

A Translation of the New Edition of the
Suśrutasamhitā

Jason Birch and Dominik Wujastyk

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Abstract

The [Suśruta Project](#) is producing a new Sanskrit text edition of the *Suśrutasaṃhitā* based on the early Nepalese manuscripts.¹ As we gradually transcribe and edit the manuscripts, we are producing this new translation of the classic work.

¹ MS Kathmandu KL 699, MS Kathmandu NAK 1-1079, and MS Kathmandu NAK 5-333.

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Kalpasthāna, adhyāya 1

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.⁵⁰ Translations of this chapter since 2000 have appeared by Wujastyk (2003: 131–139), P. V. Sharma (1999–2001: 3, 1–15), and Srikantha Murthy (2000–2).⁵¹

More recently, a discussion of the fourth chapter of this section in the light of the Nepalese manuscripts was published by Harimoto.⁵² 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.⁵³

Manuscript notes

- MS Kathmandu NAK 5-333 has foliation letter numerals, for example on f. 323a, that are similar to MS Cambridge Add. 1693,⁵⁴ dated to 1165 CE noted in Bendall's chart of Nepalese letter-numerals Bendall 1883: Lithograph V, after p. 225

⁵⁰ [HIML](#): IA, 289–290.

⁵¹ For a bibliography of translations to 2002, including Latin (1847), English (1877), Gujarati (1963) and Japanese (1971), see [HIML](#): IB, 314–315.

⁵² Harimoto 2011: 101–104.

⁵³ The two editions that Harimoto noted, [Su 1938](#) and [Su 1889](#), present identical texts.

⁵⁴ Scan at cudl.lib.cam.ac.uk/view/MS-ADD-01693/1.

Translation

- 1–2 And now I shall explain the procedures for safeguarding food and drink, as were declared by the Venerable Dhanvantari.⁵⁵
- 3 Divodāsa, the king of the earth, was the foremost supporter of religious discipline and virtue. With unblemished instruction he taught his students, of whom Suśruta was the leader.⁵⁶

[Threats to the king]

- 4–5 Evil-hearted enemies who have plucked up their courage, may seek to harm the king, who knows nothing of it. He may be assailed with poisons by or by his own people who have been subverted, wishing to pour the poison of their anger into any vulnerability they can find.⁵⁷
- 6 Therefore, a king should always be protected from poison by a physician.
- 7 The racehorse-like fickleness of men's minds is well known. And for this reason, a king should never trust anyone.⁵⁸
- 8–11 He should employ a doctor in his kitchen (*mahānasa*) who is respected

55 MS H adds in the margin अथ खलु वत्स सुश्रुतः “Now begins Vatsa Suśruta.” This phrase has been copied here by the scribe from the beginning of the *Suśrutasaṃhitā* chapter in the *sūtrasthāna* on the rules about food and drink (1.46.3 (Su 1938: 214)). The scribe presumably felt, not unreasonably, that this section had common subject matter with the present chapter. Further, SS 1.46.3 is the only place in the Nepalese transmission of the *Suśrutasaṃhitā* that names Dhanvantari and integrates him into the narrative of the *Suśrutasaṃhitā* as the teacher of Suśruta.

The mention of Dhanvantari here is the only other time in the Nepalese transmission that this authority is cited as the source of Ayurvedic teaching, and the unique occurrence of this actual phrase, “as was declared by the Venerable Dhanvantari.” See the discussion by Klebanov (2021a: 28–32), who concludes that the earliest recoverable recension of the *Suśrutasaṃhitā* may have had the phrase only at this point and not elsewhere in the work. See the further discussion by Birch et al. (2021).

56 This is a quite different statement from the vulgate which has Dhanvantari as the teacher, and calls him the Lord of Kāśī (*kāśīpati*) (Su 1938: 559). Dalhaṇa followed the vulgate but explicitly noted the reading before us with small differences: दिवोदासः क्षितिपतिस्तपोधर्मश्रुताकरः “Divodāsa, the king of the earth, was a mine of traditions about discipline and virtue.”

