

The Classical Āyurvedic Texts

Bṛhat Trayi

Caraka Saṃhitā

- Author(s)—Caraka / Dṛdhabala
- Date—200 BC (to 400 BC)
- Popularity—translations and commentators
- Contributions of the Saṃhitā:
 1. Law of the Uniformity of Nature—physical laws applied to the biological field
 2. Rationalism—logic, experience
 3. Psychosomatic Approach
 4. Importance of Prakṛti
 5. Expanded beyond tri-sutra (hetu, linga, auśadha) to Pañcanidānam (nidana, purva rupa, rupa, upaśaya, samprapti)
 6. Scientific method of diagnosis (scriptures, observation, inference; dosha, duṣya, agni, sattva, satmya, prakṛiti, bala, vaya; etiology, symptomology, pathogenesis; the patient, drug, then proceed)
 7. Importance of Nature—one only assists Nature/ natural resistance bolstered
 8. Emphasis of promotion of life and prevention of disease
 9. Scientific study of drugs—pharmacology
- Organization: 120 chapters
 1. Sutrasthānam—fundamentals/principles (30)
 2. Nidānasthānam—diagnosis (8)
 3. Vimānasthānam—specific features (8)
 4. Śarirasthānam—anatomy (8)
 5. Indriyasthānam—fatal signs (12)
 6. Cikitsāsthānam—treatment (30) numerous formulations throughout, PK treatments
 7. Kalpasthānam—pharmaceuticals (12)
 8. Siddhisthānam—successful management (12) PK—techniques, substances, management

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Presented by Michael Dick

The Caraka Samhitā is believed to have arisen around 400-200 BCE. It is felt to be one of the oldest and the most important ancient authoritative writings on Ayurveda. It is not known who this person was or, if indeed, this represents the work of a "school of thought"-- of scholars or followers of a man known as Caraka, or whether it's an original composition of a single person named Caraka. This work is sometimes considered a redaction and truncation of an older and more voluminous work-Agnivesha Samhita (estimated to have had 46,000 verses), which is no longer extant. Dr̥dhabala, living about 400 A.D., is believed to have filled in many verses of missing text (perhaps up to 20%) in the Cikitsasthāna and elsewhere, which disappeared over time.

The language of Caraka is Sanskrit and its style is poetry--with meter and melody. Poetry was known to serve as a memory aid. For example, Caraka contains over 8,400 metrical verses, which are often committed to memory, in toto, by modern medical students of Ayurveda.

It presents most of the theoretical edifice of Ayurveda and concentrates on the branch of Ayurveda called kayacikitsa. This is largely the theory of the internal fire--of digestion--or internal medicine in modern terms. Caraka never discusses the sub-types of pitta and kapha, but it does list and describe the 5 sub-types of vata.

Seen from a greater perspective this work seems to represent a certain value of Consciousness different from other works. It gives more discussion about the notion that life is fundamentally a field of Intelligence and Pure Knowledge. This field is self-aware--it is the Knower as well as the object of perception. And for Caraka this is part of what is to be treated by the physician.

The P.V. Sharma translation comes in four volumes--two of original text and two of commentary about the original work. Sharma's English version is said to be a scholarly and relatively faithful work. It has numerous appendices and an extensive index. The B. Dash / R.K. Sharma version lacks these features but does have the commentary of Cakrapani and their own commentary incorporated in with the original text (7 vol.). All three translators have excellent academic or/and clinical credentials supporting their works.

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Suśruta Samhitā

- Author
- Date 400 BC / 200 BC
- Versions and Commentators Nagarjuna (2), Dalhana, Cakrapani Datta
- Contributions:
 1. Definition of Health
 2. Importance of Surgery
 3. Many surgical procedures
 4. Pitta elaborated
 5. Blood as 4th doṣa
 6. Description and discussion of marmāni
- Organization: 196 chapters written in 9250 verses
 1. Sutrasthānam (46) lists of emetic, purgative, errhines—39; purgative preparations--44
 2. Nidanamsthānam (16)
 3. Sharirasthānam (10)
 4. Cikitāsthānam (50) drugs 10-15, 27-30; 31-40 snehana, svedana, basti, nasya, vamana, virecana
 5. Kalpasthānam (8)
 6. Uttarasthānam (66)

