

Seeing the Forest for the Trees: Defining the Āraṇyakas

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Abstract: This article presents a new approach to defining the Āraṇyakas as a textual collection based on representations of textual engagement rather than through linguistic analysis. Noting that the Āraṇyakas' diversity has diverted attention from the question of whether they can be regarded as a coherent collection, this essay firstly returns to fundamental questions of where and why challenges have arisen in the modern interpretation of the Āraṇyakas and of what can be retrieved of the Āraṇyakas' self-representation. By comparing modern approaches to those taken by the Gr̥hyasūtras, secondly, it examines the way these representatives of another late-Vedic textual tradition negotiated the Āraṇyakas' diversity through consistencies in practice, leading to a critical differentiation between typical Vedic study and the study of esoterica (rahasya). Thirdly, it turns to a close examination of the Āraṇyakas' own representations of the restrictions placed on their recitation. This point to the intellectual coherence that textuality and the ritual construction of identity bring to the restrictions that most broadly define the Āraṇyakas as a collection, and indicates that the anticipation and handling of texts, as recognised in their self-representations and teachings, can contribute significantly to the Āraṇyakas' scholarly interpretation.

The Āraṇyakas are a group of at least four but potentially many more texts and textual collections that are traditionally identified as a third and secret stage in the transmission of the Veda. While the historical substance of this identification has been questioned on linguistic grounds, for the Āraṇyakas contain materials that both pre- and post-date the Middle Vedic period of Brāhmaṇa prose composition, a significant proportion of their contents have been located at the watershed

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between the ritual and exegetical focus of the Brāhmaṇas and the knowledge-oriented metaphysical concerns of the Upaniṣads. The Āraṇyakas are thus of critical importance to an understanding of how Brahmanical culture developed over the course of the Vedic period and particularly of how the emergence of new concerns or the evolution of old ones are at play in the background of later social and intellectual changes. Yet, the ease with which the Āraṇyakas are historically positioned on a trajectory between the Brāhmaṇas and Upaniṣads belies the complex challenge they have posed to scholarly interpretation. Despite the fact it is approaching two centuries since the Āraṇyakas were taken up by modern scholars, the preponderance of their contents has outweighed traditional explanations of these ‘wilderness’ (*āraṇyaka*) texts and rendered them one of the least familiar collections within the Vedic corpus. More specifically, the Āraṇyakas’ linguistic and compositional diversity gives an impression of miscellaneity that has obscured the search for core characteristics that would unite them under a single but comprehensive definition.

This diversity has typically led scholars to either describe the Āraṇyakas as a mixed genre with a wildly variable attitude to ritual (Gonda 1975, p. 424)—an approach that lacks explanatory detail and bypasses the secrecy traditionally ascribed to these texts—or to adopt a more exclusive approach that defines them on the basis of the small set of restricted rituals they have in common and explains the rest as a result of their having ‘generally served as a catch-all for the later texts of the particular [Vedic] school involved’ (Jamison and Witzel 1992, p. 5). But to whatever extent the characterization of the Āraṇyakas as ‘akin to a lopsided Brāhmaṇa with a mystic bent’ (Jamison 1991, p. 9) is borne out by the traditional identification of numerous text-types even within a single text—*brāhmaṇas*, *upaniṣads*, *mantras*, and *sūtras*, to name a few cited by the commentator Bhaṭṭa Bhāskara—the more important point is that this perception has diverted focus from the matter of whether and how the Āraṇyakas could be regarded as a coherent collection. This essay aims to address this gap by returning to fundamental questions of where and why challenges have arisen in the modern interpretation of the Āraṇyakas and of how these differ from the Āraṇyakas’ characterization by the late-Vedic Gṛhyasūtras. Given the complexity of their subject, my undertaking is necessarily preliminary but strongly indicates the need for further examination of the Āraṇyakas’ position within Vedic culture as based on their self-representations.

In the present study, I contend that the modern attendance to the Āraṇyakas’ linguistic and literary characteristics differs radically from the primary concern with textual engagement that appears in the Āraṇyakas themselves and is echoed both by their commentators and by representatives of other Brahmanical textual traditions. Here, textual engagement brings focus to the ritual circumstances that surround the Āraṇyakas’ learning and recitation and imbue the Āraṇyakas’ contents with meaning, defining them as restricted or secret. The behaviours and expectations to which I refer appear in other Vedic texts as well, but here these particular conditions motivated traditional commentators to distinguish the Āraṇyakas as *āraṇyakas*—that is, as ‘wilderness’ texts distinct from comparable and related types of Vedic textual