57 Verses about the use of Venemous Virgins as a weapon do not appear in the Nepalese manuscripts. Cf. Wujastyk 2003: 81 f., 132. This material is present in the commentary of Gayadāsa.

58 The verb √śvas is conjugated as a first class root in the Nepalese manuscripts.

- by experts, who belongs to a good family, is orthodox, sympathetic, not emaciated, and always busy.
- 12–13 The kitchen should be constructed at a recommended location and orientation. It should have a lot of light,⁵⁹ have clean utensils and be staffed by men and women who have been vetted.⁶⁰
- 17–18ab The chefs, bearers (*voḍhāra*), and makers of boiled rice soups and cakes and whoever else might be there, must all be under the strict control of the doctor.⁶¹
- 18cd–19ab An expert knows people’s body language (*iṅgita*) through abnormalities in voice, movement and facial expression. He should be able to identify a poisoner by the following signs.
- 19cd–23 Wanting to speak, he gets confused, when asked a question, he never arrives at an answer, and he talks a lot of confused nonsense, like a fool. He laughs for no reason, cracks his knuckles and scratches at the ground. He gets the shakes and glances nervously from one person to another. His face is drained of colour, he is grimy (*dhyāma*) and he cuts at things with his nails.⁶² A poisoner goes the wrong way and is absent-minded.
- 25–27 I shall explain the signs to look for in toothbrush twigs, in food and drink as well as in massage oil (*abhyāṅga*) and combs (*avalekhana*); in dry rubs (*utsādana*) and showers, in decoctions (*kaṣāya*) and massage ointment (*anulepana*); in garlands (*sraja*), clothes, beds, armour and ornaments; in slippers and footstools, and on the backs of elephants and horses; in nasya (*snuff*), inhaled smoke (*dhūma*), eye make-up (*añjana*), etc., and any other things which are commonly poisoned. Then, I shall also explain the remedy.
- 28 Flies or crows or other creatures that eat a poisonous morsel (*bali*) served from the king’s portion, die on the spot.

Cf.
Arthaśāstra
1.21.8.

59 We read महच्छुचिः with the Nepalese manuscripts and against the vulgate’s महच्छुचि. We understand शुचिस् as a neuter noun meaning “light” following Apte (1992: 1050a).

60 Verses detailing the ideal staff are omitted in the Nepalese manuscripts. Cf. Su 1938: 560; Wujastyk 2003: 132.

61 The word सौपोदनैकपूपिक “chefs for the boiled rice soups and cakes” is grammatically interesting. The term सूपोदन (as opposed to sūpauḍana) is attested in the *Bodhāyanīya-grhyasūtra* 2.10.54 (Shastri 1920: 68). More pertinently, perhaps, सूपोदन is attested in the Bower Manuscript, part II, leaf 11r, line 3 (Hoernle 1893–1912: vol. 1, p. 43).

62 The word ध्याम is glossed by Ḍalhaṇa (in a variant reading) as someone who is the colour of dirty clothes 5.1 (Su 1938: 560).

- 29 Such food makes a fire crackle violently, and gives it an overpowering colour like a peacock's throat.
- 30–33 After a chukar partridge looks at food which has poison mingled with it, its eyes are promptly drained of colour; a peacock pheasant drops dead. A koel changes its song and the common crane rises up excitedly.⁶³ It will excite a peacock and the terrified parakeet and the hill myna screech. The swan trembles very much, and the racket-tailed drongo churrs.⁶⁴ The chital deer sheds tears and the monkey releases excrement.⁶⁵
- 34 Vapour rising from tainted food gives rise to a pain in the heart, it makes the eyes roll, and it gives one a headache.⁶⁶
- 35, 36cd In such a case, an errhine and a collyrium that are costus, *lāmajja* grass (*lāmajja*), spikenard (*nalada*) and honey (*madhus*);⁶⁷ a paste of sandalwood on the heart may also provide relief.⁶⁸