The Sushruta Samhita presents the field of Ayurvedic surgery called shalya. This branch of medicine arose in part from the exigencies of dealing with the effects of war. This work, also, is said to be a redaction of oral material passed down verbally from generation to generation. It is thought to have arisen about the same time period as the Caraka Samhita-- slightly after or before it according to different authorities. Its style is both prose and poetry with poetry being the greater portion. The Sushruta Samhita, while dealing with the practice and theory of surgery, is an important source of Ayurvedic aphorisms. For example, the most comprehensive and frequently quoted definition of health is from Sushruta. This work is unique in that it discusses blood in terms of the fourth doshic principle. This work is the first to enumerate and discuss the pitta sub-doshas and the marmas. With its emphasis on pitta, surgery, and blood this work best represents the transformational value of life.

This work, also originally written in Sanskrit, is now available in English with Devanagari. Bhisagratna's translation is English and Sanskrit and recently P.V. Sharma has written a translation with both the Sanskrit/Devanagari and English that includes Dalhana's commentary. Dalhana has been regarded as the most influential commentator on Sushruta's work.

Vāgbhaṭa –Aṣṭaṅga Hṛdayam

- Author—Given, uncertain and various
- Date—550-600 AD
- Contributions:
 - Brevity
 - Sequential arrangement of topics
 - Clear description of precepts and practices of medical science
- Organization: 120 chapters / 7120 verses
 1. Sutrasthānam—fundamentals/principles, properties of articles of diet and drugs, kinds of diseases and methods of treatment, humoral physiology and pathology (30); groups of drugs for purificatory therapies—15, PK 16-21
 2. Śarirasthānam—anatomy, physiology, embryology (6)
 3. Nidānasthānam—diagnosis—causes, prodromal and cardinal S&S, pathogenesis, prognosis (16)
 4. Cikitsāsthānam—treatment including effective medicinal recipes, diet and care of patient (22)
 5. Kalpa-siddhisthānam—pharmaceuticals, administration of purificatory therapies, management of complications, principles of pharmacy (6)
 6. Uttarasthānam—miscellaneous devoted to the remaining 7 branches of AV (40)

Ashtanga Sangraha / Ashtanga Hridayam are the work of a person named Vagbhata. There are two works by a person or persons with this name. The Ashtanga Sangraha has approximately 9250 verses and is written in both poetry with prose. The Hridayam (about 7120 verses) is written in prose and seems to have a slightly different organization of material than the former. Both works have been dated about the same time and are thought to date after the Caraka and Sushruta Samhitas (400 CE).

The exposition is relatively straightforward and also deals primarily with kayacikitsa. In this work we see the kapha sub-doshas are also listed and described--completing our modern edifice of vata, pitta, kapha with their five sub-types. Its emphasis on treating the physiology of the body and suggestions for therapeutic use of metals and minerals means the perspective of the treatise represents the gross, material value of life more than its counterparts--Caraka and Sushruta. While Caraka has chapters dealing with the Self, these works merely mention that the body is the home for the Self without any elaboration.

Srikantha Murthy's translation includes the Sanskrit/Devanagari for those who want to delve into the original text. S. Murthy has translated many of the ancient Ayurvedic writings into English, for which we are indebted.

Laghu Trayi

Mādhava Nidānam

(Aka: Roga Viniścaya)

- Author: Given but little known about him
- Date: 700 AD
- Contributions:
 1. The ideal book of Nosology—knowledge of diseases = only includes causes, pathogenesis, symptoms, prognosis
 2. Not entirely original--CSV
- Organization: 70 chapters

Mādhava Nidānam, available here in Sanskrit/Devanāgarī and English translation by Srikantha Murthy deals with the classification of diseases in Ayurveda. Its taxonomy is slightly different at times from those given by Caraka, Suśruta, and Vāgbhaṛa, while for the greater part its verses are seemingly direct quotes from them. This work is dated around 700 A.D. and is prized for covering a wide range of diseases in the fields of bala, śālya, daṃstrā, śalakya, kāyacikitsā. While this treatise gives detailed description of disease etiology (disease doctrines), prodroma and cardinal signs and symptoms, it does not give explanation or suggestions for cikitsā (treatment).

