On Attaining Special Powers through *Rasāyana* Therapies in Sanskrit Medical Literature

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In this article, I will examine the association of a particular branch of Āyurveda called *rasāyana* (vitalization therapy) with the development or attainment of extraordinary capabilities or special powers (*siddhi*). Special powers or abilities are often described in Indic literature as the necessary or incidental products of spiritual advancement: For example, a specific set of special powers (*siddhi*) forms an integral part of the yogic path of the *Pātañjalayogaśāstra*.¹ But what role do special powers play in medicine? Are they also part of a spiritual path, or do they have a different function in medicine? In the following, I will examine how the generation of special powers is described in Sanskrit medical literature in the context of *rasāyana* and will explore what this tells us about the Sanskrit medical authors' understanding of medicine.²

- 1 See Knut A. Jacobsen, *Yoga Powers: Extraordinary Capacities Attained Through Meditation and Concentration* (Leiden: Brill, 2011) on the general theme of yoga powers in Indian thought; Corrado Pensa, "On the Purification Concept in Indian Tradition, with Special Regard to Yoga," *East and West* 19, no. 1–2 (1969): 194–228 on the role of *siddhis* in Patañjali's work and in Buddhism; Philipp A. Maas, "On the Meaning of *rasāyana* in Classical Yoga and Āyurveda," *History of Science in South Asia Special Issue "Rejuvenation, Longevity, Immortality in South Asian Medical, Alchemical and Yoga Traditions"* 5, no. 2 (2017): 66–84 on the generation of yogic powers through the use of *rasāyana* in the *Pātañjalayogaśāstra* and its commentaries; and James Mallinson and Mark Singleton, *Roots of Yoga* (London: Penguin Random House UK, 2017), 359–394 on yogic powers in medieval yoga literature.
- 2 The following Sanskrit medical works were consulted for this article: the *Carakasamhitā* (early centuries CE), *Suśrutasamhitā* (early centuries CE), *Aṣṭāṅgahṛdayasamhitā* (c. seventh century), *Aṣṭāṅgasamgraha* (c. seventh century CE), *Siddhayoga* (c. tenth century CE), *Cakradatta* (c. eleventh century CE), *Vaṅgasenasamhitā*, (c. eleventh/twelfth century CE), *Śārṅgadharasamhitā* (c. thirteenth/fourteenth century CE), *Bhāvaprakāśa* (sixteenth century CE), *Yogaratanākara* (eighteenth century CE), and *Bhaiṣajyaratnāvalī* (eighteenth/nineteenth century CE). Apart from the *Śārṅgadharasamhitā*, all these works contain separate chapters on *rasāyana*.

1 Background

The Indian medical tradition of Āyurveda is transmitted to us through a series of compilations, most of which are written in Sanskrit. The earliest of these, the *Carakasamhitā* and *Suśrutasamhitā* date to the early centuries of the Common Era.³ These works represent the first attempts at the systematization and codification of medical knowledge as a discipline in its own right, defining medicine as a professional occupation with a circumscribed body of knowledge. As the titles suggest,⁴ these works are collections, or assemblages, and as such, they unite in themselves a range of approaches to their subjects. At the same time, they are not miscellanies, but (multiply) redacted works that reflect which subjects, medical theories and practices were considered valid or at least relevant by the compilers and redactors. Later medical works build upon the early ones, ensuring continuity through an adaptive reuse of the older materials. The innovation of the later compilers and authors lies in restructuring and freshly interpreting older materials, introducing new ideas, and removing and/or replacing parts.

The early Sanskrit medical works propose a division of medical knowledge into eight subject areas, each representing medical specializations. In the *Carakasamhitā* (Sūtrasthāna 30.28), these are listed as: 1. general medicine (*kāyacikitsā*); 2. the surgical treatment of body parts above the shoulders (*śālākya*); 3. the removal of foreign bodies, surgery (*śalyāpahartṛka*); 4. toxicology (*viṣagaravairodhikapraśamana*); 5. the treatment of possession by supernatural beings (*bhūtavidyā*); 6. pediatrics (*komārabhṛtyaka*); 7. vitalization therapy (*rasāyana*); and 8. aphrodisiacs and treatments relating to virility (*vājīkaraṇa*). The *Suśrutasamhitā* records a similar list, albeit in a different order.⁵ While

3 Both works have complicated transmission histories with several historical layers. For a survey of the proposed dates of the different redactions of the *Suśrutasamhitā*, see Jan Gerrit Meulenbeld, *A History of Indian Medical Literature* (Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 1999–2002), 1A, 342–352. The *Carakasamhitā* is presented as a revised version of an ancient work on medicine (the *Agniveśatantra*), the date of which is uncertain. The version of the *Carakasamhitā* that has been transmitted to us is a redacted version that was edited and added to by a scholar called Dṛḍhabala in about the fifth century. See Meulenbeld, *A History of Indian Medical Literature*, 1A: 105–115 for a detailed discussion of the issues surrounding the dating of the *Carakasamhitā*. Also see the article by Philipp A. Maas, “On What Became of the *Carakasamhitā* After Dṛḍhabala’s Revision,” *eJournal of Indian Medicine* 3, no. 1 (2010): 1–22.

4 “*Samhitā*” means “collection.”

5 See *Suśrutasamhitā* Sūtrasthāna 1.7. The list reads: 1. surgery (*śalya*); 2. surgery above the shoulders (*śālākya*); 3. general medicine (*kāyacikitsā*); 4. treatment of possession (*bhūtavidyā*); 5. pediatrics (*kaumārabhṛtya*); 6. toxicology (*agadatantra*); 7. vitalization therapy (*rasāyana*); and 8. virility therapy (*vājīkaraṇatantra*).

both these works note that a physician should have proficiency in all areas of medicine, their descriptions of the different medical subjects display marked differences in methodological approaches, which may reflect older divisions among medical practitioners into groups with distinct specializations. For example, while general medicine was predicated on humoral theory and associated physiological processes, these initially played no role in the context of toxicology, or vitalization and virility medicine.⁶

2 What Is *Rasāyana*?

The branch of Āyurveda called *rasāyana*, which I have rendered as “vitalization therapy” above, is dedicated to the prolongation of life, rejuvenation, anti-ageing and the preservation or promotion of health and well-being.⁷ The term *rasāyana* also denotes the therapies that together constitute this branch of medicine and the medical substances and formulations used in these therapies. Many Sanskrit medical works dedicate whole sections to the topic of *rasāyana*. Often, these sections are juxtaposed or, especially in later works, merged with sections on virility therapy (*vr̥ṣya/vājīkaraṇa*).⁸ *Rasāyana* formulations and references to substances that function as *rasāyanas* are also found interspersed throughout Sanskrit medical works.

The medical treatises offer some definitions of *rasāyana*, or rather, of what is meant to be achieved through *rasāyana*. For example, the *Carakasamhitā*

6 This changed: For example, humoral theory was integrated into vitalization therapy (*rasāyana*) from the c. seventh-century medical work *Aṣṭāṅgahṛdayasamhitā* onward. I would like to thank Prof. Francis Zimmermann for this important observation, made at the Ayuryog workshop in October 2017 (<http://ayuryog.org/event/ayuryog-workshop-rejuvenation-longevity-immortality-perspectives-rasayana-kayakalpa-and-bcud>). However, the humors were still only of marginal importance in the *Aṣṭāṅgahṛdayasamhitā*'s description of vitalization therapy and remained a fairly minor element in vitalization therapy in general. The exception to this rule is the eleventh-/twelfth-century *Vaṅgasenasamhitā*, which describes an array of tonics specifically formulated for treating disorders of the humors.