engagement such as the learning of the *Samhitā* (*anuvācana*) or its ongoing self-study (*svādhyāya*). These conditions of textual engagement arguably require our attention to shift from text to textuality. In this study, textuality refers to the way a text's existence is apprehended and given meaning and how its impacts are anticipated and personalized by human actors involved in the endeavours of composition, memorization, recitation, and so on. Because the evidence for textuality is often strongly situated in texts themselves—for example, in their statements of the conditions that surround their learning and in their depictions of the changes their teachings catalyse in their reciters—textuality is well-suited to philological examination. Although this attention to the human subject as a site of the *Āraṇyakas*' significance shades over into the much-disputed question of whether the experience of religious practitioners is available to study and theorization, I am inclined to agree with Sheldon Pollock's (2006, p. 7) observation that to contrast 'representation with "history"' is to ignore something crucial about the historicity of representation itself.¹ Textuality's representation therefore increases the depth and variety of ways that texts can be examined and definitions developed, for it allows us to pursue questions about the conceptualization of a text in relation to its speakers without dismissing the historical factuality of the representation or misrepresenting it as direct access to the speakers' experience. To the extent that textuality is sensitive to the specific conditions of learning and recitation that the *Āraṇyakas* and later traditions attempted to restrict, it is arguable that a focus on textuality can bring us closer to an understanding of the *Āraṇyakas* than a focus on text alone. More specifically, I contend that an examination of the *Āraṇyakas*' textuality should allow us to start retrieving qualities that may have relegated these texts to the wilderness and brought coherence to their diversity.

Before proceeding with this examination, however, some clarification is in order. By way of setting the ground for a deeper consideration of textuality and its potential contribution to the study of the *Āraṇyakas*, I commence with an overview of the approaches that scholars have taken to identifying texts as *Āraṇyakas*. These approaches highlight major characteristics that have been relied upon in the formation of working definitions of the *Āraṇyakas*; more importantly still, they highlight the challenge of accounting for the *Āraṇyakas*' diversity and illustrate the repercussions of this challenge in developing a sense of the *Āraṇyakas* as a distinct collection. This brings us to an examination of how representatives of other textual traditions that were more closely related to the *Āraṇyakas* in time, and possibly also in cultural context, negotiated the same diversity. Here, the late-Vedic *Gr̥hyasūtras* provide a counterexample that illustrates the central role of textual engagement in the way these texts were conceptualized and distinguished from other Vedic textual collections. Following the *Gr̥hyasūtras*' lead, I then argue for a working model of how the representations of textuality contained in the *Āraṇyakas* themselves are critical to their redefinition and the question of whether a coherent connection can be traced between their teachings and the restrictions placed upon them.

1. Enumerating the Āraṇyakas

Both separable and inseparable from the issue of how scholars have negotiated the Āraṇyakas' diversity is the issue of how scholars have interrogated the Āraṇyakas' self-representations and, less frequently, their handling by later textual traditions. These considerations offer critical insights into the historical conceptualization of the Āraṇyakas, but also reinforce the complexities of definition, leaving open the question of whether accounts of the Āraṇyakas should be guided by traditional perspectives or by historical linguistic chronologies. In its most simple application, this question responds to the fact that the Āraṇyakas' contents are chronologically diverse. One outcome is that not all texts containing closely related materials are considered to be Āraṇyakas by modern scholars, regardless of traditional perspectives. Moreover, while there is overarching consensus that the traditional designation *āraṇyaka* refers to the prohibition that the Āraṇyakas should only be learned in the wilderness (*araṇya*) and that this must reflect the texts' focus on the ritual considered most secretive or dangerous by the Vedic branch or *śākhā* to which a given text belongs (Jamison and Witzel 1992, p. 12), not all parts of Āraṇyakas are lucidly concerned with the core ritual and nor were all parts apparently considered to fall under the prohibition.²

Differing perspectives on textual boundaries and textual purpose have also led to significantly different enumerations of texts belonging to the collection of Āraṇyakas. The following table illustrates four, often overlapping patterns that can be identified behind an individual text's inclusion in the collection. These enumerations respond to characteristics that may be shared by a given number of texts, but they offer diverging perspectives on the Āraṇyakas as a collection and rarely attempt the question of how the Āraṇyakas' more diverse contents might relate, be it within a single text or across the corpus as a whole. First are the four Āraṇyakas by name—the Ṛgvedic *Aitareya* and *Śāṅkhāyana* Āraṇyakas, and the Kṛṣṇa Yajurvedic *Taittirīya* and *Kaṭha* Āraṇyakas. These texts establish the focus on either the Mahāvratā or Pravargya rituals with their associations of danger as the leading criterion in defining the collection.³ Following this, there is a less consistent expansion of the collection to include a handful of texts that either include derivations of the term *araṇya* in their title (e.g., the Sāmavedic *Āraṇyagāṇa* and *Āraṇyaka Samhitā*) or which provide the Śukla Yajurvedic counterpart to the focus on the Pravargya ritual found in the *Kaṭha* and *Taittirīya* (e.g., *Vājasaneyī Samhitā* 37-39, *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 14.1-3). Third are texts whose teachings appear to be intended for students (*brahmacārin*) preparing to complete their period of Brahmanical studentship, such as *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 1-2, *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* 1,⁴ and the latter sections of *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* (Jamison and Witzel 1992, p. 12). This establishes a characteristic shared with the main group of four Āraṇyakas, which include rites relevant to the married life of householders among their contents. Fourth and finally are texts that share neither the Brāhmaṇas' nor the Upaniṣads' respective attitudes to ritual and religious aims but sit somewhere in between and may have served a similar