- 63 The verb अर्च्छति “rises up” is a rare form best known from epic Sanskrit (see Oberlies 2003: 212, §7.6.1). The transmitted form क्रौञ्च is obviously a colloquial version of Sanskrit क्रौञ्च. Commenting on 1.7.10 (Su 1938: 31), Ḍalhaṇa interestingly gives the colloquial versions of several Sanskrit bird names, even singling out pronunciation in the specific location of Kānyakubja. For क्रौञ्च he says that people pronounce it कुरञ्च and कौचि. The form कोञ्च is found in Pāli (see Cone 2001: 731, who notes that Ardhamāgadhī has the same form). Elsewhere, Ḍalhaṇa calls the bird क्रौञ्चिर, क्रौञ्चि, and कैचर (1.46.105 (Su 1938: 223), 6.31.154 (Su 1938: 684) and (6.58.44 (Su 1938: 790) respectively).
- 64 Ḍalhaṇa seemed confused about the racket-tailed drongo (भृङ्गराज). He called it a generic drongo (भ्रमरक), a word that can also mean “bee,” (Dave 1985: 62), and then said that it is like the black drongo (धूम्याट) (for a nice explanation of this name, see Dave 1985: 62–63) and that people call it “the king of birds.”
- 65 MS Kathmandu KL 699 reads bull (वृषभ) for Chital deer (पृषत). The latter may perhaps be mistaken for the former in the Newa script, although the reading of MS Kathmandu KL 699 is hard to read at this point.
- 66 “Tainted” translates उपक्षिप्त. The word’s semantic field includes “to hurl, throw against,” and especially “to insult verbally, insinuate, accuse.” The commentator Ḍalhaṇa glossed the term as, “spoiled food given to be eaten” (विदूषितस्यान्नस्य भोक्तुं दत्तस्य), but he noted that some people read “उखाक्षिप्त” or “thrown into a pan.” Other translators have commonly translated it as “served,” perhaps influenced by Ḍalhaṇa’s “given (दत्त).”
- 67 The vulgate supplies another phrase and verb at this point that is not present in the Nepalese transmission, but that makes the text flow more easily.
- 68 Singh and Chuneekar (1972: 350) discussed the difficulties in identifying लामज्ज, a plant cited more often in the *Suśrutasamhitā* than in the *Carakasamhitā*; Ḍalhaṇa adopted the common view that it is a type of *uśīra* or vetiver grass. The grammatical

- 37 Held in the hand, it makes the hand burn, and the nails fall out. In such a case, the ointment (*pralepa*) is beautyberry (*śyāmā*), velvet-mite (*indragopa*), soma and water-lily (*utpala*).⁶⁹
- 38–39 If he eats that food, through inattention or by mistake, then his tongue will feel like a pebble (*aṣṭhīlā*) and it will lose its sense of taste. It stings and burns, and his saliva (*śleṣman*) dribbles out.⁷⁰ In such a case, he should apply the treatment prescribed above for vapour, and what will be stated below under “toothbrush twigs”.⁷¹
- 40 On reaching his stomach, it causes stupor (*mūrcchā*), vomiting, the hair stands on end, there is distension, a burning feeling and an impairment of the senses.⁷²
- 41 In this case, vomiting must quickly be induced using the fruits of emetic

neuter form मधुस् “sweetness” of the Nepalese manuscripts is less common than neuter मधु “honey, sweetness, liquorice.”

- 69 “Beautyberry” (*Callicarpa macrophylla* Vahl.) is one identification of श्यामा, but vaidyas and commentators have different ideas about the plant’s identity (see Singh and Chuneekar 1972: 410; Warriar et al. 1994–6: 1: 334; Nadkarni 1954: #420).

On translating इन्द्रगोप as “velvet-mite,” see Lienhard 1978. Ḍalhaṇa’s remarks show that he had a reading इन्द्रगोपा before him, and he tries to explain इन्द्रा and गोपा as separate plants. But he also says that some people read इन्द्रगोप.