7 The term *rasāyana* is somewhat elusive, due to the polyvalent meanings of its elements, in particular of *rasa*. See Dagmar Wujastyk, “Acts of Improvement.” *History of Science in South Asia Special Issue “Rejuvenation, Longevity, Immortality in South Asian Medical, Alchemical and Yoga Traditions”* 5, no. 2 (2017): 1–2 and especially Maas, “On the Meaning of *rasāyana*,” 75–79, which discusses the term at length and concludes that the different interpretations of the term by the Sanskrit medical authors show a certain level of uncertainty concerning its meaning. I therefore leave it untranslated in this article, unless it is clearly used in the sense of “tonic.”

8 See Kenneth G. Zysk, “Potency Therapy in Classical Indian Medicine,” *Asian Medicine* 1, no. 1 (2005): 101–118 on potency (= virility) therapy in classical Indian medicine.

defines *rasāyana* as therapies that promote strength and vigor in the healthy.⁹ Its more detailed definition reads as follows:

Through *rasāyana*, a man gains longevity, memory, mental power, health, youthful vigor, a great radiance, complexion, and voice, an extremely strong body and keen senses, mastery of speech, respect, and beauty.¹⁰

One of the *Carakasamhitā*'s listed effects, "mastery of speech" (*vāksiddhi*), points to the aspect of *rasāyana* we will examine further here, namely the attainment of special powers. As explained elsewhere, "mastery of speech" could be understood to refer to excellent oratorical skills, or even just to a strong or pleasant voice.¹¹ Regaining or attaining a strong voice is certainly documented as one of the functions of *rasāyana*: a number of formulations are indicated for strengthening the voice and combating hoarseness (*svarabhedha*).¹² However, the function of curing hoarseness seems already covered by "*svaraudāryam*"—"greatness of voice." The attainment of "mastery of speech" in the sense of oratorical skills or eloquence is perhaps less easily explained in terms of overcoming a pathology, unless mastering speech is understood to mean counteracting stammering or other problems with coordinating speech.¹³ Since the term *vāksiddhi* to my knowledge only occurs twice in the *Carakasamhitā* (both times without explanation), it is impossible to know what

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- 9 See *Carakasamhitā* Cikitsāsthāna 1.1. 1–8. In the edition of the *Carakasamhitā* used here, the *rasāyana* chapter is located in the section on therapeutics (Cikitsāsthāna) and it is divided into four subchapters (*pāda*): 1. *abhayāmalakīyo rasāyanapāda* ("the *rasāyana* section dedicated to the chebulic and emblic myrobalans"); 2. *prāṇakāmīyo rasāyanapāda* ("the *rasāyana* section dedicated to the desire for vital breath"); 3. *karapracitīyo rasāyanapāda* ("the *rasāyana* section dedicated to hand-plucked (emblic myrobalan fruits)"); and 4. *āyurvedasamutthānāyo rasāyanapāda* ("the *rasāyana* section dedicated to the uplift of the science of life").
- 10 *Carakasamhitā* Cikitsāsthāna 1.1.7–8ab: *dīrgham āyuh smṛtiṃ medhām ārogyaṃ taruṇaṃ vayaḥ | prabhāvarṇasvaraudāryaṃ dehendriyabalaṃ param ||7|| vāksiddhiṃ prañatīṃ kāntiṃ labhate nā rasāyanāt* / This passage recurs in a number of later medical texts, albeit with some variations. See Wujastyk, "Acts of Improvement," 5–7.
- 11 Dagmar Wujastyk, "On Perfecting the Body: *rasāyana* in Sanskrit Medical Literature," *AION—sezione filologico-letteraria* 37 (2015): 57. Maas, "On the Meaning of *rasāyana*," 74.
- 12 On hoarseness, see, for example, *Carakasamhitā* Cikitsāsthāna 1.1.71, 1.2.3, 1.3.27. The strengthening of the voice is often mentioned in conjunction with the increase of strength (*bala*), digestion (*agni*) and complexion (*varṇa*).
- 13 Stammering is typically associated with a dysfunction of the humor wind and is not explicitly addressed in *rasāyana* chapters. On stammering as a wind- (*vāta*) induced disease, see, for example, *Suśrutasamhitā* Cikitsāsthāna 1.85.

exactly was meant. However, in the eleventh century, the commentator Cakrapāṇidatta explained *vāksiddhi* as a special power through which “whatever is said, inevitably arises.”¹⁴ According to this interpretation, someone in possession of *vāksiddhi* would automatically speak the truth since any statement they made would consequently become true. In other words, not only would they speak the truth, they would produce truth, creating reality through the act of speaking.¹⁵

The idea that humans can gain access to special powers, usually through spiritual practices, is found in many sources in Indian literature and is also discussed in early medical literature. While *rasāyana* chapters in medical works describe the attainment of special powers through the intake of medicine, the *Carakasamhitā* also gives a short list of special powers attained through yogic practice in Śārīrasthāna 1.140–141:

Entering someone’s mind, knowledge of objects, free action, vision, hearing, recollection, beauty, and invisibility at will: these are called the eight-fold lordly powers that yogins have. All that arises from meditation with a purified mind.¹⁶

Notably, *vāksiddhi* is not among this list, although one could perhaps make an argument that “free action” may describe a similar phenomenon. Vision, hearing, recollection, and beauty are central aims of *rasāyana* treatments, while invisibility does not feature as an effect of *rasāyana*. Thus, while there is some overlap, the extraordinary capabilities described in its *rasāyana* chapter do not fully correspond to the group of eight powers attained through yogic practice outlined in the *Carakasamhitā*’s Śārīrasthāna.

A complex picture of the variety of goals pursued with *rasāyana* treatment emerges when we look at the various *rasāyana* sections of the medical and alchemical works and examine what effects are attributed to their formula-

14 *vāksiddhiḥ yad ucyate tad avaśyaṃ bhavātīty arthaḥ*—Cakrapāṇidatta on *Carakasamhitā* Cikitsāsthāna 1.1.7–8.

15 See the discussion of this passage in Maas, “On the Meaning of *rasāyana*,” 72–75. Also see Lloyd W. Pflueger, “Holding On and Letting Go: The In and Out of Power in Classical Yoga,” in *Yoga Powers: Extraordinary Capacities Attained Through Meditation and Concentration*, ed. Knut Jacobsen (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 251 on the concept of the conformation of one’s words with reality.

16 Dominik Wujastyk, “The Path to Liberation through Yogic Mindfulness in Early Ayurveda,” in *Yoga in Practice*, ed. David Gordon White (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 40. This list of eight differs from the more common list of eight special powers of the *Pātañjalayogaśāstra*.

tions. The described effects of *rasāyana* medicines and procedures can be broadly divided into five, partly overlapping, thematic groups:¹⁷

1. Health: Medicines and procedures used for the prevention or cure of disease, and for the establishment of overall well-being, including the proper functioning of the body and senses.
2. Ageing: Medicines and procedures attributed with effecting rejuvenation, anti-ageing, or the increase of lifespan.
3. Cognitive power: Medicines and procedures that restore, establish or enhance memory power, memorization ability and intelligence.
4. Virility: Medicines and procedures which restore or enhance sexual stamina, bodily strength and fertility.
5. Special powers/extraordinary capacities/perfections (discussed below).