		Müller 1859	Mitra 1872	Weber 1875	Macdonell 1900	Gonda 1975	Witzel 1977	Mylius 1983	Jamison & Witzel 1992	Lopez 2022
ṚGVEDA	<i>Āitareya Āraṇyaka</i>	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
	<i>Śāṅkhayana / Kauṣītaki Āraṇyaka</i>	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
KṚSNA YAJURVEDA	<i>Kaṭha Āraṇyaka</i>	-	-	X	X	X	X	-	X	X
	<i>Taittirīya Āraṇyaka</i>	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
	<i>Taittirīya Upaniṣad 1</i> ("Śikṣāvalī") = <i>Kaṭha Śikṣā Upaniṣad 11</i>					X	X		[X]	
ŚUKLA YAJURVEDA	<i>Vājasaṃeyi Saṃhitā 37-39</i> on <i>Pravargya</i>			X						
	<i>Āraṇyakakāṇḍa</i> ("Pravargya Brāhmaṇa") SB[M] 14.1-3			X	X			X	[X]	
	<i>Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad</i> SB[M] 14.4-9 = BĀU 1-6	X	X			X	X			
	BĀU ~6								[X]	
SĀMAVEDA	<i>Āraṇyagāṇa</i>					X				
	<i>Āraṇyaka Saṃhitā</i>		X			X				
	<i>Jaiminīya Upaniṣad Brāhmaṇa</i>				X	X	X	X	[X]	X
	<i>Chāndogya Brāhmaṇa 1-2</i> ("Mantrapāṭha")						X			

¹ KĀ entries marked with a dash (-) indicate the inclusion of the KĀ within the TĀ rather than its separate identification; entries contained within square brackets are discussed by the authors as plausible additions to the genre but not explicitly included as such.

Figure 1. Enumerations of the Āraṇyakas¹

function to the named Āraṇyakas. This expands the collection to include *Jaiminīya Upaniṣad Brāhmaṇa* (JUB) on grounds of both content and dating. Taken together, these enumerations variously increase the collection from four core texts up to a potential collection of thirteen Āraṇyakas or functional equivalents thereof (Fig. 1).

Following these enumerations, it appears that the emphasis placed on the rituals deemed to provide the original nucleus of the named collection—namely, the Pravargya and Mahāvratā—has encouraged a tendency to examine the Āraṇyakas in part rather than in full. This appears as a lack of attention even to teachings with a certain relationship to the focus on ritual esotericism, such as the Āruṇaketuka discussed in TĀ 1 (Malamoud 2004), or which reappear across texts with different śākhā affiliations, such as the Mahānāmni verses. The distinct details of the Āraṇyakas’ many other contents are either subsumed by the breadth of the definition (‘miscellaneous’) or excluded from its scope, and the question of whether this diversity is evidence of something other than an accumulation of extrinsic materials remains largely uninvestigated.

Rather than attempting to resolve these enumerations as yet another challenge in defining the Āraṇyakas, I contend that a far more interesting and productive approach comes from the two characteristics that modern and traditional scholars appear to agree upon—namely, the esoteric nature of the Āraṇyakas’ teachings and the restrictions on their recitation. The compelling nature of these characteristics only comes to light through examination of the Āraṇyakas’ textuality and its historical prioritization by other intellectual communities, for despite the tacit agreement

that recitation in the wilderness and esotericism are cornerstones of the Āraṇyakas' definition, the relationship between them remains fundamentally unexplored. Furthermore, these characteristics point to consistency in the Āraṇyakas' diversity and open the possibility of a deeper coherence between esotericism and restriction. The following case-study suggests an alternative approach to the Āraṇyakas that emphasizes the differences between the questions modern scholars have asked and the concerns embedded in the Gṛhyasūtras' reception of these texts.

