

A Translation of the New Edition of the *Suśrutasamhitā*

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Contents

The manuscripts and editions used in the vulgate editions by Yā-	
davaśarman Trivikrama Ācārya	5
The sources of the 1915 edition	5
The sources of the 1931 edition	5
The sources of the 1938 edition	6
Evaluation	7
The 1939 edition	8
The sources for the Bhānumatī	8
The sources for the Suśrutasaṃhitā	10
Evaluation	10
Features of the manuscript transmission	12
Palaeographical features	12
Chart of characters	12
Sūtrasthāna, adhyāya 1	13
Sūtrasthāna, adhyāya 2	20
Literature	20
Sūtrasthāna, adhyāya 13: On Leeches	21
Literature	21
Previous scholarship	21
Translation	21
Sūtrasthāna, adhyāya 16	26
Sūtrasthāna, adhyāya 28	24
Kalpasthāna, adhyāya 1	25
Literature	25
Manuscript notes	26
Translation	27
[Threats to the king]	27

Kalpasthāna, adhyāya 2	36
Introduction	36
Translation	36
The effects of poisons	41
Symptoms of tuber poisoning	42
Slow-acting poison	44
The stages of toxic shock	45
Remedies for the stages of slow poisoning	46
The invincible ghee	48
Curing the ‘slow-acting’ poison	48
Kalpasthāna, adhyāya 3	49
Introduction	49
Translation	49
The origin of poison	53
Patients beyond help	55
Kalpasthāna, adhyāya 4	57
Introduction	57
Literature	57
Translation	57
Uttaratantra, adhyāya 16 (17 in the vulgate)	57
Literature	57
Translation	57
[Complications]	66
[Characteristics of the probe]	67
[Complications]	67
Uttaratantra, adhyāya 38	70
Introductory remarks	70
Translation	72
Editions and Abbreviations	75
Index of Manuscripts	79
References	79

Glossary	100
Materia Medica Reference Works	100
Glossary and Index of Medical Substances	102
On digital critical editions	126

Kalpasthāna, adhyāya 4

Introduction

The fourth chapter of the Kalpasthāna of the *Suśrutasaṃhitā* addresses the topic of snake bites and snake venom. Unusually for the Nepalese version of the *Suśrutasaṃhitā*, the discussion is framed as a question from Suśruta to the wise Dhanvantari. Suśruta's questions are about the number of snakes, how they are classified, the symptoms of their bites and the pulses or stages of poisoning experienced by a victim of snakebite and related topics. The taxonomy of snakes is presented in a presentational variant form in Figure 2.

Literature

A brief survey of this chapter's contents and a detailed assessment of the existing research on it to 2002 was provided by Meulenbeld.¹⁹⁷

A discussion of this chapter specifically in the light of the Nepalese manuscripts was published by Harimoto.¹⁹⁸ After a close comparative reading of lists of poisonous snakes, Harimoto concluded that, "the Nepalese version is internally consistent while the [vulgate] editions are not." Harimoto showed how the vulgate editions had been adjusted textually to smooth over inconsistencies, and gave insights into these editorial processes.¹⁹⁹

Translation

- 1 Now we shall explain the procedure about the knowlege concerning the venom in those who have been bitten by snakes.
- 3 Suśruta, grasping his feet, questions the wise Dhanvantari, who was expert in all the sciences.
- 4 My Lord, you are capable of speaking about the number of snakes, and their divisions, the signs of a bite, and the knowledge concerning the pulses (*vega*) of poison.²⁰⁰

kalpa?

¹⁹⁷ HIML: IA, 292–294.

¹⁹⁸ Harimoto 2011: 101–104.

¹⁹⁹ The two editions that Harimoto noted, Su 1938 and Su 1889, present identical texts.

²⁰⁰ The word "pulse" translates वेग, which in other contexts may mean "(natural) urge."