Rasāyana formulations most often unite a range of benefits from several, and in some cases all, thematic groups. However, there are many examples of *rasāyana* tonics that have a specific focus or a bias toward one group, such as the “*medhyarasāyana*,” medicines for the improvement of cognitive faculties. It is also not always possible to neatly discern one group from the other. Health and ageing could both be considered the overarching category, since the occurrence of certain diseases, or the loss of cognitive or sensory powers or problems concerning sexual stamina may be understood in terms of health problems, but also in terms of ageing, i.e., health problems caused or exacerbated by the ageing process. These are also the dominant terms in the definitions of *rasāyana* in later medical literature, ambiguously presented in a compound (*jarāvyādhi*) that allows to understand them as the separate categories of “ageing and diseases,” or as a combined category of “diseases caused by ageing.”¹⁸

However, the group of special powers does not in all cases fit either category of health or ageing. I would like to suggest a division into two kinds of special powers. The first kind consists of powers unconnected to a medical framework of a patient’s bodily and mental health and well-being, or the absence or pres-

17 See Dagmar Wujastyk, “Acts of Improvement” for a more detailed discussion of the applications of *rasāyana*. Also see Oliver Hellwig, “*Rasāyana* und die āyurvedische Krankheitskunde,” *Traditional South Asian Medicine* 8 (2008): 32–64, which discusses the aims of *rasāyana* of treating “self-arisen” (*svabhāva*) diseases in the *Suśrutasamhitā*.

18 See *Siddhayoga* 69 (*rasāyanādhikāra*): *yaj jarāvyādhividhvamsi bheṣajam tad rasāyanam* / (“a *rasāyana* is a remedy that removes ageing and disease (or: that removes diseases [caused by] ageing)”). The same phrase appears in *Cakradatta* 66 (*rasāyanādhikāra*) 1; *Varigasenasaṃhitā* *rasāyanādhikāra* 371; and *Bhaiṣajyaratnāvalī Uttarakhaṇḍa* 73 (*rasāyanaprakaraṇam*), 1. *Śārṅgadharasaṃhitā* 1.4.13 gives a similar definition: *rasāyanam ca taj jñeyam yaj jarāvyādhināśanam* || (“*rasāyana* is known as that which removes disease caused by ageing”).

ence of disease.¹⁹ Rather, their function seems to be to manipulate the world in favor of the person using the *rasāyana*, in particular influencing the person's social standing and general fortune and therefore affecting not only the consumer, but also other persons or the environment. *Rasāyana* preparations associated with these kinds of powers address human vulnerability to malign forces (both human and non-human) and the evil intent of others.

The second kind of special powers does not so much stand outside a medical framework of health and well-being, but rather extends it by redefining what is possible in terms of perfecting the body and its functions. This kind of *rasāyana* addresses a wider spectrum of human corporeality and functioning.

3 Good Luck and Protection from Malign Forces

A number of *rasāyana* medicines are attributed with affording the consumer fame, success, wealth, charm, valor, good fortune, eloquence, or success in debates; securing the favor of the king or other powerful persons; subduing the will of others; preventing misfortune; protecting from the evil intentions and actions of others (in particular from witchcraft and damaging mantras), or from possession by evil spirits or bad dreams; and removing wrongdoing (*pāpman*, *pāpa*). We meet with these kinds of effects throughout the examined *rasāyana* chapters, though the frequency of their occurrence differs from work to work.

The *Suśrutasamhitā*'s presentation of *rasāyana* in Cikitsāsthāna 28 provides a number of recipes that are specially dedicated to this kind of effect:

Gold, lotus seeds, honey, parched grain and beautyberry (*priyaṅgu*), taken with cow's milk, should ward off bad luck.²⁰

A decoction of the petals of the blue lotus boiled with cow's milk together with gold and with sesame is thought to destroy bad luck.²¹

19 The objective of Āyurveda is defined as freeing the diseased of disorders and protecting the health of the healthy in *Suśrutasamhitā* Sūtrasthāna 1.14. This is echoed in the beginning of the *Carakasamhitā*'s *rasāyana* chapter (Cikitsāsthāna 1.1.4), which states that healing (*bheṣaja*) is twofold, dividing it into what promotes strength in the healthy, and what eradicates disorders in the diseased.

20 *suvarṇaṃ padmabījāni madhu lājāḥ priyaṅgavaḥ | gavyena payasā pītam alakṣmīm pratiṣedhayet || 14*

21 *nīlotpaladalakvātho gavyena payasā śṛtaḥ | sasuvārṇas tilaiḥ sārddham alakṣmīnāśanaḥ smṛtaḥ || 15*

Wild asparagus (*śatāvarī*) butter used properly every day together with honey and gold will place the king under one's power.²²

A compound of sandalwood, *mohanikā*, licorice, pyrites, honey and gold should be taken by one who desires good fortune.²³

This kind of special effect is somewhat less developed in the *Carakasamhitā*. We find examples in two recipes:

A man who takes an iron tonic for a year will become intelligent, famous, a master of speech, one who retains what he has heard, and very wealthy.²⁴

This powerful *aindra* (waterhyssop?) tonic is extremely energizing and neither enchantments, nor bad luck, poison or disease can withstand it.²⁵

Similarly, such effects also play only a minor role in the *Aṣṭāṅghṛdaysamhitā*, where they occur in only two (out of about sixty-seven) recipes in the *rasāyana* chapter. The first, a multiple-herb ghee called *brāhmyādighṛta* found in Uttarasthāna 39.50–53 promises the user a multitude of benefits, among them prosperity and a bright and beautiful appearance, as well as the cure of problems caused by spells. The latter are specified as “*atharvamantra*,” i.e., spells

22 *śatāvarīghṛtaṃ samyagupayuktaṃ dine dine | sakṣaudraṃ sasuvārṇaṃ ca narendraṃ sthāpayed vaśe || 21*

23 *gocandaṇā mohanikā madhukaṃ mākṣikāṃ madhu | suvarṇaṃ iti samyogaḥ peyaḥ saubhāgyam icchatā || 22*

I was not able to identify the plant “*mohanikā*” and the occurrence of this name in the *Suśrutasamhitā* was the only one I was able to find. The name translates as “the confusing”.
24 *dhīmān yaśasvī vāksiddhiḥ śrutadhārī mahādhanah | bhavet samāṃ prayujjāno nara lauharasāyanam || Carakasamhitā* Cikitsāsthāna 1.3.22. The full recipe is found in verses 15–23.

25 *paramojaskaraṃ caitat siddham aindraṃ rasāyanaṃ | nainat prasahate kṛtyā nālakṣmīr na viṣaṇ na ruk || Carakasamhitā* Cikitsāsthāna 1.3.28. The full recipe is found in verses 24–29. Regarding *ojaskara*, “bestowing *ojas*,” as “energizing”: *Ojas* is a concept connected to the digestive process in Ayurvedic literature. It is the end product of the transformation process of one bodily element (*dhātu*) into the next. It is sometimes interpreted as something akin to life force, hence my rendering as “energizing”. On the varying meanings of *ojas* in different Indic literatures over time, see Jan Gerrit Meulenbeld, “The Woes of *ojas* in the Modern World,” in *Modern and Global Ayurveda: Pluralism and Paradigms*, eds. Dagmar Wujastyk and Frederick M. Smith (Albany: SUNY Press, 2008), 157–175.

associated with the *Atharvaveda*, the fourth of the Vedic liturgical scriptures. Presumably, this is a reference to mantras categorized in the *Atharvaveda* as “*aṅgirāmantra*” or “*āṅgiras*,” i.e., mantras for harming others (*abhicāra*).²⁶ The second recipe is found in *Aṣṭāṅgahṛdayasaṃhitā* Uttarasthāna 39.169–173. It details the preparation of a medicated ghee called “*nārasimha*” (“associated with Narasiṃha,” i.e., the man-lion incarnation of the god Viṣṇu), and lists becoming wealthy (*śrīmat*) and devoid of wrongdoing (*nirdhūtapāpman*) among the medicine’s many effects.

