If, twenty years ago, you had read most of the literature published before the 1990s about the Śaivasiddhānta, you would probably have received the impression that this was primarily a South Indian movement, whose scriptures, called āgamas, were divided into four sections, or pādas, devoted to ritual (kriyā), doctrine (jñāna), yoga and pious conduct (caryā). The first two of these four sections, the kriyā-pāda and the jñāna-pāda, you would have learnt, were the most important, the kriyāpāda being devoted to describing the rituals practised in the Śaiva temples of the Tamil-speaking area, and the jñānapāda (or vidyāpāda) being devoted to teaching and defending a strictly dualist system that presents an ontological ladder of thirty-six tattvas, but that recognises three irreducible ontological categories: pati, paśu and pāśa. That is to say: the Lord (pati), bound souls (paśu), and the bonds that bind them (pāśa), namely Matter, karman and an innate impurity called mala or āṇava-mala.

Each one of these pieces of received wisdom has been challenged by the discoveries of the last two decades, so that we now know that none of the above propositions actually holds true for the earliest strata of the religion to which surviving primary literature can give us access. A great many of those discoveries are those of Alexis Sanderson and the students to whom for decades he devoted much of his time and energy.

Of course it is wide reading of a very broad corpus of published and unpublished sources that has gradually revealed to us quite a different picture of the early phases of the religion. But if one were to single out any one text for its importance in expanding our knowledge of the early history of the Mantramārga, it would probably be the Niśvāsattvasaṃhitā.

Ten years ago, hardly any aspect of the text had been explored in print, but, thanks in part to the spotlight of the Franco-German ‘Early Tantra’ project, which between 2008 and 2011 focussed the minds of many people present at the Toronto symposium on the Niśvāsa and on its relation to other early tantric literature, parts of the work have been commented upon in an array of publications. The first major article actually predates the ‘Early Tantra’ project, and is,
of course, by Professor Sanderson himself: it is his study of the Lākulas (2006). Apart from the first volume of the collaborative edition and translation, covering the earliest three books of the Niśvāsa—the Mūlasūtra, Uttarāsūtra and Nayāsūtra—there are now substantial articles on, for instance, the evolution of the system of tattvas that can be traced as it gradually takes shape within the Niśvāsa-corpus (Goodall 2016), and on the lengthy grimoires of magical rites contained in the Guhyasūtra that are similar in style and content to those found in Buddhist kriyātantra works, and most strikingly similar to the those in the Mañjuśrīyamūlakalpa (Goodall and Isaacson 2016).

Now that the earliest three books of the Niśvāsa are published at last, and now that the introductory book, the Niśvāsamukhatattvasaṃhitā, has been thoroughly examined in a doctoral thesis defended this year at the University of Leiden by Nirajan Kafle (2015*), what remains is the largest book of them all: the Guhyasūtra. The ninth-century manuscript of the corpus (NGMPP Reel No. A 41/14) comprises 114 folios, and all of the hitherto edited works together cover only the first 40 of those. The remaining 74 folios give us the text of the Guhyasūtra. Here is a very brief outline of the structure of its eighteen chapters:

A. Sādhana

Ch. 1 personality-types of sādhaka and types of liṅgas that may be used for siddhi.

Ch. 2 liṅgapratiṣṭhā.

Ch. 3 preparations for sādhana, prognosticatory rites, vrata, procedures for attaining certain siddhis.

B. Cosmography

Chs. 4–7 a lengthy cosmography (prakriyājñāna).

Ch. 8 a variant form of dīkṣā in the form of worship of a series of maṇḍalas peopled by deities of the different levels of the cosmos (prakriyāyāga).

C. Other Mantra-systems

Finally, the use, primarily for magical powers, of mantra-systems other than those given in the earlier three sūtras, namely

a) Chs. 9–11 The vyomavyāpin.

b) Chs. 12–14 The five brahmamantras.

Ch. 15 Long forms of their āngamantras.

c) Chs. 16–18 A ten-syllable mantra called vidyā.

The Guhyasūtra is somewhat like a series of appendices to the earlier sūtras, containing more detailed accounts of some topics that have already been cov-
ered (cosmography), but also entirely new subjects (new mantras) or treatments of subjects that have hitherto only been alluded to, notably the acquisition of siddhis. As I have tried to indicate with the overarching titles (A, B, C) in the brief summary above, I think that it can be said that chapters 1 to 3 have a certain sort of unity because they cover the acquisition of magical powers in much greater detail than we see in earlier layers of the text: the first chapter gives information about sādhakas, then stresses the importance of the liṅga for attaining siddhis, after which, in chapter 2, the installation of liṅgas is covered, and then in the third chapter we return to the preparations for sādhana and finally the procedures to be followed. Chapters 4–7 then give us a very detailed account of the Śaiva cosmos, the higher reaches of which have been further expanded and embroidered upon since the composition of the earlier sūtras of the text.1 This is undertaken because dīkṣā involves purging the soul of the fruits of karman that would need to be experienced—and thus expended—through every layer of the Śaiva universe. Using the same cosmography, chapter 8 describes an alternative dīkṣā involving the worship of maṇḍalas representing successive layers of the universe, and it then contains a number of add-on discussions that suggest, it seems to me, that the text once drew to a close at that point, as we shall see below. What follow, taking us up to the end of the Guhyasūtra, are three distinct textual layers each devoted to introducing an extra mantra-system, namely 1) that of the 81-word vyomavyāpin, 2) that of the brahmamantras, and 3) that of the ten-syllable vidyā. To each of these is attached a grimoire of magical recipes (kalpa).

Turning to the conclusion of chapter 8, I think that we can see from the summary given below that it reads like a series of codas. Verse 105 gives a clear statement of what we are supposed to have learnt from the preceding chapters, and it is followed immediately by remarks about the persons to whom these teachings may and may not be submitted, a typical closing device. Tagged on to this, from verse 116 onwards, is a treatment of religious suicide, again a theme suitable to the conclusion of a work of scripture. The final section, from verse 125, is introduced by Devī’s question about the status of rival religious traditions. In answer, Śiva explains that He and Devī, as consonants and vowels, are the source of all language, and that they are the source of all the universe in that they are to be identified with the various tattvas from which all else evolves.

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1 A full examination of this embroidery will have to await the publication of the relevant parts of the Guhyasūtra, but some idea of its extent and nature may be gained from the table on pp. 293–293 of Goodall, Sanderson and Isaacson 2015 and from the surrounding annotation, as well as from Goodall 2016.
Summary of the conclusion of *Guhyasūtra* 8:

8.88–89 Devī asks how an initiate may foretell his own death.
8.90–98 Śiva recounts signs of death.
8.99–104 Activities that can be done under particular asterisms that grant release [from death?].
8.105 Summary of teachings from chapter 4 up to this point in chapter 8.

8.106–110 Those to whom one should and should not transmit this knowledge.
8.111–114b The 4 means of liberation: dīkṣā, jñāna, yoga, caryā.
8.114c–115 One should transmit this only to someone worthy.

8.116–117 Devī asks about religious suicide.
8.118–122 Śiva deprecates death in *tīrtha* for initiates; he teaches instead 5 varieties of a ‘razor’-mantra for suicide by *japa*.
8.123 Increasing length of life by yogic *dhāranās*.
8.124 The supreme Śaiva knowledge, without which one cannot be liberated, has been taught!

8.125–127 Devī asks about the fate of those who follow rival religions.
8.128–133 Śiva explains that He and Devī, as the consonants and vowels of the alphabet, are the source of all linguistic expression (vān-mayam) and of all that has evolved (vikārāḥ).
8.134–136 The Mūla-mantra is a panacea (*myrtasaṅjīvanī*).
8.137–138 Śiva and Pārvatī are parents of everything in that they are respectively these tattvas: puruṣa and *prakṛti*; kāla and niyati; īśvara and māyā+vidyā; sadāśiva and kalā.
8.139–140 They are also respectively [supreme] Śiva and His Will (*icchā*).
8.141 Those who do not know the NAVĀTMAN, who are devoid of dīkṣā and jñāna, who do not know the Mūla, do not attain the highest state.