2. The Āraṇyakas in the Gṛhyasūtras

In contrast to the enumerations outlined above, the Gṛhyasūtras contain evidence of a conceptualization of the Āraṇyakas that rests upon a regular concern with their restriction and content, and which hints at their textuality without representing it directly. Unlike the Āraṇyakas' commentaries, which provide the most frequently cited definitions of the term *āraṇyaka* yet sit at a considerable historical distance from them, the Gṛhyasūtras are late-Vedic manuals of domestic rite that describe rituals and concerns pertaining to the everyday life of Brahmin householders. The Gṛhyasūtras (literally, 'belonging to the household') thus provide rich illustration of how Vedic teachings and texts were seen as relevant to events and practices anticipated to punctuate one's life, including the periods of Vedic education (*brahmacarya*) during which the Veda would be transmitted from teacher to student through recitation and which contributed formatively to the Vedic graduate's social and spiritual status. To the extent that the Gṛhyasūtras have been aptly described in Timothy Lubin's (1994) examination of the special regimens (*vrata*) relating to Vedic study and in Laurie Patton's (2012) analysis of self-consciousness and ritual action in these texts, I refrain from providing another description of them here except to reiterate that it is in the Gṛhyasūtras that we see the 'ascendency of recitation as a form of sacrifice' (Lubin 1994, p. 203). These interrelated focuses—on the individual's lifeworld and on recitation or 'self-study' (*svādhyāya*) as the 'truly formative act' (Patton 2012, p. 374)—shift emphasis to the personal impact of textual learning. According to the Gṛhyasūtras, such learning supersedes or is equally efficacious to the performance of the rituals addressed in earlier *śrauta* literature and the Brāhmaṇas' exegesis.⁵ This attention to a perceived relationship between regimens of study and the formation of the ritual actor's identity situates the Āraṇyakas in a cultural context marked by traceable historical developments to which they themselves feasibly contributed.⁶

While the Gṛhyasūtras do not seek to define the Āraṇyakas as such, they do contain suggestion of the texts, teachings, and observations that were interrelated in their study and distinguish them from the usual Vedic education. To be clear, three phases or aspects of Veda-study can be discerned in the Gṛhyasūtras' accounts. The first of these is the period of formal training that the Gṛhyasūtras depict as obligatory and which, according to the commentator Nārāyaṇa, involved study of the

mantras, *Brāhmaṇas*, and *smṛti* literature of the Vedic school involved (*Śāṅkhāyana Gr̥hyasūtra* (ŚāṅkhGS) 2.7.28). This phase encapsulates the student's initiation (*upanayana*) and the core rules of *brahmacarya*, most commonly including celibacy (*brahmacarya*), begging for alms (*bhikṣācaraṇa*), sleeping on the ground (*adhahśayyā*), complete obedience to one's teacher (*śuśrūṣā*), dietary restrictions, and abstinence from bathing and from trimming one's hair and nails (e.g., *Gobhila Gr̥hyasūtra* (GGS) 2.10.34, *Khādīra Gr̥hyasūtra* (KhGS) 2.4.26-32, 2.5.11-16, *Pāraskara Gr̥hyasūtra* 2.3.2, 2.5.10-11, and ŚāṅkhGS 2.4.5, 2.6.8). The student's living in residence (*antevāsin*) with their teacher's household and the practice of learning through recitation and repetition (*anuvacana*) further distinguish the initial phase of Vedic education.

Upon the completion of this phase, the ritual actor—now a fully fledged Brahmin by initiation and training—was qualified to engage in the second aspect of Veda-study, or *svādhyāya* (literally 'self-study'). As its name suggests, *svādhyāya* is a private recitation practice, undertaken alone or for initiated students (*upeta*, ŚāṅkhGS 4.8), and ultimately performed for oneself: known also as *brahmayajña*, *svādhyāya* constitutes one of the five 'great sacrifices' (*mahāyajña*) that were considered to be lifelong daily obligations and which, by the time of the *Gr̥hyasūtras*, had significantly recentred ritual practice and its explanation. According to this system of sacrifices, debts, and obligations—which the *Gr̥hyasūtras* critically appear to have inherited from *Taittirīya Āraṇyaka* (TĀ 2) and the *Āraṇyaka*-like sections of *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (ŚB[M] 11.5.6-7)—recitation functioned as the medium and instrument of sacrificial offering. It therefore was not only regarded as a sacrifice in itself but may indeed have subsumed the other four sacrifices to the gods, beings, ancestors, and men (*Āśvalāyana Gr̥hyasūtra* (ĀGS) 1.1-2, 3.1-4), thus facilitating the domestication, and even personalization, of late-Vedic ritual. However, while *svādhyāya* can be compared to a student's initial Vedic education in two respects—namely, the observance of regimens for purity and the study of the Veda without its secret texts—each of these comparisons requires careful handling. Firstly, to whatever extent *svādhyāya* is depicted as subject to numerous regulations governing the physical and temporal circumstances under which recitation is permitted to occur (e.g., ŚāṅkhGS 4.7-8), the power of *svādhyāya* was such that specific rules could be bypassed as long as purity of oneself and one's place were ensured.⁷ In the *Gr̥hyasūtras*, this pertains particularly to behaviours and practices that are suitable in the context of a person who is socially engaged or a householder, but which in the context of *brahmacarya* are markers of asceticism. Secondly, although the separation of the special regimens of study (*vedāvrata*) and the *Gr̥hyasūtras*' statements on the content of recitation make it clear that *svādhyāya* was regarded as ritually effective without the inclusion of the esoterica,⁸ the historical antecedent for self-study appears in esoteric texts themselves. The *Gr̥hyasūtras*' representation of *svādhyāya* as the culminating practice of Vedic education therefore appears to negotiate between upholding the restricted nature of the *Āraṇyakas* and the relevance of certain of their teachings to a new framework centred on domestic religiosity.

