

A Translation of the New Edition of the *Suśrutasamhitā*

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

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1 Now I shall narrate the chapter on the origin of this knowledge.¹

2 ²

3 Now, as is well-known, Aupadhenava, Vaitaraṇa, Aurabhra, Puṣkalāvata, Karavīra, Gopurarakṣita, Bhoja, Suśruta and others addressed Lord Divodāsa, king of Kāśi, the best of the immortals, who was in his ashram surrounded by an entourage of sages.³

4 “O Lord, distress arose in our minds after witnessing people thrashing about with cries, assailed by different kinds of pain and injury (*vedanāb-highāta*), feeling helpless in spite of having friends, because of diseases arising from the body, the mind and external sources.

“To quell the illnesses of those who seek happiness and for our own purpose of prolonging life, we desire the science of life (*āyurveda*) that is being taught. Welfare, both in this world and in the next, depends upon it. Therefore, we have come to the Lord in pupillage.”

5 The Lord said to them:

“Welcome to you! My children, all of you are beyond reproach and worthy to be taught.

6 “As is well known, Ayurveda is the name of what is said to be the subsidiary part of the Atharvaveda. Before creating people, Svayambhū composed it in hundreds of thousands of verses and a thousand chapters and, after observing the short lifespan and low intelligence of people, he presented it again in eight parts.⁴

7 Surgery, treatment of body parts above the clavicle, general medicine, knowledge of spirits, care of children, and the disciplines of antidotes, rejuvenation and aphrodisiacs.

¹Ḍalhaṇa understands the word “knowledge (*veda*)” as specifically “medical knowledge.” He says that the word “longevity” (*āyur*) has been elided.

²At this point, later manuscripts and commentaries include the statement “as the venerable Dhanvantari stated.” The absence of this statement in the early Nepalese MSS is noteworthy. See the discussion of [Klebanov \[b\]](#).

³On these persons, see [\[Meulenbeld, IA 369 ff.\]](#). [Klebanov \[a\]](#) has discussed these authors in the context of an anonymous commentary on the *Suśrutasaṃhitā* that cites them.

⁴Svayambhū is another name for Brahmā, the creator.

- 8.1a Now, a collection of the characteristics of each component of Āyurveda.
- 8.1b Among them, [the component] called surgery has the goal of extracting various grasses, wood, stone, dust, iron (?), soil, bone, hair, nails, discharge of pus, malignant wounds and foreign bodies inside the womb, and of determining the application of surgical instruments, knives, caustics and fire by means of sixty definitions.
- 8.2 [The component] named the doctrine of treating body parts above the clavicles has the aim of curing diseases situated above clavicles and diseases located in ears, eyes, mouth, nose and so on.
- 8.3 [The component] called general medicine has the goal of curing illnesses established in the whole body and [diseases] such as fever, tumour, swelling, hemorrhagic disorders, insanity, epilepsy, urinary diseases, diarrhoea and the like.
- 8.4 [The component] called knowledge of spirits is for appeasing demons by pacification rites and making food offerings for those whose minds have been possessed by gods, Gandharvas, Yakṣas, demons, deceased ancestors, Piśācas, Vināyakas,⁵ Nāgas and evil spirits that possess children.
- 8.5 [The component] called care of children is for bearing children and purifying defects in a wet-nurse's milk, and curing diseases that have arisen from bad breast milk and demons.
- 8.6 [The component] called the discipline of toxicology is for [knowing] the signs of poison from snake and insect bites and for neutralising various combinations of poisons.
- 8.7 [The component] called the discipline of rejuvenation is maintaining youth, bringing about a long life and mental vigour and for curing diseases.
- 8.8 [The component] called the discipline of aphrodisiacs brings about the increase, purity, accumulation and production of semen for those whose semen is minimal, bad, depleted, and dry [respectively] and for inducing an erection.

⁵The vulgate doesn't have *vināyakas* but does add *asuras*, probably under the influence of Ḍalhaṇa. Cite Paul Courtwright, Ganesha book.

- 9 Thus, this Āyurveda is taught with eight components.”
- ”Among these [components], tell us which [component is taught] to whom.”
- 10 They said, ”After you have sufficiently conveyed the knowledge of surgery, teach us everything.”
- 11 He said, ”so be it.”
- 12 They then said, ”Having considered the view of all of us, when we are unanimous, Suśruta will question you. We too will learn what is being taught to him.”
- 13 He said, ”so be it.
- 14–16 Now, as is well-known, the aim of Āyurveda is eliminating the diseases of the sick and supporting the healthy. Āyurveda is that in which they know life, or that by which life is known. Learn the best component of it, which is being taught in accordance with tradition, perception, inference and analogy.
- 17 Indeed, this component is first and foremost as afore-mentioned because it cures wounds and joining together Yajña’s head and pradhāna (?). For, just as it has been formerly said, ’the head that had been cut off by Rudra was joined again by the two Aśvins.’
- 28 Thus, living creatures and their strength, complexion (*varṇa*) and energy (*ojas*) are rooted in food. That (food) depends on the six flavours (*rasa*). Thus, the flavours depend on substance (*dravya*), and substances depend on medicinal herbs. There are two kinds of them (herbs): stationary and mobile.⁶

⁶Suśruta sū.1.28 [Sharma, I, 21], [Ācārya and Ācārya, a, 7].

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