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Much of this conclusion has, by the way, been borrowed and adapted into the *Niśvāsakārikā*, which seems itself like another series of addenda that further modify and extend the teachings of the sūtras of the *Niśvāsatattvasaṃhitā*. Thus *Guhyasūtra* 8.88–89 and 8.92–104 have been reworked to produce chapter 21 of the *jñānakāṇḍa* of the *Niśvāsakārikā* (T. 17, pp. 131–133; T. 127, pp. 36–38); and *Guhyasūtra* 8.125–136 have been reworked to form the beginning of chapter 20 (23 in T. 127) of the *jñānakāṇḍa* of the *Niśvāsakārikā* (T. 17, pp. 122–124; T. 127, pp. 231–233). The chapter continues, at least in T. 17, for a further 32 verses on rival notions of liberation and methods for attaining it.
We may remark in passing that a noteworthy feature of this final passage is that the text takes no clearly defined position on the debate between dualism, which was to become a defining characteristic of classical mainstream Saiddhântika doctrine, and non-dualism: it seems as though this debate had not yet caught the interest and attention of Śaiva thinkers. Here is the passage in question:

I am purusatattva and you are prakṛti and also niyati; ... Maheśvara is Time; you are Māyā and Vidyā, while I am Īśvara-tattva. I, O goddess, am Sadāśiva [and] you are mistress of the 4 kalās. (137–138) Because I rule, I control, I am omniscient, because I am permanently at rest, without division and in equilibrium, I am Śiva. (139) You are my Will, not to be crossed, for you are the one from whom the power of the śaktis arises!

The whole universe has sprung from you; You bestow Śiva-nature, O you of true compassion! (140)

Having proposed an identification of the principal layers of redaction that are detectable in the Guhyasūtra, I should like now to skip back to the verses in the conclusion of chapter 8 that speak about those to whom the teachings may and may not be transmitted, since these verses bear both upon the themes that structure the work and upon the subject of caryā. For, slipped into the middle of that section, beginning in verse 8.111, is a short sequence of verses that make the claim that the teachings of the text comprise four independently salvific parts: dīkṣā, jñāna, yoga and caryā.

etad buddhvā na dātavyaṃ śivadevāṃśam param 8.110
dīkṣājñānena yogena caryayā ca yathākramam
pratyekaśaṅh śivāvāptis tantre 'smin pārameśvare 8.111
dīkṣayā sukaraṃ mokṣaṃ yad gurus sādhayet sadā
jñānaṁ ca gurum āśādyā labhyate tat[[prasādataḥ]] 8.112
Knowing this, one should not give [lightly] the supreme nectar of Lord Śiva. (110)

According to this scripture of the Lord, one may attain Śiva by each of the following [practised individually] (pratyekāsāh): initiation, knowledge, yoga and caryā in due order. (111)

By initiation one attains liberation easily, since it is the guru who invariably accomplishes it.4 And knowledge is obtained, once one finds a guru, through his grace. (112)

... yo[ga] ... from the feet of the guru; One must practise caryā, which bestows all supernatural powers, using one's own strength (ātmāśakti). (113)

This tetrad has been taught to destroy the dangers of saṃsāra. It should not [lightly] be given to others if one desires supernatural power for oneself. (114)

An innocent might here at first suppose that we find here what may be the earliest allusion to the notion that each Śaiva scripture should be arranged in four text-units called pādas, for it is not difficult to see that the kriyāpāda might easily be referred to by the most significant ritual of all, namely dīkṣā. Now Brunner (1992) and others5 have shown that most early scriptures are not in fact divided into four such text-units, and the Niśvāsa certainly is not. Nonetheless, one might reasonably suppose that the four topics to which some later scriptures devote four text-sections called pādas are referred to here. But are they? Plainly the first three, dīkṣā, jñāna and yoga, may be found treated at length in the Niśvāsa; but is there anything that we might recognise as caryā? This is a word we are rather used to seeing translated as “conduct” or “comportment,” as for instance in the title of Brunner’s 1985 translation of the kriyāpāda and caryāpāda of the Mṛgendratantra: Mṛgendrāgama[.] Section des rites et section du comportement. When she characterises the content of the caryāpāda there, she observes (p. xxxvii):

3 Perhaps N once read: yogañ ca gurupādataḥ?
4 At the beginning of the kriyāpāda of the Mataṅga (1.2), initiation is similarly presented as an alternative route to salvation that is easier than taking the more difficult path of jñāna.
5 See Goodall 1998, lviii–lxv.
La presque totalité de l’exposé (śl 1–105) est consacrée à un sujet unique: le comportement normal des différents groupes d’initiés.6

This is a topic that we really do not find addressed in the *Niśvāsatattvasaṃhitā*, and it is therefore clear that *caryā* probably does not mean “comportement normal” in this text. When speaking in Toronto, I was unaware that Christian Wedemeyer, faced with similar difficulties of interpretation resulting from assuming such a meaning, had already devoted a chapter of his work on *Making Sense of Tantric Buddhism* (2013, 133–169) to discussing how *caryā* and related terms should be understood in early Buddhist and Śaiva tantric works.7 An exploration of this theme therefore now seems in some respects less pressing to me than it once did. But there are still some issues that can usefully be commented upon, and there are several early Śaiva attestations of the nexus of *caryā*-related terms of which Wedemeyer was not aware and which serve to adjust, I think, some of what he has said about this semantic field, and that go some way to explaining a significant juncture in the semantic voyage of the term *caryā* that led to its being commonly assumed in modern scholarship to mean something like “comportement normal,” even in passages in which such a meaning does not fit. Wedemeyer’s account does clarify a number of confusions, and he is to be commended for taking into account several Śaiva passages, but a combination of a desire to show that it is the Śaivas who have borrowed from the Buddhists rather more than the Buddhists have from the Śaivas here (2013, 136–137, 154) and of not having had access to the earliest known Śaiva material (which I should like to have made widely available long ago, but editing concurrently the *Niśvāsa*, the *Kirāṇa* and the *Sarvajñānottara* is proving a very time-consuming project) have led him to some problematic assertions and assumptions, some of which I hope to correct below.8 In what follows, I will

6 “Almost the entire exposition (verses 1–105) is devoted to a single subject: the regular comportment of different groups of initiates.”

7 I am grateful to Tim Cahill for bringing Wedemeyer 2013 to my attention by kindly giving me a copy when he was visiting Pondicherry in 2015.

8 John Nemec too expresses some reserves in his generally positive review (2014, 272–273) and encourages further investigation of the Śaiva understanding of *vrata*s:

> Even if we grant that Wedemeyer limits his argument to instances of the antinomian practices that were understood to lead to liberation through a nondualistic, epistemological, or gnostic insight, as I think he wishes to do, there is nevertheless some work left to be done, in my view, to prove that even this particular understanding of the rites in question originated with tantric Buddhism (and the *Guhyasamājatantra* in particular [160–162, 166]). What is needed is a more thorough effort to establish the relative chronology of the relevant texts and, more importantly, a more detailed account of the Śaiva self-understandings of the religious observances in question.
be expanding upon and shoring up what was advanced rather too tentatively in a lengthy note on *Mūlasūtra* 4.17c–18 (Goodall, Sanderson, Isaacson et al. 2015, 284–287).

In fact, the basic difficulty with the central term *caryā* had arguably already been resolved, *in nuce*, by Alexis Sanderson in his 2006 article on the Lākulas, but in a somewhat laconic fashion. What he writes, just before presenting the *vratas* in the ninth chapter of the *caryāpāda* of the *Matanigapārameśvara*, is the following:

The Śaivas have conventionally divided the means of liberation taught in the Āgamas, that is to say their subject matter, into the four categories, ritual (*kriyā*), doctrine or gnosis (*jñānam, vidyā*), meditation (*yogah*), and ascetic observance and other rules governing the conduct of the various classes and kinds of initiate (*caryā*). Continuities between the Lākulas and the Śaivas have now been shown in the areas of the ritual of initiation and in the doctrine of the path to liberation, [...] Insufficient evidence exists to permit much of a comparison in the domain of meditation, [...] This leaves only the domain of ascetic observance (*vrat-acyārya*).

It is clear, in other words, that *caryā*, in early Śaiva works, may refer specifically to ascetic observance, presumably indeed because it is a contraction of the collocation *vratacaryā/vratacaraṇa*, “the performance (*caryā/caraṇa*) of timed religious observances (*vrata*).” The verb *car*, “to move,” but also “to be engaged in,” has indeed long been the natural idiomatic verb of choice for use with *vrata*, and this accounts for the frequency of such bahuvrīhi expressions as *cīrnavrata* (“who has observed his observances”), both in non-Mantramārga works (e.g. *Bodhāyanagṛhyasūtra* 4.12.2 on p. 118, *Yājñavalkyasmyti* 3.298c, *Mahābhārata* 3.81.135c) and in works of the Mantramārga (e.g. *Mālinīvijayottara* 10.17c and 10.34c, *Mohacūḍottara* 1.14a, etc), as well as for the distinctively tantric bahuvrīhi expression *cīrnavidyāvrata* (e.g. *Siddhayogeśvarimata* 13.1a),9 to which we shall return below.

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9 One non-tantric instance has been pointed out to me by Harunaga Isaacson (email of 26.xii 2015).