In contrast with *brahmacarya* and *svādhyāya*, which are ordinary in the sense of the common expectation that they should be completed by all Brahmin householders, as well as, increasingly, by males of the Rājanya or Kṣatriya and Vaiśya *varṇas*, the Gr̥hyasūtras depict learning of the Veda's esoteric portions as an optional and secret (*rahasya*) set of studies that could only be undertaken in the wilderness following the completion of one's formal training.⁹ Although the Gr̥hyasūtras and their commentaries are not explicit in naming the individual texts designated for such study, their survey makes it apparent that the *rahasya* included the *mantras* required for the performance of the Mahāvratā, the Pravargya, and other esoteric rituals along with their Brāhmaṇa-type exegesis, the Mahānāmni or Śakvari/Śakkari verses and *puriṣa* verse-extenders, the *upaniṣads* affiliated with the Gr̥hyasūtras' respective priestly schools (*caraṇa*), and expiatory or otherwise potent litanies. To the extent that these teachings are of limited relevance to the life of householders—the majority of whom would have been unlikely, then as now, to actually perform the esoteric rituals addressed in the Āraṇyakas—Lubin (1994, p. 203) is most likely correct in his observation that the appeal of these studies lay in the acquisition of personal power alongside material benefits more clearly in keeping with the Gr̥hyasūtras' domestic orientation. Therefore, although the underscoring of social aims by ascetic practices is visible throughout the Gr̥hyasūtras, the negotiation of the social and the ascetic is particularly apparent in the study of the *rahasya* due to the requirement for exceptionally rigorous regimens (*vedāvrata*) that recontextualize the student-subject by temporarily undoing all of their domestic relationships and relocating them to the wilderness. This is marked by the placement of restrictions on both the student's speech and the teacher's manner of recitation.

A particularly vivid account of this concern with textual engagement as it is mediated through *vratā* is given in the Ṛgvedic ŚāṅkhGS (2.11-12). According to this passage, the preparations for learning the Āraṇyaka involve a year-long observation of the rules (*kalpa*) that an ordinary student or *brahmacārī* is expected to follow—an undertaking that renovates the student's relationship to the teacher and reinstates their earlier control of their senses—as well as an additional period of heightened restrictions during which the student of the secret texts engages in 'deliberately uncivilized behaviour [that] is appropriate for the wilderness where these texts are studied' (Lubin 1994, p. 215). While the teacher must also observe temporary *brahmacarya* and avoid impediments to study (*anadhyāya*), the period of heightened restrictions placed on the student involves a suspension of the state of *brahmacarya* (i.e., of the 'perpetual'—*nitya*—obligations) and an intensive regimen of fasting, blindfolding, and silence. These sensory constraints have two immediate implications for the Āraṇyakas' textuality. Firstly, according to the Khādīra (KhGS 2.5.29-30), because the act of blindfolding protects the student's senses from risk of being 'burned' (*pra√dah*) by the recitation, with both sight and speech depicted as needing to be ritually restored at the end of the *vratā* (KhGS 2.5.30-31, GGS 3.2.39-44), these behaviours can be understood as a response to the perceived danger of the texts. Secondly, because these constraints isolate hearing as the student's

sole mode of sensory involvement with the recitation—thus suggesting that hearing the texts alone is sufficient to cause ritual transformations in the subject—it is plausible that the Gr̥hyasūtras' perception of the power of the secret texts is consistent with the later commentarial assertion that no part of the Āraṇyakas can be heard by one who has not undertaken the *vrata*.¹⁰ The *Śāṅkhayana*'s detailed account is worth reading in full:

atha vratādeśānam || 1 || *tasyopanayanena kalpo vyākhyātaḥ* || 2 || *na sāvitṛim anvāha* || 3 || *daṇḍapradānāntam ity eke* || 4 || *udagayane śuklapakṣe* || 5 || *ahorātram brahmacaryam upetyācāryo 'māṁsaśī brahmacārī* || 6 || *caturdaśim pariḥpāyāṣtamim ca* || 7 || *ādyottame caike* || 8 || *yām vānyā bhaprasāstām manyeta tasyām śukriye brahmacaryam ādiśet* || 9 || *trirātram brahmacaryam cared dvādaśārātram saṁvatsaram vā yāvad vā gurumanyeta* || 10 || *śākvaraṁ tu saṁvatsaram* || 11 || *vṛātikam aupaniṣadam ca* || 12 || *pūrṇe kālē carite brahmacarye śaṁyor bārhaspatyānte vede 'nūkte rahasyam śrāvayiṣyan akālaniyamam cādeśena pratīyeta* || 13 || ŚGS 2.11