The *Aṣṭāṅgasamgraha*’s *rasāyana* chapter, which presents about 183 recipes, is much longer than the *Aṣṭāṅgahṛdayasaṃhitā*’s. Correspondingly, it contains more recipes for the attainment of special powers, though the majority of its recipes are focused on eradicating disease, supporting cognitive power and procuring longevity. The chapter includes variations of a number of the recipes from the *Suśrutasamhitā* presented above: A recipe of gold, lotus seeds, honey, grains and beautyberry against bad luck;²⁷ a compound of gold, wood-apple, sweet flag, and clarified butter for prosperity (and beauty, health, longevity, and nourishment);²⁸ a preparation of wild asparagus and clarified butter with gold and honey to subjugate the king.²⁹ The *Aṣṭāṅgasamgraha* also reiterates recipes associated with special powers from the *Aṣṭāṅgahṛdayasaṃhitā*: the recipe for *brāhmyādighṛta*,³⁰ and the one for *nārasimhaghṛta*.³¹ It further contains a description of the characteristics of bakuchi (*bākucī*) as calming, bestowing wealth, and dispelling poisons, evil spirits, misfortune, and wrongdoing.³² A recipe for sweet flag ghee promises success in all activities;³³ one for elephant creeper root ghee protection from sickness, possession by spirits, wrongdoing, and bad luck.³⁴ A recipe for *śivā guṭikā* (“auspicious pill”) is described in much detail. Based on rock resin or bitumen (*śilājatu*), this pill is presented as an effective wide spectrum medicine (forty-seven disease groups

26 On this classification of mantras for harming others in the *Atharvaveda* and its ancillary texts, see Teun Goudriaan, *Māyā Divine and Human* (Delhi, Varanasi, Patna: Motilal Banarsidass, 1978): 221.

27 *Aṣṭāṅgasamgraha* Uttarasthāna 49.57.

28 *Aṣṭāṅgasamgraha* Uttarasthāna 49.60.

29 *Aṣṭāṅgasamgraha* Uttarasthāna 49.61.

30 *Aṣṭāṅgasamgraha* Uttarasthāna 49.69–72 and *Aṣṭāṅgahṛdayasaṃhitā* Uttarasthāna 39.50–53.

31 *Aṣṭāṅgasamgraha* Uttarasthāna 49.394–398 and *Aṣṭāṅgahṛdayasaṃhitā* Uttarasthāna 39.169–173.

32 *Aṣṭāṅgasamgraha* Uttarasthāna 49.155 a: *iti śamanī dhanyeyam viṣagarabhūtopasarga-pāpmaghni* |

33 *Aṣṭāṅgasamgraha* Uttarasthāna 49.159: *sarvārtheṣu siddhimān (...) bhavati*.

34 *Aṣṭāṅgasamgraha* Uttarasthāna 49.343–346.

are listed), and an antidote to all sorts of poisons (animal, herbal, and mineral). It is also attributed with protecting the consumer from malevolent spells, bad dreams, evil spirits, evil, and misfortune, as well as with bestowing wealth, beauty, fame, and good fortune. Finally, it is also meant to procure the favor of the king; and to make a person win debates.³⁵ This formula remained popular in the following centuries: it reappears a number of times in later works in *rasāyana* chapters.³⁶

The Bower Manuscript's *rasāyana* chapter mostly describes formulations with medicinal functions, i.e., for general health and against specific disease groups. However, its version of the widely adopted "increasing long pepper" (*pippalīvardhamāna*) recipe is ascribed with effecting good fortune (*lakṣmī*), a growth of luck (*śrī*) and general success (*siddhi*).³⁷

The *Siddhayoga*'s *rasāyana* chapter contains only one recipe for a medicine with extra-medical special effects, namely a *rasāyana* based on puncture vine (*gokṣura*) that is supposed to make the consumer powerful and fortunate (as well as beautiful, long-lived, and sexually active).³⁸ In the *Cakradatta*, extra-medical special effects are noticeably absent, the one exception being the inclusion of a recipe for *śivā guṭikā* (spelled "*guḍikā*" in this version), which lists the same effects as the older version from the *Aṣṭāṅgasamgraha*.³⁹

The *Vaṅgasenasamhitā*'s *rasāyana* chapter is structured very differently than those of all the other works examined here. It includes materials that seem to be interpolations rather than integral parts of the subject of *rasāyana*. For example, the chapter begins with recipes for various kinds of vinegars and medicated fats not found in any other *rasāyana* chapter. It also contains a discussion of *marmans*, i.e., vital points in the body,⁴⁰ a description of a method of treatment with a head-pouch (*śirovasti*)⁴¹ and lists of diseases associated with particular humoral substances.⁴² The other parts have a strong focus on the medical effects of its *rasāyana* formulations: about half of its recipes are for medicines aimed at specific disease groups. Otherwise, the focus is on longevity and

35 *Aṣṭāṅgasamgraha* Uttarasthāna 49.309–325.

36 Recipes for *śivā guṭikā* are found in *Cakradatta* 66. 172–193, *Vaṅgasenasamhitā rasāyanādhikāra* 14–30, and *Bhaiṣajyaratnāvalī Uttarakhaṇḍa* 73.151–175.

37 See Bower Manuscript 2.6.4 and 22.

38 *Siddhayoga* 69.48–49.

39 See *Cakradatta* 66. 172–193.

40 *Vaṅgasenasamhitā rasāyanādhikāra* 332–350.

41 *Vaṅgasenasamhitā rasāyanādhikāra* 331.

42 *Vaṅgasenasamhitā rasāyanādhikāra* 351–360 diseases associated with the humor wind (*vāta*), 361–365 diseases associated with the humor bile (*pitta*), 366–369 diseases associated with the humor phlegm (*kapha*).

rejuvenation and the enhancement of cognitive powers. Nevertheless, some recipes do list special “good luck” powers among their effects. The *Varigase-nasamhitā* includes the recipe for *śivā guṭikā*, again with the same expected effects of protecting the consumer from malevolent spells, bad dreams, evil spirits, evil, and misfortune; as well as with bestowing wealth, beauty, fame, and good fortune.⁴³ Its flagship recipe, a formulation based on mica (*abhraka*),⁴⁴ offers a multitude of benefits, including becoming brave (*śūra*) and a good orator (*vāgmin*), and enjoying the fruits of the aims of human life (*trivargaphalabhājana*),⁴⁵ i.e., experiencing success in all spheres of life.

Neither the *Bhāvaprakāśa*, nor the *Yogarātnākara* include such special effects in their descriptions of the effects of *rasāyana*. Finally, the *Bhaiṣajyaratnāvalī* reintroduces the theme by including a recipe for *śivā guṭikā* (151–175) with the same effects as described in the older works. It also describes a recipe for a pill called *śrīśiddha* (44–53), which it attributes with letting the consumer attain the eight special powers (*siddhi*).⁴⁶ These are presumably the classic eight yoga powers detailed in the *Pātanjālayogaśāstra*, though the author may have also had alternative lists of *siddhis* in mind, such as those described in the *Carakasamhitā*.

4 Extended Capacities, Bodily Perfection

The other kind of special effects of *rasāyana* medicines and therapies aim at extending human capacities and attaining a god-like perfection of the body, mind, and senses. This includes the attainment of extreme longevity, superhuman strength and beauty, complete immunity of the body, and extraordinary eyesight.