... I find one occurrence of *cīrnavidyāvrata* in a non-tantric text and a non-tantric context. It is in Vyomaśiva’s *Vyomavatī*, the oldest of the commentaries on the *Padārthadharmanasamgraha* (perhaps early 13th century; might be even slightly earlier). Of course, even though the context is here of orthodox Vedic/brahmanical practice, we can be pretty certain that Vyomaśiva, as his name already suggests, was familiar with the Siddhānta and
If we were concerned only with the meanings of the word *caryā*, then it might seem that we could almost end our essay here: Wedemeyer has pointed out that *caryā* conventionally refers to virtuous behaviour and conduct in accordance with religious precepts in a number of early non-tantric Buddhist texts (2013, 135), where he characterises it as “by far the most common generic term for the spiritual undertakings of buddhas and bodhisattvas,” just as it does in much later Śaiva works of the Mantramārga, such as the *Mṛgendra*; Sanderson has alluded (in the passage just quoted) to the observed fact that it may refer in Śaiva sources both to the prescribed “conduct of the various classes and kinds of initiate” as well as to “ascetic observance,” and he has pregnantly suggested that this second meaning is connected with the notion of *vratacaryā*; finally, Wedemeyer has observed that *caryā* in Buddhist tantric sources, and in some Śaiva ones, refers not to life-long virtuous conduct, but rather to timed antinomian practices, in troubling places such as cremation grounds and involving transgressive sexual and mortuary elements.

But, as my title indicates, there is in fact a nexus of terms to be examined here. Wedemeyer indeed points out that there are several other related terms that seem to be used in places where *caryā* might have served instead, *caryāvrata* and *vratacaryā* being apparently “used with identical meaning” (2013, 136), to which he adds instances of these words “in compound with qualifiers related to ideas of secrecy or madness,” such as *guhyavrata*, *guhyacaryā*, *prachannavrata*, *unmattavrata*, and “a cluster of interrelated terms that appear in the same contexts, and which seem to be largely synonymous,” which he tabulates on p. 137. Among these, he singles out *vidyāvrata*, for which he suggests the translations “knowledge observance, spell observance, and/or consort observance” (2013, 136) as being “treated as essentially equivalent to *caryāvrata*/vratacaryā in Buddhist and Śaiva sources.”

Now it may indeed be the case that several of these terms appear to be used interchangeably, but a slightly broader and chronologically deeper slice of Śaiva samples reveals, it seems to me, both how the terms in fact differ from each other and also why it is that they may in some contexts appear to be interchangeable, while at other times they are not. This may seem hair-splittingly tedious, but, as Wedemeyer points out, if we do not understand the words, then we cannot understand what it is that they serve to express.10 The Viennese
endeavour that has so far produced three out of five volumes of the *Tāntrikābhidhānakośa* is a step towards a better understanding of technical terms and of common terms used with technical senses in the literature of the Mantramārga, even if it does not, alas, cover Tantric Buddhist literature.\(^\text{11}\)

Turning to the Viennese dictionary for an understanding of *caryā* is, however, not yet particularly useful, for the entry under this word consists only of a cross-reference to the term *caryāpāda*. But the account of that term does contain what will one day be a useful cross-reference to a future article on the term *vrata* and it includes one useful pointer to a moment in the history of the term *caryā*:

Note that *vrata* is substituted as a synonym for *caryā* in *Kīraṇa* 6.6c; indeed it is conceivable that the term is an abbreviation of *vratacaryā* (*Kīraṇa* 49.4).

The volume of the *Tāntrikābhidhānakośa* in question appeared back in 2004; by the time the fifth volume appears, including the terms *vrata* and *vidyāvrata*, this dictionary will be a still more useful resource for tracing out the shifting semantics of this and many another nexus of tantric terms.

Let us follow up this reference to the *Kīraṇatantra*. Since its chapter, 49, on *vratacaryā* is short, we may quote much of it below, omitting from the middle a detailed treatment of the ideal *kamaṇḍalu*, and giving just the readings of the Devakottai edition (*E*\(_D\)) and the Nepalese manuscript of 924 AD (*N*, f. 70r):

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{garuḍa uvāca—} \\
&\text{samayī putrakaś cāpi deśikaś ca maheśvara} \\
&\text{eśāṃ vyrtiḥ samākhyaṭā sādhakasya bravihi me} & 49.1 \\
&\text{bhagavān uvāca—} \\
&\text{sādhakaḥ sātviko dhīraḥ sahiṣṇur mantradhīr varaḥ} \\
&\text{apradhrṣyo mahāprājñaḥ samaloṣṭāśmakāñcanaḥ} & 49.2 \\
&\text{udyukto homaniṣṭhaś ca japaḥyānarataḥ sadā}
\end{align*}
\]

\[^{11}\text{The desirability of covering Buddhist Tantric literature is alluded to in the preface to the third volume (p. 11), but it is obvious that the project cannot be simply “tweaked” at this late stage to incorporate a huge extra corpus only in volumes 4 and 5.}\]
vighnaprotṣāraṇe kalyo vrataṇiṣṭhaḥ samaḥ śuciḥ 49.3
sasakhāyo vanaṃ gatvā vratacaryāṃ samārabhet
asahāyo tadā tasmiṃ svasakhāyāḥ kamaṇḍaluḥ 49.4

Guruḍa spoke:
You have taught me, O great Lord, the activities of the neophyte, the putraka and the ācārya. Tell me those of the sādhaka. (1)
The Lord spoke:
The excellent (varah) sādhaka [should be] full of sattva, firm, capable of endurance, his mind fixed on [his] mantra, unassailable, of great wisdom, looking impartially on mud, stones and gold, (2) engaged, regular in [the performance of] oblations, always devoted to recitation and meditation, dexterous in the dispelling of obstacles, firm in [the practice of his] religious observance, calm, pure. (3) Accompanied by his ritual assistant, he should go to the forest and begin the practice of his religious observance (vratacaryāṃ). [If he is] without a ritual assistant, then his spouted water-pot is his ritual assistant in that [practice].12 (4)

[Description of spouted water-pot omitted.]

saśalyas tumbako vā syād evaṃ kṛtvā vratañ caret 49.13
jaṭāmakuṭasāṭopaṃ śulakhatvāṅgalāṃchitam
śuddhamunḍārdhasaṃyuktam tṛlocanakṛtādaram 49.14

12 This idea that the sādhaka, when embarking on the pursuit of supernatural powers, must be accompanied either by a ritual assistant or by his water-pot is expressed elsewhere too, for instance in Sarvajñānottara 25.19:
susakhāyo yadā mantri mantrasādhanam ārabhet
asakhāyo yogi siddhīṃ kamaṇḍaluκaraḥ sadā 19
vyāghracarmāmbaraṇaṃ sāntaṃ raudraṇaḥ vrataṃ idaṃ śubham
suniṣṭhasya bhavet śaḍbhīr mmāsaiḥ siddhir ihottamā 49.15
madhyā māsaiḥ caturbhīṣṭaṃ ca kṣudrā māsaiḥ tribhir vrataṃ
pravaraṃ pravaraṃ raudram tatsiddhau sakalo bhavet 49.16
kāryaṃ mantra-vrataṃ siddhayai sādhakānurūpakān

Alternatively, [instead of a kamaṇḍalu,] it may be a gourd with a shaft.
Having made this [ready], he should practise his observance. (13cd)
This is the auspicious Raudra-vrata: imposing with a chignon of mat-
ted locks, marked by a trident and khaṭvāṅga, equipped with a clean
half skull, awe-inspiring with a third eye, clothed in the skin of a tiger,
peaceful. (14–15b)
For one firm [in this observance], the highest siddhi will arise in six
months; middling [powers] in four months; the lowest [powers] will
arise in three months. (15c–16b)
The highest of the observance is the Raudra-vrata. On accomplishing
that, one becomes [equal to] the Sakala [form of Śiva]. (16cd)
For attaining siddhi, the sādhaka should perform a mantra-observance
that is appropriate [to the mantra in question].13 (17ab)

What we see here, it seems to me, is a reflection of the old notion that caryā
refers to vratacaryā, “the performance of a vrata,” where vrata is a timed reli-
gious observance that typically involves adopting an unusual diet (not men-
tioned here), an unusual style of dress (often with accoutrements of the cre-
mation ground, in this case the khaṭvāṅga), and unusual behaviour (sexual
transgressions, mortuary obsessions, or, as here, ascetic detachment). This
observance is furthermore a preparation for the attainment of magical powers
through the use of a mantra.

This is, I think, in essence, the same as what is meant by the term vrata in all
early tantric literature. It explains therefore how vratacaryā, “the performance

13 Or perhaps “appropriate [to the desired siddhi].”
of such a vrata," and therefore sometimes also caryā have come to be used interchangeably with vrata. But the term caryā evidently began to expand and then slip in meaning as the Mantramārga expanded to include not just sādhakas (who seem to be the only audience of the Niśvāsatattvasamhitā), but also other categories of initiates. We can see that this slippage has in fact already taken place by the time of the Kīrṇa, for that work begins its thirty-first chapter with an announcement that the next topic to be taught will be caryā, and yet, as we have just seen above, does not deal with the vratacaryā of the Sādhaka until chapter 49, which follows eighteen chapters later.

