenum where it can be found by tracing back the more easily located right gastroepiploic artery to its origin. The anterior superior pancreaticoduodenal artery passes downward and traverses the sulcus between the head of the pancreas and the medial surface of the duodenum from above downward to meet and anastomose with the inferior pancreaticoduodenal artery which has arisen from the mesenteric artery and passed from below upward in this same sulcus. Thus the superior and inferior pancreaticoduodenal arteries form an anterior marginal artery along the medial surface of the duodenum and give off numerous small branches to the duodenum and to the head of the pancreas.

Before the gastroduodenal artery terminates it gives off the following branches:

1. The *posterior* superior pancreaticoduodenal artery which arises from the gastroduodenal at the superior margin of the duodenum and anterior to the common bile duct. It passes medially behind the head of the pancreas and posterior to the intrapancreatic portion of the common bile duct to anastomose with the posterior inferior pancreaticoduodenal artery which arises from the superior mesenteric artery and passes upward to meet it, forming a posterior marginal artery along the medial border of the duodenum.

2. The supraduodenal artery which is small and arises from the gastroduodenal at the superior margin of the duodenum to supply the superior and anterior portions of the first part of the duodenum.

3. The retroduodenal artery which is small and arises from the gastroduodenal at the same level or close to the supraduodenal. It courses along the posterior surface of the duodenum to supply the posterior wall of this part of the duodenum.

The anterior and posterior inferior pancreaticoduodenal arteries arise separately or by a common trunk from either the superior mesenteric artery or one of its primary branches. They not only anastomose with their corresponding superior pancreaticoduodenal arteries to form a marginal arcade to supply the duodenum and head of the pancreas as described above, but they also supply the duodenojejunal junction and adjacent parts of the neck of the pancreas.

Thus it can be seen that the head of the pancreas derives its chief arterial blood supply from the anterior and posterior marginal arcades formed by the anterior and posterior superior and inferior pancreaticoduodenal arteries as described above.

The neck, body and tail of the pancreas receive arterial blood from other sources.

The *superior pancreatic* artery is a small vessel which is often absent. When present, it most commonly arises from the splenic artery which courses transversely along the superior margin of the body and tail of the pancreas, but it may arise from the celiac axis, or from the hepatic, splenic or superior mesenteric artery. It courses along the superior border of the pancreas but is usually buried in the substance of the gland. It anastomoses with the inferior pancreatic artery.

The *inferior pancreatic* artery is also small but it is more constantly present than is the superior vessel. It may arise from the superior mesenteric, anterior superior or inferior pancreaticoduodenal, or the superior pancreatic artery. It passes through the substance of the body of the pancreas along the posterior inferior margin of the gland.

The body and tail of the pancreas also receive arterial blood from a number of branches of the splenic artery which leave that vessel at multiple points (see Fig. 146, p. 205), as it courses along the superior border of the pancreas, to pass

directly into the substance of the gland. These arteries are numerous, small and easily torn. Control of bleeding from them is tedious and often causes trouble when dissection is undertaken in this region.

Although the arterial supply to the pancreas is usually as described above, Falconer and Griffiths²¹ found that variations were common (Fig. 588). Cattell and Warren¹⁷ point out that in rare cases the main hepatic artery may arise from the

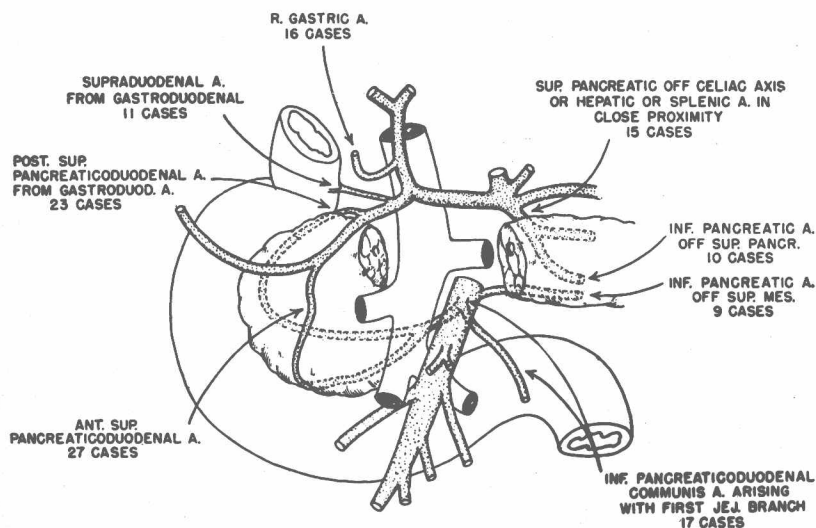


Fig. 588. Variations in origin of principal arteries to the pancreas. (Falconer and Griffiths: Brit. J. Surg., Vol. 37.)

superior mesenteric artery. Nonrecognition of this anomaly during dissection around the head of the pancreas may have serious consequences.