A passage from the *Suśrutasamhitā*, which describes the use of Soma,⁴⁷ may serve as an example of these kinds of special effects of *rasāyana* medicines:

43 *Varigase-nasamhitā rasāyanādhikāra* 15–30.

44 *Varigase-nasamhitā rasāyanādhikāra* 136–166.

45 The three aims in human life (*trivarga*) are *artha*, *kāma* and *dharma*, i.e., wealth; physical pleasure and love; and virtue.

46 See *Bhaiṣajyaratnāvalī Uttarakaṇḍa* 73.151–175, and 44–53, respectively.

47 Soma is frequently mentioned in the *R̥gveda* (one of the ancient Indian liturgical texts), with many hymns praising its energizing qualities. It is not clear, however, in what relation the Soma of the medical works stands to that of Vedic literature. On the identification of the Soma plant, see Harry Falk, “Soma I and II,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 52 (1989): 77–90. On Soma in the *Suśrutasamhitā*’s *rasāyana* chapter, see Dagmar Wujastyk, “On Perfecting the Body,” 62–63.

The visionary man who makes use of the king of plants, Soma, wears a new body for ten thousand years. Neither fire, nor water, neither poison, blade nor projectile are powerful enough to take his life. He gains the strength of a thousand well-bred, sixty-year-old, rutting elephants. If he wants to go to the lands of northern legend, to the milky ocean, or even to the abode of the king of the gods, nothing can stand in his way. He is as beautiful as the god of love, as attractive as the second moon. He is radiant and brings joy to the hearts of all creatures. He truly knows all sacred knowledge, with all its branches and sub-branches. He moves like a god through the whole world, with infallible power.⁴⁸

This potion promises all: extreme longevity; immunity, indeed indestructibility, of the body; superhuman strength (including virile power) and beauty; a transcendence of bodily constraints in the ability to go wherever one wishes; and a complete grasp of all sacred knowledge. In other words, the intake of Soma lets its consumer attain a god-like state.

Compare this with the more moderate effects of another *rasāyana* recipe from the *Suśrutasamhitā*:

One whose impurities have been removed should enter the hut,⁴⁹ and should consume a lump of sweetflag about the size of an emblic myrobalan after it has been sanctified by oblations together with milk. Once this has been digested, milk, clarified butter, and boiled rice serve as food. Having done this for twelve days, his hearing becomes unimpeded, after using it for twice the amount of time, he becomes someone who has good memory, after using it for thrice the amount of time, it lets him retain what he hears, using it for four times twelve days, he transcends all sins, attains eagle⁵⁰ vision and a lifespan of one hundred years.⁵¹

Barring the transcendence of all sins and perhaps the attainment of eagle vision (unless this simply means very good vision and not literally vision like that of the divine Garuḍa), the effects of this *rasāyana* substance fall well

48 Translation of *Suśrutasamhitā* Cikitsāsthāna 29, 14–19 by Dominik Wujastyk, *The Roots of Ayurveda* (London: Penguin Books, 2003), 130.

49 On the use of special buildings as part of *rasāyana* therapy, see Arion Roşu, “Considerations sur une technique du *rasāyana* āyurvedique,” *Indo-Iranian Journal* 17 (1975): 1–29 and 395 and Dagmar Wujastyk, “On Perfecting the Body.”

50 *Tārṅkṣya* is a synonym of the legendary bird Garuḍa, the mount of the god Viṣṇu, who was attributed with extremely good vision.

51 *Suśrutasamhitā* Cikitsāsthāna 28.7.

within the range of ordinary expectations of medicine, i.e., a general improvement of the senses (in this case hearing and eyesight) and cognitive power (memory and memorization ability) and a good life expectation.

I would like to suggest that these two recipes and their effects describe different points on a spectrum of the human condition that spans a range of conditions: Bad health, deficient cognitive and sensory function, and early death on the one end; good health, satisfactory cognitive and sensory function, and normal life expectancy in the middle; perfect health, outstanding cognitive and sensory powers, and extreme longevity or even immortality on the far end of the spectrum.⁵² The second recipe is mostly aimed at achieving the middle conditions, the first the conditions at the far end of the spectrum.

The perfection of the body to a god-like state and the extreme extension of lifespan are central themes for these kinds of special powers at the far end of the spectrum.

5 Bodily Perfection: When the Body Becomes like a Stone

Many *rasāyanas* are described as effecting either a return to youthfulness or a halting of the ageing process. Youthfulness is associated with bodily strength, proper functioning of the senses (especially eyesight), and beauty. The more superlative descriptions promise a bodily perfection in which the body is beautiful and strong, but also immune to deterioration and impervious to damage.

The stability of the body, described with terms such as *sthira* ("firm") or *dr̥ḍha* ("hard"), or by likening the body to hard materials, is frequently mentioned. For example, *Carakasamhitā* Cikitsāsthāna 1.1.77 asserts that the body will become firm as a stone (*gātram aśmavat sthīrībhavati*), while later medical and also alchemical literature refers to a "diamond body" or "adamantine body" (*vajrakāya*).⁵³ This is a concept well-known from Mahāyāna scriptures, where it is associated with the extreme longevity or even absolute permanence, freedom from sickness, and purity of a Buddha's body.⁵⁴ In medical and alchemical

52 I would like to thank Dominik Wujastyk for suggesting the idea of a spectrum of the human condition to me.

53 For example, in *Viṅgasenasamhitā rasāyanādhikāra* 100 (full recipe: 93–100). For instances of the term in Sanskrit alchemical literature, see *Rasaratnākara Rasendrakhaṇḍa* 4. 19 and 86 and *Rasaratnākara Rasāyanakhaṇḍa* 2.11, 2.42, 3.214, 4.14 and 4.47, and in *Rasārṇava* 18.185.

54 On the changing concepts of the *vajrakāya* in Buddhist literature, see Michael Radich, "Immortal Buddhas and Their Indestructible Embodiments," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 34. no. 1–2 (2011(2012)): 227–290.

literature, it is used for its imagery of hardness, the idea of both impenetrability and unbreakableness. We encounter this idea early on, as seen in the example of the *Suśrutasaṃhitā*'s description of the effects of Soma, namely that neither fire, nor water, poison, or any weapons can damage the transformed body; and in an iron preparation in the *Aṣṭāṅgasamgraha* that lets the consumer "overcome all troubles and become unassailable by disease, ageing, death, weapons, fire, water, and poison."⁵⁵

The idea of perfecting the body is, however, also connected with that of rebuilding the body. And this necessitates its prior disintegration. The fullest expression of this process is again found in the *Suśrutasaṃhitā*'s description of *rasāyana* therapy with Soma: a long process, in which the body progressively disintegrates, shedding impurities and old layers, to then begin its renewal and gradual transformation into god-like perfection.⁵⁶ The *Carakasamhitā* describes comparable effects for a treatment which involves sealing the patient's body in a covered wooden barrel post-*rasāyana*-intake. The body would gradually dissolve and then regenerate after six months, having become similar to the gods in appearance, knowledge and powers.⁵⁷

The theme of disintegration and regeneration is also present in another context, namely in the *rasāyana* treatment of *kuṣṭha*, i.e., a group of skin diseases and particularly a disease with the symptoms of what now might be diagnosed as leprosy.⁵⁸ As mentioned, many *rasāyana* formulations are described as cures to various diseases, especially serious ones considered particularly difficult or even impossible to treat. *Kuṣṭha* is one of them, and indeed probably the most widely mentioned disease in *rasāyana* chapters. Its symptoms, the falling off of skin and extremities, parallel the body's disintegration described in the *Suśrutasaṃhitā*'s and *Carakasamhitā*'s extreme *rasāyana* therapies. The medical texts promise a complete cure of *kuṣṭha* through *rasāyana*, but more than that, they describe a reconstitution of the body reminiscent of the regeneration of

55 *Aṣṭāṅgasamgraha* Uttarasthāna 49. 53.