Here is the beginning of chapter 31, in which the topic called caryā is first introduced in such a way as to suggest that the primary meaning has now become something like regular enjoined "comportment."

`garuḍa uvāca—

samayisutayor deva kā vṛttis tu dine dine
evaṁ mayi samācakṣva caryā me noditā purā 31.1`

No such clear evidence can be found of this broadening of the meaning of the word caryā in another post-Niśvāsa but pre-tenth-century Saiddhāntika scripture for which we have an early Nepalese palm-leaf witness, this time apparently of the ninth-century, namely the Sarvajñānottaratantra. That work gives

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14 As for caryāvrata, which, as we have seen above, Wedemeyer considers to be synonymous with vratacaryā, I suspect that it rather means "one of the timed religious observances belonging to [the body of activities that can collectively be called] [vrata]-caryā." No doubt there is, in certain contexts, little difference between saying this and saying "the performance of timed religious observances" (vratacaryā).

15 For the absence of initiates who are not sādhakas from the religious teachings of the Niśväsa, see Goodall, Sanderson, Isaacson et al. 2015, 47 ff.

16 In case it should be supposed that the work's structure is itself evidence of a shift in meaning of the term caryā, I should mention that, although Aghoraśiva's commentary divides it
us an account of another sort of *vrata* that will be useful to us in the discussion below, in this case somewhat more detailed, but involving no transgression of brahmanical rules about purity and sexual behaviour.

ataḥ paraṃ pravakṣyāmi vratānāṃ vratam uttamam\(^{17}\)
vśuddham pāṇḍaram bhasma\(^{19}\) śuklavāsonulepanam
śuklayajñopavītī\(^{20}\) ca jaṭāmakutamanḍitaḥ\(^{21}\)
sarvābharanāsamanpannah\(^{22}\) śuklamālyavibhūṣitah\(^{23}\)
carubhūt brahmacaryasthaḥ\(^{24}\) śivāngurupūjakah\(^{25}\)
mantramūrtih\(^{26}\) śivasaiva yathā rūpam\(^{27}\) prakīrtitam
tathā vai sādhakendrānāṃ vrataṁ jñeyam tadātmakam\(^{29}\)
śuklakaupīnavāsa vā uṣṇīṣākṣakamanḍaluh\(^{30}\)
sivālaye vasen nityam\(^{31}\) bhikṣābhakṣo\(^{32}\) jītendriyayā

carubhūt brahmacaryasthāḥ\(^{24}\) M; carubhūt brahmacaryastho N; carubhūt brahmacaryasya L

\(^{17}\) vratam uttamam[ NL; uttamam vrata M

\(^{18}\) śivavrateti vikhyaṭam sadevāṣuraṇī M; śivavratam iti khyātaṃ sarvodayaḥ N; śivavratam iti khyātaṃ sarvodayaḥ L

\(^{19}\) pāṇḍaram bhasma[ M; pāṇḍaram bhasma L

\(^{20}\) śukla°[ NL; śukla° M

\(^{21}\) maṇḍitaḥ[ NL; maṇḍita M

\(^{22}\) sampannah[ NL; sampannah M

\(^{23}\) mālyavibhūṣitah[ NL; mālyavibhūṣitah M

\(^{24}\) carubhug brahmacaryasthaḥ[ N; carubhug brahmacaryasto N; carubhūt brahmacaryasya L

\(^{25}\) pūjakah[ NL; pūjita L

\(^{26}\) mūrti[ NL; mūrti M

\(^{27}\) rūpam[ NL; rūpa M

\(^{28}\) sādhakendrānāṃ[ NL; sādhakendraṇā N

\(^{29}\) vratam jñeyam tadātmakam[ NL; vratam jñeyam tathātmakam M

\(^{30}\) śuklakaupīnavāsa vā uṣṇīṣākṣakamanḍaluh[ NL; śuklakaubī(pī)navāsaṃ vā uṣṇīṣākṣata-(kaj)maṇḍalum L

\(^{31}\) vasennityam[ NL; vasannityam M

\(^{32}\) bhikṣā[ NL; bhikṣa° M

\(^{33}\) japa[ NL; śiva° M

\(^{34}\) bhaved asau[ conj.; bhavedasauditi N; bhaved iti M

\(^{35}\) Here there is a flourish marking a chapter-break in N, and in the Southern sources there is a chapter-colophon: iti śrīmatsarvajñānottare śivavratapaṭalo 'ṣṭāḍaśaḥ M; iti sarvajñānottare kriyāpāde śivavratapakraṇam L
Next, I shall teach the best observance among observances, which is known as the Śiva-vrata and which is revered by *asuras* and gods alike. (18.1)

Pure pale ash [should be used, and] white dress and unguents; he should wear a white sacred thread and be adorned by a chignon of matted locks. (18.2)

He should be equipped with all [suitable] ornaments, [and] adorned with white garlands; he should consume [only the pure ritual gruel-offering known as] *caru*; he should observe the chaste conduct of a student; he should venerate Śiva, the fire and his guru. (18.3)

He should be mantra-bodied;⁴² the appearance (*rūpam*) of excellent *sādhakas* [who follow this observance] is to be the same as that of Śiva: the observance must be understood as consisting in this. (18.4)

Alternatively, he may wear [just] a white loin-cloth, [and bear] a turban, rosary and spouted water-pot. (18.5ab)

He should dwell constantly in a temple of Śiva, eating alms, controlling his senses, devoted to recitation and meditation, maintaining silence, venerating Śiva, the fire and his guru. When a year has passed, he will become equal to Śiva. (18.5c–6)

Next, I shall teach the characteristics of a temple of Śiva, as well as [how to perform] the installation of the *liṅga*, in which the universe is [itself] ‘installed.’ (19.1)
All the gods, beginning with Brahmā, reside in the liṅga; therefore a yogin who venerates his guru, God and the fire and who has performed his vidyāvrata should install the liṅga, following the procedure taught in scripture. (19.2–3b)

We shall return below to the use of the term vidyāvrata, which I have not translated here. First we may observe that these passages of the Kiraṇa and Sarvajñānottara might appear to confirm Wedemeyer’s observation that the vratas in early Śaiva works were observances in which the sādhaka imitated God (2013, 165).

The early Śaiva Tantric paradigm for the transgressive vrata, then, was one of imitatio dei—mimicking the activity of the god in the interest of eliding the (presumably mistaken) sense of a gulf between him and the devotee. In none of these rites is there mention of transcendence of conceptuality or attainment of any epistemic nonduality—the concern seems entirely to be one of nonduality in the sense of union with the god Śiva.

Imitation of forms of god, whether pure or transgressive, seems indeed to be typical of vratas in early Śaiva sources, but it is not the invariable rule, as the Niśvāsa demonstrates. Several vratas are described in the course of the work, but there is one passage in which a set of nine is concisely described together, namely in chapter 3 of the Guhyasūtra. A brief summary of the contents of that chapter will help to contextualise that description, showing that it is part of a chapter devoted to 1) preparations for magical pursuits, and 2) magical procedures:

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43 Nemec also (2014, 273) expresses doubt about this point of Wedemeyer’s:

I am, in a word, not convinced that the many transgressive practices in the “early period” of Śaiva tantra, defined as “pre-tenth century” (165), involve a practice of imitatio dei, “of union with the god Śiva,” to the exclusion of “transcendence of conceptuality or attainment of any epistemic nonduality” (ibid.).

As to what states of consciousness such non-imitative observances might or might not be intended to achieve, the text gives us no direct information; we can only say that it does elsewhere describe practices whose purpose is said to be transcending duality, for example in yogic meditations described in Uttarasūtra 5.42–43 and Nayāsūtra 4.55 ff., and that a non-dualist cosmogony is sketched out in Uttarasūtra 1.13.
Summary of Guhyasūtra 3

Preparations for magical pursuits

3.1–2 Having set up the God of gods in a suitable place, one may employ a ritual assistant (uttarasādhaka) for attaining the highest siddhi.

3.3–6 Qualifications of the uttarasādhaka.

3.7–11 Construction of a special dwelling for the pursuit of siddhi.

3.12c–16 Alternative: a suitable cave or empty temple. One should live from vegetables or begging or from roots, and perform fasts (cāndrāyana, etc.)

3.17–22 Prognostication of success in siddhi by consulting Svapnamaṇavaka by calling him to appear in one’s sleep.

3.22–23 Prognostication by consulting Amoghamantrarāja.

3.24–27 Catoptromantic prognostication (prasīnā) using virginal children and the mantra of Caṇḍī.

3.28–29 japa using the aksamālā [in order to prepare it].

3.31–43b vrata s.

Magical procedures

3.43c–112 sādhanas for attaining various siddhis.