[1] Now, the enjoining of the regimen. [2] The rule for it is explained in accordance with the initiation. [3] (The teacher) does not repeat the Sāvitrī mantra. [4] Some say the handing over of the staff forms the conclusion (of this ceremony). [5] During the sun's northward course, on a bright fortnight (of the waxing moon), [6] and having undertaken *brahmacarya* for a day and a night, the teacher eats no meat (and) is celibate. [7] Except for the fourteenth and the eighth (days of the fortnight), [8] and the first and the last, according to some. [9] Alternatively, on another (day) he considers favourable according to the constellations, he should direct (the student) to *brahmacarya* as per the *śukriya* (regimen for the study of the Pravargya mantras). [10] (The student) should observe *brahmacarya* for three nights, twelve nights, one year, or for as long as the venerable one deems fit. [11] The *śākvara* (regimen for the study of the Mahānāmni verses), however, (should be observed) for a year, [12] (as should) the *vṛātika* and *aupaniṣada* (regimens). [13] When the duration of time is complete, when *brahmacarya* has been observed, when the Veda has been recited down to the Śaṁyor Bārhaspatya (hymn), (the teacher) intending to teach the secret should make sure of the times and rules according to what is enjoined.

kṛtaprātaraśasyāparāhṇi 'parājītāyām diśi || 1 || *hutvācāryo 'thainam yāsv eva devatāsu parīto bhavati tās v evainam pṛcchat[y] agnāv indra āditye viśveṣu ca deveṣu caritam te brahmacaryam* || 2 || *caritam bho3 iti pratyukte* || 3 || *paścād agneḥ purastād ācāryasya prāṇmukhe sthite 'hatena vāsasācāryaḥ pradakṣiṇam mukhaṁ triḥ pariveṣṭya* || 4 || *upariṣṭād daśāḥ kṛtvā yathā na sambhraṣyeta* || 5 || *trirātram samidādhanam bhikṣācaraṇam adhaḥśasyām guruśuśrūṣāṁ cākurvan vāgyato 'pramatto 'raṇye devakule 'gnihotre vopavasasveti* || 6 || *atra haikē tām eva niyamāms tiṣṭhato rātryām evopa-diśanti* || 7 || *ācāryyo 'māṁsācī brahmacārī* || 8 || *trirātre nirvṛte rātryām vā grāmān niṣkān naitānikṣetanadhyāyān* || 9 || *piśitāmam caṇḍālām sūtikām rajasvalām tedanim apahastakām śmaśānam sarvāṇi ca śavarūpāṇi yāny āsye na praviṣeyuḥ svasya vāsān nirasan* || 10 || *prāgudicim diśam upaniṣkramya śucau deśe prāṇmuhka ācārya upaviśati*

|| 11 || *udita āditye 'nuvācanadharmmeṇa vāgyatāyoṣṇīṣiṇe 'nvāha* || 12 || *mahānāmnīsv evaiṣa niyamah* || 13 || *athottareṣu prakaraṇeṣu svādhyayam eva kurvata ācāryasyetarah śṛṇoti* || 14 || ... || ŚGS 2.12.1-14

[1] When the morning meal is done, in the afternoon in a place to the northeast, [2] the teacher sacrifices and asks (the student) with respect to the deities to whom he has been dedicated, 'Have you observed *brahmacarya* before Agni, Indra, Āditya, and the All-Gods?' [3] When (the student) has replied, 'I have observed it, sir' [4] (and is) standing behind the fire, in front of the teacher, (and) facing east, the teacher wraps his face three times from left to right with an unworn garment. [5] He tucks in the ends so that it does not slip off. [6] (The teacher says) 'For three nights holding off on lighting a fire, going for alms, sleeping on the ground, and obedience to the venerable one, go and fast in the wilderness, in a house of the gods, or in an *agnihotra* (fire-shed), restraining your speech and undistracted'. [7] In respect to this, however, some teach that (one should observe) those rules while standing through just one night. [8] The teacher consumes no meat (and) is celibate. [9] When three nights or one night has elapsed, (the teacher) departs the village. He should not look at these impediments to recitation: [10] raw flesh, a *caṇḍāla* (outcaste), a woman lying in from childbirth, a woman who is menstruating, blood, those whose hands have been cut off, a cremation ground, and all corpse-like things which should not enter the mouth, casting (them) away from his house. [11] Going out in a northeastern direction, the teacher sits down facing east in a clean place. [12] When the sun has risen, he repeats (the secret text) according to the rules of recitation for (the student who) has restrained their speech (and) is wearing a turban. [13] This rule applies to the Mahānāmnī verses only. [14] Now, for the rest of the sections, the other listens while the teacher performs *svādhyāya* only.