56 See *Suśrutasaṃhitā* Cikitsāsthāna 29.10–12. See also the translation of the passage in Dominik Wujastyk, *Roots*, 126–129 and a discussion of it in Roṣu, "Considerations," 13–15.

57 See *Carakasamhitā* Cikitsāsthāna 1.4.7. The theme of shedding layers of the body for a non-ageing and long-lived body is also found in Sanskrit alchemical literature, as for example in *Rasaratnākara rasāyanakhaṇḍa* 4.59, which reads: *jīved brahmadīnaṃ yāvat sarpavat kañcukaṃ tījayet* || ("He would live a day of Brahma while shedding his layers like a snake").

58 *Kuṣṭha* can describe a group of diseases characterized by symptoms primarily showing on the skin. Here, the symptoms described seem to point to leprosy more specifically. However, in modern medical terms, leprosy is a long-term infection by particular bacteria. Āyurvedic works do not have a concept of infection by bacteria and offer a different model of how the different kinds of *kuṣṭha* develop.

the disintegrated body after Soma or barrel therapy, with the nose, ears, fingers and indeed any limbs that have fallen off growing back again.⁵⁹ The cure of *kuṣṭha* is already a bold claim; the *rasāyana*'s effect of giving someone the power to regenerate the body, however, is extraordinary. It confirms the image of *rasāyana* medicines and therapy as effective in otherwise hopeless cases, a cure that can cheat death and overcome the ravages of time and disease.

6 Longevity

Suśrutasaṃhitā Sūtrasthāna 35.7–11 describes a lifespan of seventy years as a medium life expectation and twenty-five years as a short lifespan.⁶⁰ A long life would necessarily go beyond a medium life expectation of seventy years, though we are not told by how much. The promise of reaching one hundred years in a healthy condition occurs frequently in *rasāyana* chapters and can perhaps be understood as a natural, or normal limit. However, some formulations are credited with providing even longer spans of life. In the *Suśrutasaṃhitā*'s *rasāyana* chapter, we find recipes that are described as prolonging life up to 300, 500, 800, 2000, and 10000 years. Such claims are found throughout the examined medical works. However, in the *Carakasamhitā*'s narrative, such extended lifespans are usually associated with a deep past and a particular demographic, namely Vedic sages. These are presented as the original recipients of Āyurvedic knowledge and the first consumers of *rasāyana* medicines.⁶¹ Rather than stating that a particular *rasāyana* will let someone live for several centuries, the treatise narrates how a formulation affected sages in the past: Sage Cyavana became young and virile again, the Vaikhānasa and Bālakhilya sages attained an unlimited lifespan.⁶² As prototypical consumers of *rasāyanas*, the sages also set the standard for future recipients of *rasāyana*

59 See, for example, *Aṣṭāṅgahṛdayasaṃhitā* 39.109–110, which describes the application of a *somarājī* seed medicine for growing new limbs in the case of *kuṣṭha*.

60 See Christèle Barois, "Stretching Out Life, Maintaining the Body: Part I—Vayas in Medical Literature," *History of Science in South Asia Special Issue "Rejuvenation, Longevity, Immortality in South Asian Medical, Alchemical and Yoga Traditions"* 5, no. 2 (2017): 37–65 on different presentations of normal lifespan in Sanskrit medical literature.

61 For example, see *Carakasamhitā* Cikitsāsthāna 1.1.75, which states that the sages lived for countless hundreds of years (*anekavarṣaśatajīvano*) after taking *rasāyana* medicines, or Cikitsāsthāna 1.1.54 and Cikitsāsthāna 1.2.21 which relates that sages attained an unlimited lifespan (*amītāyus*) through *rasāyana*.

62 See the recipe for *cyavanaprāśa* in *Carakasamhitā* Cikitsāsthāna 1.1.62–74 and for *brahmarasāyana* in Cikitsāsthāna 1.1. 41–57.

therapy, who, according to *Carakasamhitā* Cikitsāsthāna 1.4.30–35, need to be self-restrained, of impeccable moral conduct, and intent on spiritual practices. Those who do not fulfil these requirements would not be able to benefit from treatment. This general idea also appears in the *Suśrutasaṃhitā* (Cikitsāsthāna 28.32, 30.4 and 30.28–29), where the crucial ingredients of Soma or a divine herb can only be found and used by worthy persons. Nevertheless, the treatises do allow for the possibility that anyone following certain behaviors can reap the same benefits of *rasāyana* treatment the sages purportedly enjoyed. The *Carakasamhitā* (Cikitsāsthāna 1.1.78–80) states:

The application of *rasāyana* was to the great sages of old as nectar was to the gods and ambrosia to the serpent-deities.

In old times, those occupied with *rasāyana* experienced neither ageing nor weakness, illness or death for thousands of years.

One who undertakes *rasāyana* according to rule does not merely attain a long lifespan in this world. He follows the auspicious path pursued by the divine sages and attains the eternal Absolute.⁶³

The last verse, which is repeated in several later medical works,⁶⁴ seems to promise a kind of immortality, depending on how we interpret *brahma tathaiti cākṣayam*, here rendered as “attains the eternal Absolute.” Cakrapāṇidatta’s eleventh-century commentary on *Carakasamhitā* Cikitsāsthāna 1.1.78–80 glosses *brahma* with *mokṣa*, i.e., liberation from the cycle of rebirths.⁶⁵ This suggests immortality outside an embodied existence.

But what about embodied immortality? Many medical works allow for longevity beyond the paradigmatic one hundred years as an outcome of *rasāyana* therapy,⁶⁶ and some formulations are described as increasing lifespan accord-

63 *yathāmarāṇām amṛtaṃ yathā bhogavatām sudhā |*
tathābhavan maharṣiṇām rasāyanavidhiḥ purā || 78
na jarām na ca daurbalyaṃ nāturyaṃ nidhanaṃ na ca |
jaḡmur varṣasahasrāṇi rasāyanaparāḥ purā || 79
na kevalaṃ dīrgham ihāyur aśnute rasāyanaṃ yo vidhivan niṣevate |
gatim sa devarṣiniṣevitām śubhāṃ prapadyate brahma tathaiti cākṣayam || 80

64 See *Siddhayoga* 69.72, *Viṅgasenasamhitā* rasāyanādhikāra 510, *Yogaratanākara* 76.37, and *Bhāvaprakāśa Uttarakhaṇḍa* 2.15.

65 For the text of Cakrapāṇidatta’s commentary of the *Carakasamhitā*, see the edition of the *Carakasamhitā* by Trikamji Āchārya.

66 For example, in the *Aṣṭāṅghṛdayasaṃhitā*, one recipe is for 200 years of life, two recipes

ing to how long they are taken. For example, the *Suśrutasaṃhitā* claims that each month of intake of a false black pepper (*viḍaṅga*) compound increases lifespan by a hundred years.⁶⁷ The same concept is found in the *Carakasamhitā* (Cikitsāsthāna 1.2.13) where the number of emblic myrobalan fruits eaten equals the number of years added to one's life. Theoretically, that should mean that lifespan could be extended indefinitely through a continuous intake of *rasāyanas*.