Having underlined the context, we may now turn to the vrata s given in this chapter, followed, by way of example, by one magical procedure. We may note that all of these observances transgress social norms to some degree, but that none unambiguously involves imitatio dei:

siddhi-m-aśvargayogyas tu na ca hiṃsanti hinsakāh 3.29
siddhavidyāvratastho hi jape ca vratam ārabhet

go mātā ca pitā bhrātā atithir mitra brāhmaṇaḥ 3.30
hato me pāpa[(cāre)]na carrera (1) Mithyāvratam vratī
<<karasthenā kapā>>lena khaṭvāṅgī bhasmaguṇṭhitaḥ 3.31
śmaśāne carate rātrau (2) Śmaśānavrata ucyate

44 °yogas tu] NW; °yoge tu K
45 jape] NW; japaṃ K
46 pāpa[(cāre)]na K; yāpa XXṇa N; yāpa Xrena W; pāpakāreṇa conj. Sanderson (2006, 209)
47 karasthenā kapālena] conj. Sanderson; ---lena NW; una K
nṛtyate gāyate caiva unmatto hasate bruvan⁴⁸ 3.32
bhasmāṅgi cīravāsaś ca (3) Gaṇavratam idaṁ smṛtam
japayuko bhaiśabhujo loṣṭušāyī jītendriyāḥ 3.33
dhyānasamyaṃyamayuktaś ca (4) Loṣṭukavratam ācāre
rikṣavyāghrasamā[ś][[[kīrṇe]]]⁴⁹ <<vane sim>> hasamākule 3.34
jitanidrāsano⁵⁰ jāpi (5) Kāṣṭhavratam idaṁ care
ṛṣas gāyate jāpi strirūpi valayabhūṣitaḥ⁵¹ 3.35
śūrppakandukavunibhiś (6) Citra-vratam idaṁ care
śastrāpitānār dayāyukta-m-aṭe trāteva⁵² ↑jatavān↑ 3.36
japadyānārccanirarato (7) Vīravratam idaṁ care
varṣāśatātapair ddehan tāpayed dhi su--- 3.37⁵³
japadyānaraṭaś caiva (8) Mahāvratas sa ucyate
ratisambhogakusālaṃ rūpayauvanaśālinīm 3.38
idṛśim triyam āsādyā niruddhendriyagocaraḥ
cumbanālinganaṃ kuryāliṅgaṃ sthāpya bhagopari 3.39
japadyānaraṇaparo bhūtvā (9) Asidhāravrataṇ care
yadi kāmavaśaṃ gacchet patate⁵⁴ naraṁ dhruvam 3.40
navātmakaṇaḥ japel lakṣaṃ ((tasya)) ---ddhyaye⁵⁵
abdaṃ śaṃmāsamātraṇāṃ yaś cared vrataṃ uttamam 3.41
tasya siddhiḥ prajāyeta adhamā madhyamottamā⁵⁶
vratasthaḥ⁵⁷ pañcalakṣāṇi punar japtvā tu siddhyate 3.42
sarve mantrās ca siddhyante īpsitaṇ ca phalaṇ bhavet

[A spell for travelling great distances:]

oṃ namo vāyupathacārinē amitagatiparākramāyā vimale kulu ²⁵⁸
thaṭha 3.43
Once the rosary has been thus prepared, he becomes ready for siddhis and power. (29cd)

Dangerous creatures do not harm one who has first accomplished an observance that qualifies one for using Spells: he should begin an observance by means of recitation (jape = japena).60 (30ab)

The one engaged in observance should practise the False Observance (mithyāvrata) [by wandering about proclaiming]: "I have committed bad deeds: I have killed a cow, mother, father, brother, a guest, friend, brahmin." (30c–31b)

If one wanders in the cremation-ground at night, with a skull in one's hand and a khatvāṅga, covered in ashes, that is called the cremation-ground observance (śmaśānavrata). (31c–32b)

If one dances, sings, laughs and talks madly, with the body smeared in ashes and wearing rags, this is called the Gaṇavrata. (32c–33b)

One performs the Clod-of-Earth Observance (loṣṭukavratam) by being engaged in recitation, feeding on alms, sleeping on the earth, with senses controlled, engaged in meditation and restraint. (33c–34b)

One may perform the Block-of-Wood Observance (kāṣṭhavratam) in a forest full of bears, tigers and lions, conquering the urges to sleep and eat, constantly reciting. (34c–35b)

If one takes on the appearance of a woman and sings and dances, adorned with bracelets, with a winnowing fan, ball and plait, one observes the Colourful Observance (citravratam). (35c–36b)

With a weapon in hand, full of compassion, if one wanders like a saviour of creatures (?)61 focussed upon recitation, meditation and worship, one performs the Warrior Observance (vīravratam). (36c–37b)

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59 varāhavaśasampiṣṭam conj. varāhava+sa+sampiṣṭa° N; varāhavamasampiṣṭam K; varāhavaśasampiṣṭa W

60 This replaces the translation, in which I no longer believe, of 30ab that we offered on p. 285 of Goodall, Sanderson, Isaacson et al. 2015.

61 This tentative translation assumes that jatavān is an error for jantavām, intended as a genitive plural with the sense of jantūnām!
If one torments the body with rain, cold and heat, ..., devoted to recitation and meditation, this is called the Great Observance (mahāvrataḥ). (37c–38b)

A woman skilled in the pleasures of love-making, endowed with beauty and youth; such a woman one should procure, holding one's senses back from the objects of the senses, and one should kiss and embrace [her], placing the penis upon her sex while remaining focussed upon recitation and meditation—one performs [thus] the Sword-Blade Observance (asidhārāvrataṃ). If one should succumb to the control of desire, then one certainly falls into hell. (38c–40)

One should recite the NAVĀTMAN one lakh times ... for [si]ddhi: one who [thus] observes such an excellent observance for a year or just six months attains lowest, middling or best siddhi. But if, while observing such a vrata, someone recites five lakh times, then [that mantra] succeeds [for him] (siddhyate), and all mantras succeed for him and he attains the fruits he desires. (41–43b)

[Using the mantra] oṃ namo vāyupathacāriṇe amitagati-parākramāya vimale kulu kulu svāhā, [and taking] arsenic, gold [and?] a mineral, ..., ground up with pig fat/marrow, over which one has recited [the NAVĀTMAN] 1000 times, he should smear [the mixture] on his feet/legs, while once again reciting the NAVĀTMAN: he will travel 200 yojanās unwearied! (43c–45)

Right at the beginning of the above-quoted passage, we find a further attestation of the term vidyāvrata, and this time, rather than prevaricating further, I have proposed translating it as “an observance [that qualifies one] for [using] Spells.” There are other passages that can and will be adduced in support of this, but I think that it should already be becoming clear from this passage of the Guhyasūtra and from the passage quoted just before from the Sarvajñānottara that the different particular vrataś that are performed serve to prepare the performer for some subsequent religious activity that involves the use of the mantra or vidyā. In the case of the Guhyasūtra, it is the pursuit of siddhi for which the sādхаka is prepared; in the case of the Sarvajñānottara, the individual is prepared for the performance of the installation (pratiṣṭhā) of a liṅga.

From the beginning of chapter 10 of the kriyāpāda, we learn that it is also an essential to the consecration of an ācārya in the Mataṅgapāramesvara:

catuṣpādārthakuśalaṃ mahotsāhaṃ hy aninditam 10.2
ṣaṭpadārthapraṇītārthaṃ sarvabhūtahite ratam
gurus tam abhiśiṣṇet tu cirṇavidyāvrataṃ naram 10.3
Rāmakaṇṭha: *atha kim tad vidyāvrataṃ yat tena cīrnam ity ucyate:*

vidyāśaktiḥ ihopāttā japtavyā prāk chivālaye
saṃniyamyendriyagrāmam abdam ekam śuciṣmatā 10.4
nityaṃ carubhujā bhūmyāṃ kuśaprarastaraśāyinā
pūjāgniḥbhavane yuktacasā bhāvitātmanā 10.5

Rāmakaṇṭha: [vidyāśaktih] vyomavyāpilakṣanā.⁶²

The guru should consecrate [as an ācārya] a man who is skilled in what is taught in all four pādaś, who has great energy, who is beyond reproach, who expounds the meaning of the teachings [encapsulated] in the six topics [of this scripture], who is devoted to the welfare of all beings, who has performed the observance for [the propitiation of his] mantra.

Rāmakaṇṭha: Now if you ask what this *vidyāvrata* is which he must have observed, this is what the text teaches:

The power of the *vidyā* that is mentioned here [in this compound *vidyāvrata*] is first to be recited for a year in a temple to Śiva, while exercising control of the senses, maintaining purity, eating daily [only the sacrificial gruel known as] *caru*, sleeping on the ground in the room reserved for *pūjā* and fire[-sacrifice] on a spread of *kuśa*-grass, with his mind engaged [in meditation], focussed.