Ḍalhaṇa curiously parses the name सोमा (f.) out of the compound; this feminine noun is almost unknown to Ayurvedic literature. Some dictionaries and commentators consider it a synonym for गुडूची, others for ब्राह्मी or चन्द्रतरु. Ḍalhaṇa also mentions that some people think the word refers to the soma creeper (सोमलता), which might explain his choice to take the word as feminine. But the compounded word is far more likely to be सोम (m.), the well-known mystery plant (see Wujastyk 2003: 76–78, 125). If this can be taken as rue (*Ruta graveolens*, L.), as some assert, one can point to a pleasing passage in Dioscorides where rue plays an antitoxic role: “...it is a counterpoison of serpents, the stinging of Scorpions, Bees, Hornets and Wasps; and it is reported that if a man be anointed with the juice of the Rue, these will not hurt him; and that the serpent is driven away at the smell thereof when it is burned; insomuch that when the weasel is to fight with the serpent she armeth herself by eating Rue, against the might of the serpent” (cited from Wren 1956: 262; not found in Osbaldeston and Wood 2000).

- 70 The word अष्टील is normally feminine. The Nepalese manuscripts read it with a short अ- ending. Gayadāsa noticed that some manuscripts read अष्टील with a short -अ ending (MS Bikaner RORI 5157, f. 5v:7–8) and Ḍalhaṇa reproduced his observation. The vulgate reading “from his mouth (चास्यात्)” is more obvious (*lectio faciliior*), but is not attested in the Nepalese manuscripts.

- 71 Poisoned toothbrushes are discussed in verses 48 ff. below.

- 72 I translate मूर्च्छा in the light of the metaphors discussed by Meulenbeld (2011), that include thickening and losing consciousness.

- nut (*madana*), bitter gourd (*alābu*), red gourd (*bimbī*), and luffa (*koṣī-takī*), taken with milk and watered buttermilk (*udaśvit*), or alternatively with rice-water.
- 42 Reaching the intestines (*pakvāśaya*), it causes a burning feeling, stupor, diarrhoea, thirst, impairment of the senses, flatulence (*āṭopa*) and it makes him pallid and thin.
- 43 In such a case, purgation with the fruit of indigo (*nīlī*), together with ghee, is best. And ‘slow-acting poison antidote (*dūṣṭviṣāri*)’ should be drunk with honey and curds (*dadhi*).⁷³
- 44 When poison is in any liquid substances such as milk, wine or water, there are various streaks, and foam and bubbles form.
- 45 And no reflections are visible or, however, if they can be seen once more, they are distorted, fractured, or tenuous and distorted too.⁷⁴
- 46 Vegetables, soups, food and meat are soggy and tasteless. They seem to go stale suddenly, and they have no aroma.
- 47 All edibles lack aroma, colour or taste. Ripe fruits rapidly rot (*prā√kuth*) and unripe ones ripen.⁷⁵
- 48 When a toothbrush twig has poison on it, the bristles are corroded and the flesh of the tongue, gums and lips swells up.⁷⁶
- 49 Then, once his swelling is lanced, one should rub (*pratisāraṇa*) it with fire-flame bush flowers (*dhātakīpuṣpa*), jambul (*jambū*), mango stones (*āmṛāsthī*) and chebulic myrobalan (*harītakī*) fruit mixed with honey.⁷⁷
- 50 Alternatively, the rubbing (*pratisāraṇa*) can be done with either the roots of sage-leaved alangium (*aṅkolla*), the bark of blackboard tree

I’m still unhappy about this verse.

Mention this in the introduction as an example of the scribe knowing the vulgate.

fn about sadyas+

73 The ‘slow-acting poison’ is discussed at 5.2.25 ff. (Su 1938: 565).

74 Both Nepalese witnesses read distorted (*vikṛta*) twice, which is tautologous. In the first occurrence both read विकृता without proper termination. One might read the sandhi in the second occurrence as or not distorted (*vāvikṛtā*), but this gives no better sense. The scribe of MS Kathmandu NAK 5-333, apparently the original hand, added in the margin the alternate reading “double (*yamālā*)” as in the vulgate. Perhaps the scribe too was troubled by the tautology. It is also evidence that he was aware of a witness with variant readings similar to the vulgate. We emend for grammar but retain the *lectio difficilior*.