While the *vratas* and sensory constraints depicted in the *Śāṅkhāyana* and other Gr̥hyasūtras clearly differentiate the learning of the Veda's esoteric portions from the practices of ordinary *brahmacarya*, it should also be briefly noted that the R̥gvedic Gr̥hyasūtras prescribe distinct rules for *svādhyāya* of the Āraṇyakas and the Mahāvratā recitation. The relevant passages occur at ŚāṅkhGS 6¹¹ and Aitareya Āraṇyaka (AitĀ) 5.3.3¹² and cite more extensive lists of rules pertaining to recitation than what is prescribed in the corresponding passages addressing regular *svādhyāya* (i.e., ŚāṅkhGS 1.4, ĀGS 3.2-3, AitĀ 5.3.3 *athātaḥ svādhyāyadharmam vyākhyāsyāmaḥ*). A comparison of these passages attests to differences of content in both the main and accompanying recitations, independent enumerations of impediments to study (*anadhyāya*), a requirement for departure from the village—though not explicitly to a wilderness—and restrictions on who can be taught and, subsequently, socialized with. To whatever extent these special rules reflect the role of *svādhyāya* in teaching the secret texts, the more important point lies in their suggestion that the textuality of the Āraṇyakas informs changes in a person's ritual identity that are unlike those informed by ordinary Veda-study. This consideration in defining the Āraṇyakas may arguably reappear in the *Mānava Dharmaśāstra*'s

(MDhŚ 4.123) later assertion that *svādhyāya* of an *Āraṇyaka* is itself a cause for *anadhyāya*, the suspension of regular study until one's purity to recite has been resecured.¹³

In the world of the *Gr̥hyasūtras*, the distinguishing value of the *Āraṇyakas* and related texts is not the intersection of recitation and regimen that had overtaken the power of sacrifice, for this can be said of all aspects in the *Gr̥hyasūtras*' view of Vedic education—and it is an emphasis that implicates the Vedic text recited, the preparations for and activity of recitation, and the reciter themselves in a relationship geared towards the ritual construction of one's person, whatever the text at hand. Rather, what allows us to distinguish the *rahasya* from the rest of the Veda's learning are the heightened restrictions on speech and the senses that are enjoined at this intersection between text and practice. While we may be unable to detect whatever it is that gives these texts more risk or greater potency, the presence of the *vratas* tells us that perceptions of danger and secrecy were handled with substance via adjusted modes of textual engagement that negotiated more rigorous, albeit temporary, forms of ascetic practice with the social priorities and responsibilities characterizing the *Gr̥hyasūtras*' ideally domesticated male. These responses to *rahasya* provide a common ground upon which the secret texts that are recognized or implied by the *Gr̥hyasūtras*' distinct *śākhās* and *caraṇas* can productively be compared.

Here again, the *ŚāṅkhGS* passages translated above provide a useful point of reference, for they are one of the clearest expositions of *vedāvratā* in which the texts associated with each regimen can be identified with a degree of confidence and the terminology employed is fairly well-attested by other *Gr̥hyasūtras*. Three *vratas* are mentioned in these passages: (i) the *vr̥tika*, relating to the study of *Śāṅkhāyana Āraṇyaka* (*Śāṅkhā*) 1-2 and 9-14, and possibly *Ait̥ā* 1; (ii) the *aupaniṣada* for the study of *Śāṅkhā* 3-6 (= *Kauṣītaki Upaniṣad*) and 7-8 (= the *Samhitā Upaniṣad* with parallels in *Ait̥ā* 3), as well as, potentially, *Ait̥ā* 2.4-6 (= *Aitareya Upaniṣad*) and the unnamed *upaniṣad* in *Ait̥ā* 2.1-3; and (iii) the *śākvara*, which pertains to the *Mahānāmni* verses and *purīṣa* verse-extenders documented in *Ait̥ā* 4.¹⁴ This provides an inclusive overview of the contents of both *Ṛgvedic* *Āraṇyakas*, and if it is further delineated on the basis of regimens, then the *Śāṅkhāyana*'s assignment of separate *vratas* for the study of the *Mahānāmni* verses and *Upaniṣads* results in apparent agreement with the modern assessment that the focus of these *Āraṇyakas* should, historically, lie with the *Mahāvratā* ritual. Yet while a correspondence between perspectives may occur in the case of the *Ṛgvedic* *Āraṇyakas*, it is the emphasis on restriction and the anticipation of changes to one's ritual status that advances the question of whether an *Āraṇyaka* can be identified for the *Sāmavedic* tradition. With respect to this, the *Gobhila* and *Jaimini Gr̥hyasūtras*' outline of *vratas* is clear: their *vr̥tika* regimen is for the study of the *Arka*-, *Dvandva*-, and *Vratā Parvans* of the *Āraṇyagāṇa*; the *āditya* for the *Pravargya* mantras in the *Śukriya Parvan*; the *śākvara* for the *Mahānāmni* verses in the *Āraṇyaka Samhitā*; and the *aupaniṣada* for the *Brāhmaṇas* and *Upaniṣads* affiliated with the *Kaushuma* and *Jaiminiya śākhās* respectively (*GGs* 3.1-2, *Jaimini Gr̥hyasūtra* 1.16-17).¹⁵