Still, it should be noted that promises of bodily immortality are unusual and occur only in a few instances, though we find the idea of keeping death at bay or preventing an untimely death a number of times. Sometimes, it is not entirely clear whether formulations are meant to bring about a rescue from death at a particular time, or whether the effect is meant to be permanent. The *Aṣṭāṅgasamgraha* gives a recipe for an iron preparation through which the consumer would “overcome all troubles and become unassailable by disease, ageing, death, weapons, fire, water, and poison.”⁶⁸ And some four hundred years later, the *Vaṅgasenasamhitā*, which shows influence from alchemical literature in a number of its *rasāyana* formulations, describes a multi-herb compound as providing the consumer with a body that is free from ageing, disease and death (*jarārujāmṛtyuvimuktadeha*).⁶⁹ A further recipe for a compound containing iron and guggul uses the phrase *yāti amaratvam*—“he reaches immortality”—which seems fairly unambiguous.⁷⁰ Note, however, Olivelle on Thieme's 1968 study of the related term *amṛta* and the verbal root *mṛ* in Vedic literature: “The term *amṛta* does not always mean immortal in the sense we usually attach to it; it often means vitality or vital energy (Thieme's *Lebenskraft*)—it is a full and prosperous life and all things that sustain and promote such a life, including food, drink, cattle, and medicine. *Amṛta* can thus indicate both life/immortal-

for 300 years, one recipe for 1000 years, one recipe for 500 years, and one recipe for a double life span. In the *Siddhayoga*, we find recipes promising 500 and 1000 years of life.

67 See the recipe in *Suśrutasaṃhitā* Cikitsāsthāna 27.7.

68 *tataḥ sarvopatāpānjitvā vyādhijarāmarāṇaśāstrāgnitoyaviṣāṇām agamyaḥ (...)* //53// The full recipe is found in *Aṣṭāṅgasamgraha* Uttarasthāna 49. 53–54.

69 *Vaṅgasenasamhitā rasāyanādhikāra* 396. The same recipe is found in *Yogarātnākara* 76.13–14 and in *Bhāvaprakāśa Uttarakhaṇḍa* 2.11–12. See also *Vaṅgasenasamhitā rasāyanādhikāra* 116, where a mixture of sulphur, the three myrobalans and false daisy (*bhr̥ṅgarāja*) is attributed with removing death and ageing (*mṛtyujarāpaha*); or *rasāyanādhikāra* 119, which describes a sulphur and iron preparation as letting someone live to the end of the moon and sun (*jīved ācandratārakam*).

70 See variants of the recipe in *Vaṅgasenasamhitā rasāyanādhikāra* 423, *Yogarātnākara* 76.27 and *Bhāvaprakāśa Uttarakhaṇḍa* 2.14.

ity, as well as instruments that sustain life and ward off death.”⁷¹ Perhaps we can apply similar meanings to the related terms *mṛtyu* and *amara*. Correspondingly, the “body that is free from death” (... *mṛtyuvimuktadeha*), in the example above, then might be understood as a body full of vitality, rather than one that is free from death forever, while to attain *amaratvam* might be understood in terms of a gain in vitality instead of immortality.

In the early medical works up to the *Vaṅgasenasamhitā*, bodily immortality is typically not presented as an outcome of medical intervention. The author of the thirteenth/fourteenth-century medical treatise *Śārṅgadharasamhitā* (1.5.50cd-52ab) states this explicitly:

The conjunction of body and breath is called life.
Their separation through time is called death by the wise.

No living being born anywhere on earth is immortal.
Hence, death is inevitable. However, one should ward off disease.⁷²

Importantly, the author gives a reason why health should be pursued:

Given that the body is an instrument for accomplishing righteousness, wealth, pleasure, and liberation, a man who understands the consequences of past actions should protect the body from diseases.⁷³

Thus, the body is used for the pursuit of this-worldly aims but is also a crucial means for the attainment of religious merit and the final goal of liberation from the cycle of rebirths.⁷⁴

71 Patrick Olivelle, “Amṛtā: Women and Indian Technologies of Immortality.” *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 25 (1997): 428.

72 *śarīraprāṇāyora eva saṃyogād āyur ucyate || 50cd*
kāḷena tadviyogāc ca pañcatvaṃ kathyate budhaiḥ |
na jantuḥ kaścid amaraḥ pṛthvyām jāyate kvacit || 51
ato mṛtyur avāryaḥ syāt kiṃtu rogān nivārayet |

73 *dharmārthakāmamokṣaṇām śarīraṃ sādhanam yataḥ | ato rugbhyas tanuṃ rakṣen naraḥ*
karmavipākavid || 53 ||

74 See also *Carakasamhitā* Sūtrasthāna 1. 6, where disease is described as an impediment to religious observances, such as austerities (*tapas*), abstinence (*upavāsa*), study (*adhyayana*), celibacy (*brahmacarya*), and vows (*vrata*), as well as to lifespan. See also *Carakasamhitā* Sūtrasthāna 1. 15, which states that freedom from disease is the root cause of righteousness, wealth, pleasure, and liberation—*dharmārthakāmamokṣaṇām ārogyaṃ mūlam uttaman*. Notably, none of the *rasāyanas* or other medicines in the *Śārṅgadharasamhitā* are described as especially extending lifespan, so that the suggestion seems to be that the attainment of liberation (*mokṣa*) is possible within a regular lifespan.

7 Concluding Reflections

Special powers as effects of *rasāyana* medicines are found throughout the medical treatises. They are an integral, though minor part of *rasāyana*.

Many of the special effects of *rasāyana* medicines concern averting misfortune and malevolent acts. *Rasāyanas* here function as shields against attacks, rendering them ineffectual. Notably, the possibility of (counter-)attacks is missing: the purpose of *rasāyanas* is defensive, not offensive. The other function of these *rasāyanas* is to bring about positive effects, often directed at improving social standing, such as fame, wealth, and success in one's endeavors. Here, *rasāyanas* may not only affect the consumers, but also their social environment: the powers bestowed on the consumers determine society's reaction to them. The first function of these *rasāyanas* points to an essentially hostile environment in which all sorts of calamities may befall a person, many of them caused by the malign actions of others. The second seems to reflect an optimism about the possibility to nevertheless live a happy life in favorable conditions. These effects of *rasāyana* medicines are reminiscent of some of the effects attributed to mantras and rituals of the *Atharvaveda* and its ancillary texts. The difference is that many of the *Atharvaveda*'s spells are dedicated to damaging one's enemy—these kinds of spells are alluded to in the *Aṣṭāṅgharḍayasamhitā* and *Aṣṭāṅgasamgraha*, as we have seen, but only as something the *rasāyana* will guard against, not as something a *rasāyana* would effect. It should also be mentioned that while mantras are sometimes cited in *rasāyana* chapters, typically to accompany a *rasāyana*'s intake, they are not specifically associated with special powers for good luck or protection from malign forces.⁷⁵

75 The exceptions to this are *Suśrutasamhitā* Cikitsāsthāna 28.25, which states that the Gāyatrī mantra should be spoken during the making of the formulations that confer such special powers; and *Cikitsāsthāna* 30.27, which prescribes the incantation of a mantra during the harvest of divine herbs (*dīvyauṣadhi*). Otherwise, mantras occur in *Suśrutasamhitā* Cikitsāsthāna 28.25, *Aṣṭāṅgharḍayasamhitā* Uttarasthāna 39.89, and *Aṣṭāṅgasamgraha* Uttarasthāna 49.83 in the context of chaulmoogra oil (*tuvaraka*), an oil used against skin diseases (*kuṣṭha*); in *Aṣṭāṅgasamgraha* Uttarasthāna 49. 262–263 in the context of taking guggul against diseases caused by the humors wind and phlegm; in the *Siddhayoga* 69.31 for the intake of flame of the forest (*hastikarṇa*) and 69.41 for taking marking nut (*bhallātaka*) for general good health and enhancing cognitive power; in the *Cakradatta* 66.100–106 in the context of taking the iron tonic called *amṛtasāralauha* for a beautiful, stable, and healthy body, and in 66.19–21 for the intake of flame of the forest (*hastikarṇa*) for longevity; in the *Vaṅgasenasamhitā*'s *rasāyana* chapter, verse 120, for the use of a sulphur and iron compound which would confer divine sight and longevity on the consumer. Mantras are not found in the *rasāyana* chapters of the *Carakasamhitā*, the *Bhāvaprakāśa*, or the *Yogarātnākara*.