Rāmakaṇṭha: It [viz. the power of the *vidyā*] is the vyomavyāpī.

Once this preparation, taking the form of the observance of one among a variety of possible vrataś (but ideally one suitable to the mantra to be put to use, as seems already to be implied in *Kīraṇa* 49.17ab above, and as we shall see confirmed below), is complete, the observer can be called *cīrṇavidyāvrataḥ* (as here and in *Sarvajñānottara* 19.3a) or *siddhavidyāvratasthaḥ* (as in *Guhyasūtra* 3.30a).

If we make such an assumption, then we can see how the expressions *vrataacaryā* and *vidyāvrata* might be regarded as interchangeable in some con-

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⁶² From Rāmakaṇṭha’s commentary, only the *avataraṇikā* and the commentary to 10.4–6 are quoted here (not the remarks on 10.2c–3). The *pratīka* in square brackets is supplied by the editor.
texts, even though they are not actually synonymous. It also becomes clear how it is that *vidyāvrata* can be characterised as preparatory mantra-propitiation and therefore equivalent to what may also be called *puraścaraṇa*. Sanderson characterises it in such a way when referring to the account of the Bhairavācārya in Bāna’s *Harsacarita*:

> With this account of a *pūrvasevā*, also called *puraścaryā* or *vidyāvratam*, i.e. the initial period of ascetic *japah* etc. to be undertaken after one has received a Mantra, whereby one becomes able to accomplish feats (*karmāṇī*) with that Mantra ...⁶⁴

So if *vrata* and *vratacaryā* and some other terms may seem to be used interchangeably in some works with *vidyāvrata*, it is because the principal purpose of the *vrata*s taught in the early Mantramārga seems to be to propitiate mantras prior to further religious activities involving those mantras, rendering those who complete such observances describable by such terms as *cīrṇavidyāvrata*, *siddhavidyāvratastha*, *vidyāvratasnāta* and so forth.⁶⁵ Various observances can, in other words, be observed in order to become one “who has completed the observance [required for the propitiation] of a *vidyā*.”

This discussion might seem to suggest that in finding the *original* meaning of the expression *vidyāvrata* we believe that we have found its immutable semantic core, but that is not really what I intend to say. Of course the term *vidyāvrata* may have gone on to evolve and be used in contexts that suggest that one might elsewhere also or instead render it as “knowledge observance” or “consort observance” (Wedemeyer 2013, 136) or, as we shall see below, “observance relating to a *vidyāṅgamantra*.⁶⁶ Furthermore, one might argue that we have in

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⁶³ Cf. Wedemeyer 2013, 159: “It is worth noting that the *Tantrasadbhāva*/*Kubjikāmata* and the *Siddhayogeśvarīmata* clearly take the terms *vidyāvrata* and *vratacaryā* to be synonymous.”

⁶⁴ Sanderson 2001, 13, note 11. Wedemeyer quotes from this definition (2013, 255, note 96), but in a manner that suggests that he was oddly not convinced by it, or not convinced that the same kind of *vidyāvrata* was being alluded to by Sanderson: Sanderson (“History”, 13n11) also describes a very different rite [scil. from that referred to in *Vīṇāśikhatantra* 180?] when he speaks of *vidyāvrata* as an “initial period of ascetic *japah* etc. to be undertaken after one has received a Mantra,” i.e., he takes it to be a kind of *pūrvasevā* or *puraścaryā*.

⁶⁵ Another purpose of performing *vrata*s in the early Mantramārga is of course expiation: see, for example, *Guhyasūtra* 9.10a, *Siddhayogeśvarīmata* 10.3c, both quoted below, and Ḥṛdayaśiva’s *Prāyaścittasamuccaya* passim (appendix to Sathyanarayan 2015).

⁶⁶ We do not aim, however, to examine here all later passages in which the meaning of *vidyāvrata* is arguably stretched. One such passage is a sequence of verses discussing the term that has been borrowed from the *Tantrasadbhāva* into the *Kubjikāmata*: that dis-
any case not started from its point of origin, for the term has presumably been drawn from or at least coloured by the brahmanical expression *vidyāvratasnāta* that is common from the *Gṛhyasūtras* onwards and that we find, for instance, in *Manusmṛti* 4.31:

\[
\text{vedavidyāvratasnātān śrotriyān grhamedhināḥ}
\text{pūjayed dhavyakavyena viparitāṁś ca varjayet}
\]

Olivelle (2005, 125–126) translates:

At rites for gods and ancestors, he should honor individuals who have bathed after completing the Vedas, vedic learning, or vedic vows, who are vedic scholars, or who are householders, but avoid individuals different from these.67

It seems to me very likely that the use of *vidyāvrata* in the Mantramārga—and *a fortiori* of *vidyāvratasnāta* (Siddhayogeśvarīmata 10.20 and Svāyambhuvaśtrasaṅgraha 21.35)—should have been influenced by earlier brahmanical usage such as we see in the *Gṛhyasūtras* and in the *Manusmṛti*. Nonetheless, in the

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67 Olivelle also adds a note that explains that there is doubt about the term (2005, 270):

[M]ost commentators take *vedavidyāvrata* as three separate categories. The first refer to those who have only learned the Veda by heart; the second to those who have mastered its meaning; and the third to those who have completed the vows associated with vedic study, such as living with the teacher for a certain number of years, even if they have not mastered the Veda.

This interpretation is not wholly consistent with what we find earlier in *Gṛhyasūtra* literature. In *Jaiminigrhyasūtra* 1.19 (p. 18), for instance, we read:

\[
\text{trayaḥ snātakā bhavantīī ha smāhārūnir gautamo vidyāsnātako vratasnātako vidyāvratasnātaka iti teṣām uttamaḥ śreṣṭhas tulyau pūrvau.}
\]

Caland (1922, 32) translates:

According to Āruṇi Gautama there are three kinds of Snātakas: the Snātaka by knowledge, the Snātaka by the completion of his observances, and the Snātaka by knowledge and by the completion of his observances. Of these the last ranks foremost, the first two are equal (to each-other).

Cf. *Pāraskaragṛhyasūtra* (kāṇḍa 2, kāṇḍikā 5, sentences 32–35, p. 220):

\[
\text{trayaḥ snātakā bhavantīī vidyāsnātako vrataṃ vratasnātako vidyāvratasnātaka iti 32 samāpya}
\text{vedam asamāpya vrataṃ yaḥ samāvartate, sa vidyāsnātakah 33 samāpya vrataṃ as}
\text{amāpya vedam yaḥ samāvartate, sa vratasnātakah 34 ubhayaṃ samāpya yaḥ samāvar-
\text{tate, sa vidyāvratasnātaka iti 35}
\]
Niśvāsa certainly, and probably throughout the early Mantramārga, the use of vidyāvrata to mean “observance for [the propitiation of] a mantra” seems to be the norm. As Sanderson has observed in the note of his that we have just quoted, vidyāvrata seems indeed to be used in the same way as pūrvasēvā in the Niśvāsa. Many short paragraphs of prose in the grimoires (kalpa) that we find in the Guhyasūtra sketch out the essential features of particular observances, and these paragraphs are very often concluded with a succinct statement of the magical powers that can be won by following them (the power to fly, for example, or to disappear); but sometimes we find instead the assertion that the observance fulfils the requirements of pūrvasēvā (10.27, 10.99, 14.26) or puraścaraṇa (14.24) or, as here in Guhyasūtra 10.91, the requirements of the vidyāvrata:

devaṃ pūjyāgnau juhuyād audumbarasamidhānāṃ tryaktānāṃ sahas-ram tṛsandhyaṃ. kṣūrāśi saptā dināni juhuyāt. cīrṇṇavidyāvrato bhavati.

Having worshipped the Lord, he should oblate into the fire at the three junctures of the day a thousand pieces of Udumbara-wood smeared with the three [sweet substances]. Consuming [only] milk, he should make oblations [in this manner] for seven days. He will become one who has accomplished the vidyāvrata.