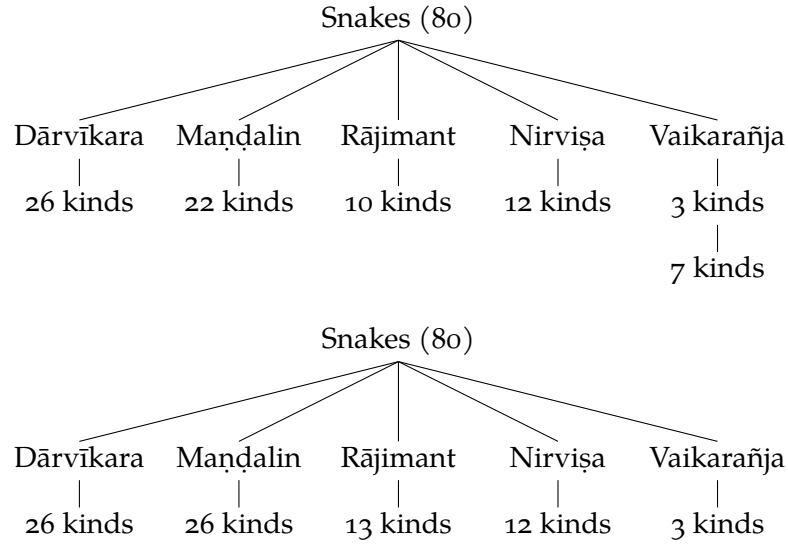


Figure 2: Top: the taxonomy of snakes in 5.4.9–13ab (Su 1938: 571).
Bottom: the taxonomy of snakes in the Nepalese version.

- 5 On hearing his query, that special physician spoke.
 “The snakes Vāsukī, Takṣaka and the rest are uncountable, O great one.
 6–9ab They are snake-lords who support the earth, as bright as the ritual fire,
 ceaselessly roaring, raining and burning. They hold up the earth, with
 its oceans, mountains and continents. If they are angered, they can des-
 troy the whole world with a breath or a look. Honour to them. They
 have no role here in medicine.
 The ones that I shall enumerate in sequence are those mundane ones
 with poison in their fangs who bite humans.²⁰¹
 9cd–10 There are eighty kinds of snakes and they are divided in five ways: Dar-
 vīkaras, Maṇḍalins, Rājimants, and Nirviṣās. And Karañjas that are
 traditionally of three kinds.²⁰²

reading
mahāt-
mānā(h)
as voc pl. of
respect.

Here, it is rather the discrete stages or phases of physiological reaction to envenoma-
 tion.

²⁰¹ The next few verses are discussed in detail by Harimoto (2011: 101–104), who shows
 that in the taxonomy of snakes, the Nepalese version of the *Suśrutasamhitā* has greater
 internal coherence than the vulgate recension.

²⁰² Harimoto (2011) translates these names as “hooded,” “spotted,” “striped,” “harm-
 less,” and “hybrid.”

- 11 Twenty hooded snakes are known, six Maņḍalins, and the same number of Rājimants. Niriviṣas and Karañjas are

Todo list

■ Cf. Arthaśāstra 1.21.8.	28
■ I'm still unhappy about this verse.	31
■ Mention this in the introduction as an example of the scribe knowing the vulgate.	31
■ fn about sadyas+	31
■ Bear's bile instead of deer's bile.	32
■ punarṇṇavā in the N & K MSS	33
■ śrita for śṛta	33
■ explain more	33
■ Medical difference from Sharma.	34
■ example where the vulgate clarifies that these should be used separately; appears to be a gloss inserted into the vulgate text. . . .	34
■ The two uses of prāpta are hard to translate. prāptāḥ → kṣipraṃ is an example of the vulgate banalizing the Sanskrit text to make sense of a difficult passage.	34
■ √ vyadh not √ vedh (also elsewhere and for the ears), causative optative.	34
■ opposite of the vulgate Same as 1.8.89 (As 1980: 79).	35
■ -> ativiṣa	43
■ Look up the ca. reference.	43
■ Come back to the issue of "kalpa". Look up passages in the Kośa.	49
■ write footnote: don't repeat ativiṣā; vulgate similar to H.	52
■ material corresponds to SS.1.45.205ab, where it describes how alcohol affects the body.	55
■ kalpa?	57
■ reading mahātmānā(ḥ) as voc pl. of respect.	58
■ where is cutting with a knife related to removing bile or phlegm.	57
■ maṣī burned charcoal. Find refs.	58
■ find ref.	63
■ Check out these refs.	64
■ meaning of kalpa	64
■ or a dual?	68