The other kind of effects of *rasāyanas* are more easily integrated into a medical framework of physical health as an extension of normal human corporeality and functioning. Here, bad eyesight becomes good vision and then divine vision; a breaking voice becomes smooth and powerful, turning into an instrument for eloquence and oration skills, which in turn culminate in “mastery of speech” (*vāksiddhi*); an untimely death is averted and replaced by the appropriate life-span of a healthy human being, or extended to an extraordinary length, or expanded indefinitely. The ultimate promise of *rasāyana* is the perfection of the body that will allow a sustained pursuit of both worldly pleasures and transcendent goals.

It is tempting for a modern reader to explain the inclusion of special powers as an effect of *rasāyana* as hyperbole: exaggerations perhaps used to claim an elevated position for *rasāyana* within medicine. Accordingly, 1000 years of lifespan would just mean “a long life;” divine sight 20/20 vision; an adamant body good immunity; and the cure of leprosy and regeneration of lost limbs an alleviation of symptoms. This is certainly how modern proponents of Āyurveda tend to frame the workings of *rasāyana* medicines. That is, special powers or extreme effects are simply left unmentioned, played down or dismissed. We can see this mindset at work in translations, but also in the careful wording and emphasis on health benefits in research papers and other publications on *rasāyana* formulations.⁷⁶ This is not surprising, given that modern practitioners of Āyurveda have long been trained to work within the modern biomedical idiom.

Examining the texts as historical sources, however, we can note that the special powers, while not especially given prominence, form part and parcel of the medical writers’ representations of *rasāyana*. Summarizing research findings on yogic powers in different Indic literatures, Jacobsen notes that “(t)he traditions assumed that the powers could be explained rationally, neither considered unreal, nor denied as irrational.”⁷⁷ This is also the impression I gain from the medical texts, though there is a certain ambiguity in some expressions

76 An online search for the term *rasāyana* brings up many research publications on specific *rasāyana* formulations or single drugs. These are all focused on their health benefits and do not mention special powers as possible outcomes of *rasāyana* therapy. See also the representations of *rasāyana* in Chittabrata Palit and Nupur Dasgupta, *Ancient Indian System of Rasayana Suvarnatantra. A Treatise on Alchemy/Rasayana* (Delhi: Kalpaz Publications, 2009), S. Mahdihassan, *Indian Alchemy or Rasayana in The Light of Asceticism and Geriatrics* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1991), Ram Karan Sharma, *Rejuvenative Health Care in Āyurveda* (Delhi: Pratibha Prakashan, 1996), and Ajay Kumar Sharma, *Elements of rasāyana Therapy in Ayurveda* (Delhi: Sri Satguru Books, 2005).

77 Jacobsen, *Yoga Powers*, 15.

that allow for either a more mundane or a supramundane interpretation. The boundaries between normal and extraordinary are fluid and are not marked in the texts: the cure of cough can be juxtaposed with the extension of life for eight hundred years. Where do we draw the line? Do we accept claims of efficacy in Āyurvedic medicines? And if so, what is the limit to this acceptance? How do we distinguish between reasonable and unreasonable claims, between normal and extraordinary? The medical writers do set certain limits, as we have seen, for example, in the descriptions of normal lifespan. These limits are then, however, stretched in the *rasāyana* chapters. This may reflect the juxtaposition of materials collected from different sources. After all, the medical works are collections, and the doctrine of *rasāyana* may have been based on a different set of rules than other branches of medicine.

In his pioneering book, *Asceticism and Healing in Ancient India*, Kenneth Zysk argued that the early medical works display “empirico-rational” and “magico-religious” elements that reflect the different cultural milieus in which medicine was developed. According to Zysk, the empirical and rational theories of medicine (especially humoral theory) originated in ascetic milieus, while the magico-religious elements were part of a “brahmanic veneer” applied while adapting medical theory and practice to brahmanic culture. The division between “empirico-rational” (as indicative of modern ideas of science) and “magico-religious” was critiqued by Engler on the grounds that “Āyurveda did not manifest standard criteria of ‘science’ (e.g., materialism, empirical observation, experimentation, falsification, quantification, or a developed conception of proof) and that Vedic aspects of the classical texts are too central to be considered inauthentic or marginal.”⁷⁸ More recently, Slouber (2016) has shown how certain religious and magical elements found in the texts follow a systematic logic and should therefore not be categorized as irrational. Nevertheless, the difference in approaches in the medical texts is fairly clear and indeed is explicitly referenced in the source texts themselves. For example, the *Carakasamhitā* divides therapy into three categories: 1. that which depends on the sacred (*daivavyapāśraya*); 2. that which depends on reasoning (*yukti-vyapāśraya*); and 3. that which triumphs through good character (*sattvāvajaya*). The first category includes “the use of mantras, herbs, jewels, good-luck ceremonies, food offerings to the gods, presents to the gods, fire oblations, pledges, penances, fasts, benedictions, prostrations, and pilgrimage.”⁷⁹ The sec-

78 Steven Engler, “‘Science’ vs. ‘Religion’ in Classical Āyurveda,” *Numen* 50 (2003): 416.

79 *Carakasamhitā* Sūtrasthāna 11.54. Translation by Dominik Wujastyk, *Roots*, 33.

and employs diet and medicines. For the third, the mind is turned away from detrimental thought.⁸⁰ *Rasāyana* encompasses all three approaches.

I have avoided the use of the words “supernatural” or “magical” to describe the effects of *rasāyana* medicines, since the way in which medical writers incorporate special powers points to their seeing them as part of how the world functions, not as a disruption of any natural laws. Even the words “special” or “extraordinary” must be used with some caution, since they depend on a specific understanding of what is normal, or common. In his study on yoga powers in Śaiva tantric traditions, Somadeva Vasudeva suggests the use of “supramundane abilities” for the word *siddhi* to reflect the idea that these abilities are not common for ordinary humans, though they are for accomplished yogins.⁸¹ Perhaps we can similarly understand the special effects of *rasāyana* as something that is not commonly available to all, but can be attained under special circumstances by certain kinds of persons, letting them achieve the “normal” state of higher beings, such as seers, sages, and gods. In the world view of the medical authors, these effects of *rasāyanas* are then only special or extraordinary in that they require special or extraordinary effort.

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80 The *Suśrutasamhitā* offers a tripartite classification of diseases in Sūtrasthāna 24.4. One of these is the category of “*ādhidaivika*”, explained in 24.7 as caused by offending gods, curses, black magic (*atharvaṇa*) and misfortune. However, the passage offers no corresponding therapeutic approach here.

81 Somadeva Vasudeva, “Powers and Identities: Yoga Powers and the Tantric Śaiva Traditions,” in *Yoga Powers: Extraordinary Capacities Attained Through Meditation and Concentration*, ed. Knut Jacobsen (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 265.

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