75 The root √कुथ “stink, putrify, rot” is apparently known only from its few uses in the *Suśrutasaṃhitā*.

76 Gayadāsa and Ḍalhaṇa point out that “enclosure of a tooth (दन्तवेष्ट)” and “flesh of the tooth (दन्तमांस)” have the same meaning (2.16.14–26 (Su 1938: 331–332)).

77 This recipe is different from the vulgate.

- (*saptachada*) or siris seeds (*śirīṣamāṣaka*).⁷⁸
- 51ab One should give advice about a poisoned tongue-scraper or mouth-wash (*kavala*) in the same way as for a toothbrush twig.
- 51cd Massage oil that has been laced with poison is slimy, thick and discoloured.
- 52 When the massage oil has been contaminated with poison, boils arise, pain, a discharge (*srāva*), inflammation of the skin, and sweating.⁷⁹ And the flesh (*māṃsa*) splits open.
- 53–54 In such a case, sandalwood, Indian rose-bay (*tagara*),⁸⁰ costus, and vetiver grass (*uśīra*), bamboo leaves (*veṇupatrikā*), heart-leaved moonseed (*somavallī*) and calamine (*amṛtā*), white clitoria (*śvetā*), sacred lotus (*padma*), and Indian barberry (*kālīyaka*) should be made into an ointment (*anulepana*) for the patient, who has been sprinkled with cold water. That is also recommended as a drink with the juice and leaves of wood apple (*kapittha*).⁸¹
- 55 In the case of a dry rub (*utsādana*), a shower (*parīṣeka*), an infusion, a massage ointment (*anulepana*), or in beds, clothes, or armour, the physician should understand that it is the same as for massage (*abhyāṅga*).⁸²
- 56–58 When a comb has poison in it, the hair falls out, the head aches and blood oozes from the follicles (*kha*) and lumps (*granthi*) appear on the head. In such a case, one should repeatedly apply an ointment of black earth soaked with bear's bile,⁸³ ghee, beautyberry (*śyāmā*),⁸⁴ black creeper (*pālindī*) and amaranth (*tanḍulīyaka*). Good alternatives are

Bear's bile
instead of
deer's bile.

78 The spelling of the name अङ्गोल varies अङ्गोट, अङ्गोठ, अङ्गोल (Singh and Chuneekar 1972: 5); Dalhaṇa notes that the form अङ्गोल is a colloquialism (1.37.12 (Su 1938: 161)). The sentence is awkward and we have emended शिरीषमाषक to be a plural, as in the vulgate, rather than the ablative singular of the Nepalese witnesses. We follow Dalhaṇa in interpreting the compound to refer to the distinctive bean-like siris seeds, rather than to mung beans (माषक) (5.1.50 (Su 1938: 562)).

79 The feminine स्फोट for “boils” is unattested.

80 Some say तगर is Indian valerian, but there remain many historical questions about the ancient and regional identities of this plant (see, e.g., Singh and Chuneekar 1972: 173–174)[334]avs.

81 This compound could be interpreted as “wood apple juice and cassia cinnamon (*pa-tra*).” Note that this recipe is differs from that of the vulgate, which requires urine.

82 See verse 52 above.

83 Dalhaṇa comments here that ‘bile is that fluid which goes along inside the tube attached to the liver’ (कालखण्डलग्ननलिकामध्यगतजलं पित्तम्) 5.1.57 (Su 1938: 562).