Veins

The venous blood of the pancreas drains into the portal system. The pattern of veins about the pancreas is most commonly as follows:

The portal vein is formed behind the neck of the pancreas by the junction of the superior mesenteric and splenic veins. These vessels groove the posterior surface of the pancreas, from which, however, they can easily be separated by blunt dissection unless inflammatory or neoplastic infiltration has destroyed the usual line of cleavage. Only occasionally is there a vein from the pancreas entering the anterior wall of the portal vein.

Falconer and Griffiths²¹ found that the superior mesenteric vein was usually formed by the confluence of two main trunks, one running along each side of the superior mesenteric artery and uniting to form a single vessel at a variable distance before passing beneath the pancreas to join the splenic and form the portal vein.

The splenic vein runs transversely along the posterior surface of the superior margin of the pancreas to join the superior mesenteric vein and thus form the portal vein behind the pancreatic neck. During its course it receives numerous small venules that drain the body and tail of the pancreas. These venules are thin walled and may cause troublesome bleeding when dissection is made in their region.

The above-mentioned veins are constant in their presence and pattern.

The left gastric vein is constant in its presence but variable in its termination.

Falconer and Griffiths²¹ found that it emptied into the splenic vein in 20 and into the splenoportal junction in 4 of their subjects.

The *inferior mesenteric vein* is also consistent in its presence, but variable in its termination. It passes from below upwards beneath the posterior surface of the body of the pancreas. Falconer and Griffiths found that it entered the splenic vein in 26 subjects and the superior mesenteric in 17.

The *right gastroepiploic vein* lies between the two peritoneal leaves of the gastrocolic ligament as it passes along the greater curvature of the stomach to join the superior mesenteric vein immediately beneath the neck of the pancreas. In its course it receives branches from the stomach, omentum, pylorus and the first portion of the duodenum. Just before its termination it is joined by the anterior superior pancreaticoduodenal and one or more colic veins to form what is called the gastrocolic trunk.

The *anterior superior pancreaticoduodenal vein* is formed in the pancreatoduodenal sulcus near the lower end of the second portion of the duodenum. It passes upward and medially in this sulcus to empty into the gastrocolic trunk. In its course it receives small thin-walled venules which drain the upper and anterior part of the head of the pancreas as well as the adjacent duodenum.

The *posterior superior pancreaticoduodenal vein* runs upward behind the intrapancreatic portion of the bile duct to enter the posterolateral aspect of the portal vein. It usually is of appreciable size and may be injured and cause troublesome bleeding in exposing the intrapancreatic portion of the common bile duct. The vessel can be ligated with impunity. It drains the upper posterior portion of the head of the pancreas, as well as the adjacent duodenum.

The *anterior inferior pancreaticoduodenal vein* is formed in the pancreatoduodenal sulcus near the origin of its superior counterpart and runs downward and medially in the substance of the pancreas to the lower margin of the uncinate process where it passes behind the superior mesenteric vessels to empty most commonly into the first jejunal vein near the latter's junction with the superior mesenteric vein. It drains the lower anterior part of the head of the pancreas and the adjacent duodenum.

The *posterior inferior pancreaticoduodenal vein* originates in the posterior pancreatoduodenal sulcus below the common bile duct and runs downward and medially around the lower edge of the uncinate process to empty into the first jejunal branch of the superior mesenteric vein. It drains the posterior portion of the lower part of the head of the pancreas.

The *inferior pancreatic vein* is fairly constant. It accompanies its artery along the posterior inferior border of the body of the pancreas and most frequently empties into the superior or inferior mesenteric veins, but may drain into the splenic vein or gastrocolic trunk instead.

A *pancreatic cervical vein* is inconstantly present. When present it is a short, wide vessel which leaves the inferior border of the neck of the pancreas to empty into the superior mesenteric vein.

The greater portion of the body and tail of the pancreas drains into the splenic vein by the short venules mentioned above.

As is the case with the arteries, the patterns described in the foregoing paragraphs are the most common (Fig. 589) but variations are frequent.

The vascular pattern of the pancreas has been described in detail because of its great surgical importance. It can be seen that the head of the pancreas and the