Before I wrap up the discussion, it should be mentioned that a different hypothesis as to the meaning of vidyāvrata was advanced some years ago, when many of the above-cited passages had not yet come to light, by Judit Törzsök when translating chapter 10 of the Siddhayogēśvarīmata. We quote here the beginning of the chapter (without the apparatus) from Törzsök's 1999 edition:

devy uvāca
mayā deva purā prṣṭaṃ vratayāgavivarjitaṃ
siddhayogēśvarīṇaṃ tu mataṃ mantraprasādhakaṃ 1
kiṃ tu deva pratiṣṭaṃ siddhir vidyāṅgaṃsamśhitā
tasmāt teṣu samāsena vratacaryaṃ braviḥ me  2
bhairava uvāca
ādau tu sarvasiddhyartham sarvavighnināśanam
sarvapāpāpanodārthaṃ vidyāvratam samārabheta
śādhaveṣūṣādhaveṣu vātha mantratadgatacetasāḥ
yāgaṃ kṛtvā vidhānena vratacaryaṃ samācaret
bhasmalepitasarvāṅgo mauni śuklāmbaraḥ sudhīḥ
sitayajñopavitāś ca akāmo niyame sthitaḥ  5

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Here is Törzsök’s translation (1999*, 143):

The Goddess spoke
I have previously asked you about the Doctrine of the Yoginis (Siddhayogeshvarimata), O God, which helps to make mantras effective (mantraprasadham) without any observances or worship. (1)

However, you have asserted, O God, that success depends on the ancillary mantras; therefore, tell me briefly about how to practise the observances associated with them (tesu). (2)

Bhairava spoke
First [before any other practice to attain a specific supernatural power], for all kinds of supernatural powers, [and] for expiatory purposes, one has to start the observance of the [ancillary] mantras, which destroys all obstacles. (3)

The male or female practitioner, with his/her mind focused on the mantra, should perform worship according to prescriptions and then undertake the vow (vratacaryam). (4)

[In the first of these] all his limbs covered with ashes, the practitioner is to observe silence and should wear a white garment; he should be of good understanding. He must have a white sacred thread, he should be free from desire and established in self-restraint. (5)

Now the reason that Törzsök translates vidyavrata with “the observance of the [ancillary] mantras” is that each of the vrata in the chapter is specific to the cultivation of a particular auxiliary mantra—the first one, given above in verse 5, must, by elimination, be an observance for the Hṛdaya-mantra—and those auxiliary mantras belong to a set known in this work and in others as the vidyāṅgamamantras. 68 It was therefore reasonable for her to assume that vidyavrata was short for vidyāṅgavrata, for she had no evidence to suggest otherwise, and she had parallel evidence that seemed to reinforce this hypothesis, namely the testimony of Svāyambhuvasūtrasaṅgraha 21 (from which Törzsök quotes, citing Alexis Sanderson’s collation, in her notes on p. 78).

That passage again gives a series of vrata, which are, by the way, again not instances of imitatio dei, and which are again specific to the vidyāṅgamamantras; so it is wholly understandable that this seemed to Törzsök in 1999 to confirm

68 For these mantras and their individual names, see Brunner 1986 and, more recently, Goodall 2004, 222–223.
the notion that the element *vidyā* in the collocation *vidyāvrata* must refer to the *vidyāṅgamantras*. I think, however, that it will now be clear that chapter 21 of the *Svāyambhuvasūtrasaṅgraha* might in fact be interpreted equally well internally if we assume that *vidyāvrata* is used instead to mean “observance for [propitiation of] a mantra” and that, given the other attestations of the term that we now know about in, for instance, the *Guhyasūtra*, the *Mataṅga*, and the *Sarvajñānottara*, it actually makes better sense to assume this broader interpretation in this passage too.

There is somewhat better evidence for pinpointing the place of the *Svāyambhuvasūtrasaṅgraha* in a relative chronology of Saiddhāntika writings than there is for most other pre-tenth-century Siddhāntatantras, for terms of both doctrinal and social developments, it seems later than the *sūtras* of the *Niśvāsatattvasaṃhitā* (see Goodall, Sanderson, Isaacson et al. 2015, 41–44, 47–50, 58), and yet it cannot be later than Sadyojyotī, who has written a commentary upon it and who, Sanderson argues (2006b, in particular p. 76), lived between c. 675 and 725 AD. The edition is not widely accessible, which may be why Wedemeyer did not refer to this passage, and its text almost invariably needs to be corrected against manuscripts, but this particular chapter has just been published anew, in the form in which it appears when quoted by Hṛdayāśiva in his *Prāyaścittasamuccaya* (see Sathyanarayanan 2015, Appendix chapter 10).69

69 In the collation below, H is the reading of Sathyanarayanan’s transcription of the twelfth-century manuscript transmitting Hṛdayāśiva’s work (where this chapter is the tenth); Ed. is of course the Mysore edition of 1937 (where the chapter is the twenty-first), and N marks the readings of the old Nepalese palm-leaf manuscript filmed by the NGMPP on Reel A 30/6.
Having recited [a particular mantra] along with [the practice of one of the] observances in accordance with the rules, and having bathed [at the end of the observance], one may recite that mantra for attaining supernatural powers. (27cd)

The skilled practitioner should do his recitation not too slowly, not indistinctly, not without taking [the meaning of what he recites] in, not too fast, not without counting, and not with his thoughts in confusion. (28)

Dressed in white, with a white turban and a white sacred thread and white unguents and garland, he should perform the observance for the VIDYĀDHIPA-mantra. (29)

Dressed in red garments and red garlands and unguents the Mantrin should first perform for one month the stated observance for the BRAHMAŚIRAḤ. (30)

Wearing yellow garments and yellow garlands and unguents and a yellow sacred thread he should perform the excellent observance of Rudraṇi for a month. (31)

The competent ritualist (budhah), constantly devoted to the worship of Śiva, should perform the observance for PURUŚṬUTA for one month with all accoutrements being black. (32)

The mantrin, intent on attaining all manner of special powers, should perform the observance for the PĀŚUPATĀSTRA resolutely (dhīraḥ) dressed in multi-coloured garments and with multicoloured garlands and unguents. (33)
And upon the completion of one or another of these observances (vratavratasamāptau),\textsuperscript{70} he should pour upon himself Śiva-water that has been consecrated by recitation of his mantra over it from a pot. (34)

Being thus bathed after the observance [in propitiation] of [his] mantra, invested in the right to [pursue] all [manner of special powers], faultless, he should then recite [his chosen] mantra according to the rules of his hand-book,\textsuperscript{71} without being afraid. (35)

In the above lines, 27d and 35 seem to make particularly plain that these vrata are performed by way of pūrvasevā, also known as vidyāvrata, as a preliminary to the pursuit of siddhi.

Csaba Kiss, following Judit Törzsök’s lead, has also alluded to the link between vidyāṅgamantras and the name vidyāvrata, but I think it will be clear from what he says below that the evidence that his new edition of parts of the Brahmayāmala has recently brought to the discussion again supports rather the broader interpretation, in which the element vidyā alludes to any mantra, not just a vidyāṅgamantra. Below are his remarks (2015, 211) on Brahmayāmala 21.4–5b, which he constitutes and translates as follows:

\begin{quote}
 ete nava vratā proktā vidyābhade vyavasthitā
esteṣāṃ tu yathānyāyaṃ yathā caryā bhabe tv iha
kathayāmi mahādevi tan me nīgadatoṣa śṛṇu
\end{quote}

These are the nine ascetic observances (vrata), corresponding to [the syllables of] the Vidyā[, Caṇḍā Kāpālinī’s nine-syllable mantra]. I shall now teach you how to perform them correctly, O Mahādevī. Listen to me [while I] teach you.

... these observances are in fact called the vidyāvratas in 21.10c, 42d, 47a, 51b, 53b, 75d and 102d; the nine types of observances obviously correspond to the nine syllables of the Navākṣaravidyā (ōṃ caṇḍe kāpālini svāhā), taught in BraYā 2; vidyāvratas may also serve, as seen in many tantric texts, as preliminary propitiation, by the use of vidyāṅgamantras, of a mantra to be applied later, or simply for the purpose of gaining

\textsuperscript{70} The text and interpretation are not certain here. A possible conjectural emendations that suggests itself is vratī vrata samāptau.

\textsuperscript{71} For this sense, see Tāntrikābhidhānakośa, vol. 2, s.v. kalpa.
mastery over the Vidyā, similarly to the way it is taught in the Yoganīśaṃcāra; as Sanderson (2009:134 n. 311) remarks: ...

More closely parallel to these nine observances, as we can now see, are the nine taught in chapter 3 of the Guhyasūtra, which are probably each for one of the nine elements of the navātman. So perhaps the association with vidyāṅgamantras is simply a red herring.

Kiss’s reference there to Sanderson 2009, 134, note 311 proves to be another passage in which Sanderson reveals that, although he did not spell out every detail of his assumptions and the evidence upon which he based them, he had in fact already assumed the interpretation for which we have been somewhat long-windedly arguing here, both of vidyāvrata and of its relation to individual named vrata:

The Yoganīśaṃcāra requires anyone who has gone through its initiation ceremony and then received consecration (abhiṣekah) to adopt one of three forms of ascetic observance in order to gain mastery over the Vidyā (vidyāvratam): the Bhairavavrata, the Cāmuṇḍāvrata, or the Triṣaṣṭikulavrata, the observance of the sixty-three families [of the Mothers], which it also calls the Kāpālavrata, i.e. the Kāpālika.