84 See note 69.

- either the fluid extract of cow-dung, or the juice of jasmine (*mālatī*), the juice of woodrose (*mūṣikakarṇī*), or household soot.⁸⁵
- 59 If either massage oil for the head, or a helmet for the head, in a wash, turban, or garlands that are contaminated with poison, then one should treat it in the same way as a comb.
- 60–61 When face make-up is poisoned, the face becomes dark and has the symptoms found with poisoned massage oil. It is covered with spots (*kaṇṭaka*) that are like lotus-spots (*padminīkaṇṭaka*).⁸⁶ In this case, the drink is honey and ghee, and the ointment (*pralepa*) is sandalwood with ghee, curds (*payasyā*), honey, verbena (*phañjī*) and scarlet mallow (*bandhujīva*) and hogweed (*punarnavā*).

85 The plant identifications in this passage follow Ḍalhaṇa's glosses, although he note a difference of opinion on the identity of mouse-ear (*mūṣikakarṇī*). Singh and Chuneekar 1972: 317; Sivarajan and Balachandran 1994: 23–25 discuss this issue well. The expression धूमो आगारसंज्ञितः 'the smoke termed "house"' is commonly interpreted by translators and in Ayurvedic dictionaries as 'household soot.' The term is comprehensively discussed by Meulenbeld (2008: 443).

86 See the description of this condition 2.13.40 (Su 1938: 323), where the skin on the face is characterized as having pale circular patches that are itchy and have spots.

Abbreviations

- Ah 1902 Kumṭe, Ananta Moreśvara and Navare, Kṛṣṇasāstrī Rāmacandra (1902) (eds.), श्रीमद्वाग्भटविरचितम् अष्टाङ्गहृदयम्, सूत्र-शरीर-निदान-चिकित्सा-कल्प-उत्तरस्थानविभक्तम् श्रीमदरुणदत्तप्रणीतया सर्वाङ्गसुन्दर्याख्यया व्याख्यया समलंकृतम् (Kṛṣṇadāsa Āyurveda Sīrīja, 3; Mum̐bayyām: Nirṇayasāgara Press).
- Anup *Anup Sanskrit Library* (n.d.).
- AS *Asiatic Society* (n.d.).
- As 1980 Āṭhavale, Ananta Dāmodara (1980) (ed.), *Aṣṭāṅgasan̐grahaḥ. Śrīmad Vṛddhavāgbhaṭaviracitaḥ Induṣyākhyāsahitaḥ* (Pune: Maheśa Ananta Āṭhavale, Śrīmad Ātreya Prakāśanam), [ark : / 13960/t9773bb9z](https://nopr.scribd.org/ark:/13960/t9773bb9z).
- Bhela 1921 Mookerjee, Ashutosh and Ananta Krishna Shastri, Vedantabisharad (1921) (eds.), *The Bhela Samhita. Sanskrit Text* (Calcutta: University of Calcutta), [ark : / 13960 / t3sv3157j](https://nopr.scribd.org/ark:/13960/t3sv3157j); Based on two copies made of the Thanjavur codex unicus (MS Thanjavur TMSSML 10773, Burnell 1880: 63–4, P. P. S. Sastri 1933: #11085).
- Bhela 2000 Krishnamurthy, K. H. (2000), *Bhela-saṃhitā. Text with English Translation, Commentary and Critical Notes* (Haridas Ayurveda Series, 8; Varanasi: Chaukhambha Visvabharati).
- BL *British Library* (n.d.).
- HIML Meulenbeld, Gerrit Jan (1999–2002), *A History of Indian Medical Literature*, 5 vols. (Groningen: E. Forsten), ISBN: 9069801248.
- KL *Kaiser Library* (n.d.).
- NAK *National Archives of Kathmandu* (n.d.).
- NCC Raghavan, V. et al. (1949–), *New Catalogus Catalogorum, an Alphabetical Register of Sanskrit and Allied Works and Authors*, 39 vols. (Madras University Sanskrit Series; Madras: University of Madras); v.1: revised edition, 1968.

- NGMCP NGMCP (2014), 'Nepal-german Manuscript Cataloguing Project. Online Title List and Descriptive Catalogue', Universität Hamburg and Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, [URL](#).
- RORI *Rajasthan Oriental Research Institute* (n.d.).
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Todo list

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