Śarṅgadhara Saṃhitā

- Author: Given but little known about him—Popular name and many had it
- Date: 1300 AD
- Contributions:
 1. Practitioner's Handbook
 2. Synopsis without originality and not exclusively from the Major Three
 3. First textual mention of the pulse as method of diagnosis
 4. First book describing the mechanism of respiration to include new term-equivalent for oxygen and heart
 5. Opium and other new drugs found here
 6. New technique for introducing drugs directly into the blood through an artificial wound
- Organization: 32 chapters, 2600 verses
 1. Prathama Khanda (first section) (7) principles, definitions, anatomy and physiology, disease classification
 2. Madhyama Khanda (second or middle section) (12) the drugs for treatment in their various forms (“All are those formulated by ancient seers and found effective by reputed physicians”)
 3. Uttara Khanda (third or last section) (13) the different kinds of treatment

The Śarṅgadhara Saṃhitā is a concise exposition of Ayurvedic principles. Its author, Śarṅgadhara, has offered his work as a digested version of Ayurvedic knowledge, deliberately omitting much detail because the works of The Great Three were already widely known. This treatise is thought to have originated in the 14th century A.D. The Śarṅgadhara Saṃhitā is prized for its enumeration and description of numerous pharmacological formulations used in panchakarma and contains the first textual elaboration of diagnosis by means of the pulse. Its subject matter is again the field of kayacikitsa. This work is available in Sanskrit/Devanagari and English translation, by Srikantha Murthy.

Bhāvaprakāśa of Bhāva Mīśra

- Author: Given but little known about him
- Date: 1500 AD
- Contributions:
 1. Comprehensive, concise (but unoriginal)
 2. Large section of nighantu
- Organization: 80 chapters / 10268 verses
 1. Purva Khanda (7) Principles, groups of drugs and articles of diet—PK discussed in ch. 7
 2. Madhyama Khanda (71) etiology, symptomology, pathogenesis, prognosis, treatment (kayacikitsa), vegetable formulae, mercurical and mineral formulations; advises surgery for tumors not cured by medicines.
 3. Uttara Khanda (2) virilization and rasayana therapy (relatively minor listing compared to Caraka for example)

Bhāva Prakāśa just now available in English translation. It's the most recent of the classical texts-written in the 16th century. It is a well-organized and compact re-presentation of the earlier classics. There are about 10,268 verses of varying meters. It deals with kayacikitsa generally and has a large section--entitled Nighantu, which gives the characteristics of many foods, plants, and minerals. Many of its sutras are direct quotes from earlier writers. This Sanskrit/Devanāgarī and English translation is, again, done by Sri Kantha Murthy.

Kāśyapa Samhitā

- Author: given but uncertain and little known; title given on name of preceptor/preacher rather than in name of redactor/ Vrijdha Jīvala/ scribe/Vyātsaya/redactor
- Composed in several languages: vaidika, prakṛta, a Buddhist and Jain cultural influence
- Date: 100 AD version extant 1200 AD ?
- Contribution:
 1. The only source book on children's and women's diseases exclusively
 2. Many comparative tables of the quotations from Caraka, Suśruta, Vāgbhata
 3. Most elaborate description of posology
 4. Advice of fruit juices at 6 months and cereals with dentition
 5. Most accurate anatomical description of uterus location with description of juvenile organs as a result of under supply of blood reversed by dhātu nutrition
 6. definition of puerperal woman and management
 7. improper use of nasya therapy associated with iatrogenic pathology
- Organization: 200 chapters (78 available in part and 19 *in toto*)
 1. Sutrasthānam—fundamentals/principles (19)
 2. Nidānasthānam—diagnosis (absent)
 3. Vimānasthānam—specific features of teacher and disciple(1)
 4. Sharirasthānam—anatomy, embryology (5)
 5. Indriyasthānam—prognosis (1)
 6. Cikitsasthānam—treatment (17)
 7. Siddhisthānam—successful management (8) basti, virecana, vāmana, nasya described
 8. Kalpasthānam—pharmaceutical preparations (9)
 9. Khilasthānam—supplementary section (24)

Bhela Samhitā

Author: Bhela

Date: circa 1000 to 2000 BCE

Contribution:

1. Description of mind located between soft palate and top of skull
2. Affirmation of circulatory system—veins end at heart
3. Simple and brief as in description of coexistence of water and fire for digestion and of disturbance of which leads to pathology (ajirna, etc.)