So let me reiterate my conclusion: we should probably assume that, even if the expression vidyāvrata was originally drawn from the common brahmanical expression vidyāvratasnāta that we saw in Manusmṛti 4.31, and even if it may have been subsequently coloured in some contexts by other associations of the word vidyā (vidyāṅgamantra, “knowledge,” “consort”), the expression vidyāvrata appears throughout the early Mantramārga to be used with the understanding that it refers primarily to an “observance for [the preliminary propitiation of a] mantra.” While some works (such as the Śaiddhāntika Kīrṇatantra, and the Sarvajñānottaratantra) appear to mention only one way of fulfilling the requirements of the vidyāvrata, many others (Niśvāsa, Yoganīśaṃcāra, Brahmayāmala, Svāyambhuvasūtrasaṅgraha, Siddhayoyesvarimata, Tantrasadbhāva, Kubjikāmata) teach several vrata, not all of which are equally transgressive and not all of which involve imitatio dei, as alternative ways of realising the vidyāvrata.

Finally, let me show how this assumption seems to me to throw light even on passages where none of the terms that we have been discussing actually occur. The first few times I read the beginning of chapter 9 of the Guhyasūtra, it seemed to begin with a curious non sequitur: the goddess asks a question about how the alphabet, treated as mantra, can be used to bring about supernatural
power and liberation; Śiva’s reply, however, first explains at some length how someone should dress half his body as the goddess and the other half as Śiva. How could this, I asked myself, be an answer to the goddess’ question? Was the apparent incoherence of the text here an indication that it had become corrupt?

devy uvāca—
mātrkāyā bhavet siddhir mmokṣaṇ caiva maheśvara
mātrkāsiddhim ākhyāhi mokṣaṇ caiva yathā bhavet

tatsamutthās ca ye mantrāḥ kimarthān kathitās tvāyā
etat praśnavaram brūhi ((bha))---phalaṁ hi me

īśvara u—

ardhastrīveśadhārī tu arddhena puruṣas tathā
arddhena alakaṁ kuryād arddhenaiva jaṭādharaḥ

tilakārddhena netrārddhē vaṅkāhā hy ekakarṇake

kuṇḍalām hy ekakarṇaṁ tu śūlan daksīṇahastataḥ

vāmāpārśve stanaṁ kuryād vāmārdhe caiva mekhalāṁ

valayaṁ vāmahaste tu vāmapāde tu nūpuraṁ

rucaṁ daksīne pāde muñjaṁālāṁ tathā kaṭau

daipīnaṁ daksīne kuryād vāme strīvastradhārītā
dhūrpaṁ vāmākare grhṇed ardhanārīśvaravrata

etad vrataṁ grhitvā tu bhiksāśī tu jītendriyaḥ

japhomarato nityam pratigrahaṁvarjitaṁ

trīkālam arccayed devasṁ trīkālamāḥ snānam ācaraṁ

sākayāvakahikṣāśī skandamūlaphalāśinaṁ

māsam e[[ka]]---samānviṭaḥ

mucyate ‘sau’ mahāpāpāṁ kuṣṭrasiddhiṁ ca vindate

dvīmāsān madhyamā siddhir abdārddhād uttāma bhavet

saṁvatsareṇa siddhis tu vidyāsiddhim avāpnuyāt

aṇiṁādyās tu jāyante siddhais ca saha modate

ipsitām labhate kāmān akāmo mokṣam āpnuyāt
The Goddess spoke:
From the मात्रकाः supernatural power and liberation can come about,
O Lord. Tell me [how to attain] supernatural power and liberation
through the मात्रकाः. (1)
Why did you teach the mantras that arise from it? Tell me [the answer
to] this excellent question. ... fruit to me. (2)
The Lord spoke:
Wearing half the dress of a woman and half [that of] a man, on one half,
he should place [feminine] tresses, on one half, he should wear mat-
ted locks. (3)
On one half, there should be a forehead mark; on one half a [forehead]
eye. A ring (वालिका) [should be] in one ear; a [pendant] ear-ornament
(कुंडळालम्) in one ear. He should put a trident (सूलम्) in his right
hand and a breast on his left side, a girdle (मेक्खलाम्) on the left
half, a bangle on the left arm, a woman's anklet on the left leg, a man's
anklet on the right leg and a मुन्या-grass belt. At the hips, he should
put a loin-cloth on the right and wear a woman's garment on the left.
(4–6)
In the left hand, he should hold a winnowing fan in the observance of
Ardhanārīśvara. Adopting this observance he should eat alms, keep
his senses under control, be devoted to regular obligatory recitation
and oblation, rejecting the receipt of gifts. (7–8b)
He should venerate God three times [a day] and perform ablutions
three times [a day]. Eating vegetables and barley-gruel, eating bulbs
(कंडालू [roots and fruits], for one month ... (9)
He will be released from [the retributive force of] major transgressions;
and he will attain low siddhis after two months, middling siddhis after
half a year and high siddhis after a year; he will attain power over the
spell (विद्यासिद्धिः). (10–11b)
The ability to make himself atomic, along with the others [of the yogic
powers], will arise. He will take pleasure in the company of siddhas.
He will attain the wishes he desires; if he is without desires, he will
attain liberation. (11c–12b)

Although the words vrata, caryā and vidyāvrata are none of them to be found, it
is now clear to me that this passage makes implicit allusion to the structure now
familiar to us from numerous other passages: the sādhaka propitiates a given
mantra, here the मात्रकाः, by performing a timed religious observance involv-
ing unusual dress and diet, the rules of which are ideally held to be in some way
appropriate to the mantra in question, and then becomes eligible for the pur-
suit of particular *siddhis*. In the case of the *Mātrkā*, adopting the appearance of Ardhanārīśvara is particularly appropriate because the *Mātrkā* is made up of feminine vowels and masculine consonants, which, as is explained elsewhere in the *Nīśvāsa*-corpus, are to be applied respectively to the left and right halves of the *sādhaka*’s body before worship in a preliminary rite that prefigures what came to be called *sakalīkaraṇa*.\(^{78}\) The *imitatio dei* that is such a prominent feature of some observances, such as this one, now seems as if it should be more precisely characterised as identification with the mantra-deity being propitiated.

### Conclusion

So what can be learned from the foregoing pages? In the beginning of this paper, I tried to emphasise the layered structure not only of the *Nīśvāsatattvasaṃhitā*, but also of the *Guhyasūtra* itself. This incidentally means that we should not only be, as always, cautious in proposals for dating both this and related literature, but that we should perhaps also allow for a broad *fourchette* for the composition of this work, broad enough to cover the periods of composition of other related works.\(^{79}\) We should also bear in mind, while attempting to model the relative chronology of early Tantric literature, that it is the very latest layers of the *Guhyasūtra* that provide the closest parallels with the grimoires of the Buddhist *kriyātantras*, in particular with the final chapter, 55, of the *Mañjuśriyamūlakalpa* (see Goodall and Isaacson 2016, *passim*).

We have also learned, I believe, about a further early stage in the history that precedes the familiar idea that Śaiva scriptures were divided into four sections treating knowledge, ritual, yoga and day-to-day behaviour (*jñāna*, *kriyā*, *yoga*, *caryā*). In the period of the redaction of the *Nīśvāsa*, initiates were, *de facto*, all *sādhakas* seeking to harness the power of mantras and their *caryā* was not a matter of approved day-to-day behaviour, or “comportment,” but rather of *vrata-caryā*, the performance of timed religious observances. Such timed religious observances could be used, as in many other religious traditions, for expiation, but their primary use in the early Mantramārga was for

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78 See *Uttarasūtra* 2.8 and annotation on pp. 351–352 of Goodall, Sanderson, Isaacson et al. 2015.

79 For the possibility that, for instance, the *Rauravasūtrasaṅgraha* might have influenced the cosmographical chapters of the *Guhyasūtra*, see Goodall 2016, 89ff. For the most recent discussion of the dating of the layered corpus that is the *Nīśvāsatattvasaṃhitā*, see Goodall, Sanderson, Isaacson et al. 2015, 30–73.
mantra-propitiation prior to other activities involving the mantras. Such preliminary mantra-propitiation could also be referred to by such expressions as *vidyāvrata*, *puraścaryā* and *pūrvasvēva*. These notions about mantra-use and mantra-propitiation may be found reflected in a wide range of post-Nīśvāsa pre-tenth-century writings. But once the intake of the religion had broadened to include many who were not occupied with spell-mastery at all, the term *caryā* in the tetrad of tantric topics also regained its (usually non-technical) sense of day-to-day “comportment.” This shift in usage had taken place by the time of the composition of the *Kiraṇa*, in other words by the beginning of the ninth century at the latest.80 Finally, the early Śaiva evidence furnished here suggests that this nexus of notions and labels is not such a fertile field as might have been supposed for those searching for evidence of instances of Buddhist influence upon the early Śaiva Mantramārga.

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80 For the observation that the *Kiraṇa* belongs to a group of scriptures whose teachings can be found paraphrased in the *Haravījaya*, which was composed in Kashmir around 830 AD, see Sanderson 2001, 5–6.
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