

TENTATIVE SKETCH OF A POSSIBLE RELATIVE CHRONOLOGY OF SOME EARLY
TANTRIC WORKS AND AUTHORS, PRINCIPALLY OF THE ŚAIVASIDDHĀNTA

In the traditional “map” of the canon of Saiddhāntika literature, there are 28 primary scriptures (*mūlabheda*). These have subsequently been reworked by various sages and divine figures into numerous further redactions or recensions (*upabheda*) that are, according to some, of lesser authority. Some of the scriptures have in turn eventually received commentaries.

But if we follow the many clues that appear to point to terminological and thematic shifts, and if we take into account at the same time the periods and areas in which we can be certain, from surviving manuscripts or from the evidence of substantial labelled quotations in the works of dated exegetical literature, that the texts were circulated, then a very different map can be charted.

In this paper, a tentative sketch of a relative chronology of the surviving works of Saiddhāntika literature will be proposed. Study of the *Niśvāsātattvasaṃhitā*, in particular, has suggested some new criteria for judging the relative antiquity of pre-tenth-century Śaiva scriptures. An edition of this work is being prepared as part of Franco-German “Early Tantra” project co-financed by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft and the Agence Nationale pour la Recherche. Among the features of the *Niśvāsātattvasaṃhitā* that suggest its early date are close similarities of detail in its magic rites with the rites described in the Buddhist *Mañjuśrīyamūlakalpa*, another work upon which we are focussing in our “Early Tantra” project.

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