Organization: 107 Chapters

1. Sutrasthānam—fundamentals/principles (28 missing 4)
2. Nidānasthānam—diagnosis (8 missing 1)
3. Vimānasthānam—specific features (6 missing 1)
4. Sharirasthānam—anatomy, embryology (8 missing 1)
5. Indriyasthānam—prognosis (12)
6. Cikitsasthānam—treatment (28)
7. Kalpasthānam—pharmaceutical preparations (9)
8. Siddhisthānam—successful management (8 missing 1)

Cakradatta

Source: Quoted from page vii from introduction to Cakradatta

Sources of Cakradatta include about 49 works by others, including the Brihat Trayi. It is said that sometimes he could not locate the exact source and took resort to tradition.

For comparison, it will be useful to trace the sources of Cakradatta as mentioned by Sivadasa.

Importance of Cakradatta:

Cakradatta incorporates the advances in medicine made during two centuries after Vrnda's Siddhayoga. This period is characterised mainly by the evolution of Rasa-Sastra along with Loha-Sastra and acceptance of Tantric practices in society. For the first time, Cakradatta prescribed mercurial preparations in treatment of various disorders³. About Rasaparpati, it is said that it is described (first) by Cakrapani

Similarly, use of iron and other minerals are seen in advanced form. A large number of formulations contain these minerals.

Tantric practices are also prescribed in certain disorders such as in case of difficult labour, seminal retention, epilepsy etc. There are also some new therapeutic measures and formulations prescribed for treatment of certain disorders.

It has also described many techniques to tackle medical and surgical cases. For instance, the Ksarasutra and its application in sinus and fistula-in-ano is vividly described in Cakradatta which is absent in Vrnda's Siddhayoga. Thus Cakradatta stood as the first representative work of the medieval era which was accepted as a handbook of medicine in the Ayurvedic profession and continued to be so for centuries to follow. Even in modern age, Cakradatta is the foremost text of medicine followed by Bengali Kavirajas and the recent compilations like Bhaisajyaratnava!! too owe much to it.

Contribution to Herbal Medicine:

India is a vast country having rich vegetation. Every region has got some peculiar herbs which

have useful application in disorders prevalent there. Such a vast flora naturally could not be recorded in Nighantus and other therapeutic handbooks. Even today, there is a large number of herbs which are not recorded in any text of Nighantu.

Medical authors emerging from time to time in different regions have tried to record the therapeutic use of such herbs which were described in nighantus later on. For instance, Sodhala, Madanapala and Narahari represented Gujarat, Rajasthan and South India respectively. Similarly, Cakrapanidatta has recorded the medicinal use of herbs growing in Bengal. In Cakradatta, we find a number of new drugs among which the following are noteworthy: (list follows of 59 entities).

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Note: The translators of the respective text have provided most of the information above and it has been summarized in this document.

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2. Sushruta Samhita-KL Bhishagratna Translator, Chaukhamba Orientalia, Varanasi, India, 1991, pp. iii-lxvi (I), i-xvii (II) 3 Volumes
3. Ashtanga Hridaya-Shri Kanta Murthy Translator, Chaukhamba Orientalia, Varanasi, India, 1991, pp. ix-xxvi 3 Volumes
4. Sharṅgadhara Samhita--Shri Kanta Murthy Translator, Chaukhamba Orientalia, Varanasi, India, 1984, pp. iii-xvi Madhava Nidanam--Shri Kanta Murthy translator, Chaukhamba Orientalia, Varanasi, India, 1993, pp. iii-xv
5. Bhava Prakasha--Shri Kanta Murthy translator, Chaukhamba Orientalia, Varanasi, India, 1998, pp. vii-xii 2 Volumes
6. Kashyapa Samhita (Vridhahajivakiya Tantra)—PV Tewari translator and commentator, Chaukhamba Visvabharati, Varanasi, 1996, pp. vii-xxxiv
7. Bhela Samhita, SK Murthy translator, Krishnadas Academy, Varanasi, India, pp. xiii-xx
8. Cakradatta--PV Sharma Translator, Chaukhamba Orientalia, Varanasi, India, 1998 p. vii

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