While this outline is at odds with what Carlos Lopez (2022, p. 20) describes as the modern ‘secure guide to understanding the historical levels of Vedic texts’—following which the JUB is the text most frequently identified as a Sāmavedic Āraṇyaka or functional equivalent thereof^{16,17}—it pertinently reinforces the argument that what gives the Āraṇyakas coherence are the circumstances that surround their learning. Indeed, it is arguable that the Gr̥hyasūtras’ approach already leads us in the direction of a polythetic definition of these texts: the Āraṇyakas have a compendium-like appearance that accommodates the repetition of familiar contents alongside the inclusion of diverse ones,¹⁸ held together by a common insistence on their textuality and the need for careful engagement.¹⁹ And this conceivably may be what the Āraṇyakas’ most prominent commentators intend when they observe that although the Āraṇyakas contain subjects that are transmitted in other textual collections without restriction on learning or location, these restrictions are expected to be upheld when they are studied as Āraṇyakas.²⁰

3. Textual engagement in the Āraṇyakas

While the Gr̥hyasūtras’ approach to the Veda stresses the possibility that the perceived consistency of textual collections is reflected in differentiated practices of textual engagement, they nonetheless approach the Āraṇyakas and Upaniṣads equally, that is, as belonging to the same thematic corpus of *rahasya* and distinguished only by the specific *vrata* required for the individual text to be studied. Because the Gr̥hyasūtras therefore do not address the Āraṇyakas and Upaniṣads as distinct collections, their evidence may well be taken to reinforce the argument for a ‘fluidity’ of genre classifications (Lindquist 2023, pp. 19, 202–03) that decentres the traditional fourfold Vedic typology and the recent attention to the Veda’s historical linguistic strata alike, shedding doubt on the value of the attempt to separate and define one collection against another. Yet, it is arguable that the preceding approaches do not, and likely were never intended to, trace the coherence of the Āraṇyakas’ own representations and what these can tell us about their interests and concerns that warranted restriction.

The following discussion is motivated by the observation that unlike the ‘early’ or ‘older’ Upaniṣads (Olivelle 1998; Cohen 2008), which frequently rhetoricize the secrecy of their teachings via narrative depictions and the implicit understanding that their contents are, as *upaniṣads*, inherently arcane, the Āraṇyakas directly assert their secrecy through restrictions on how and to whom they should be recited, references to the dangerous or transgressive nature of the rituals they teach, and representations of the fatal outcomes of their improper recitation.²¹ These assertions are a regular feature of all four Āraṇyakas comprising the core collection, as well as of the *upaniṣads* contained in the R̥gvedic Āraṇyakas that are rarely counted among the texts making up the latter genre (e.g., AitĀ 3). However, as previously noted by Charles Malamoud (1977, p. 2), the standard definition of *āraṇyaka* as

naming collections of teachings, which should only be recited in the wilderness comes to us from the 14th century CE commentator, Sāyaṇa, who specified the connection between the wilderness and the study of these texts in his introductions to the *Taittirīya* and *Aitareya* (TĀ: *araṇyādhyayanād etad āraṇyakam itīryate | aranye tad adhiyīteṭy evaṃ vākyaṃ pravakṣyate*; AitĀ: *araṇya eva pāṭhyaṃ syād āraṇyakam itīryatām*). Apart from the fact that this equation does not appear in the earlier work of Bhaṭṭa Bhāskara Miśra (ca. 12th CE), it also appears to be wholly absent from the *Āraṇyakas*, which nowhere claim the restriction for themselves in total. Nonetheless, it has entered major scholarly explanations, referred to previously, where it has further been bolstered by the description of study in location ‘(away) from the village without sight of roofs’ (TĀ 2.11: *diśi grāmād ācchadīrdaśé; Kaṭha Āraṇyaka* (KĀ) III 219: *śúcau bhūmyavakāśé grāmā[d ācchadīrdaśé]*) that is twice attested in these texts—once in direct relation to *svādhyāya*, and again in a partially reconstructed passage describing the *avāntaradīkṣā* regimen prescribed for the study of the *Pravargya* mantras (Witzel 2004, p. 84). While neither of these passages is therefore necessarily intended to define the contents or study of the *Āraṇyakas* overall, they each share conceptual connections with other representations of textual engagement and restriction that merit closer consideration.

For the purposes of this admittedly preliminary investigation, my aim is to clarify the restrictions that have most immediately come to define the *Āraṇyakas*, firstly by examining the scope and terms of the restriction that relegated these texts to the wilderness, and secondly by considering some primary examples of how this controlled mode of textual engagement is represented as contributing to the construction of the reciter’s ritual identity, thus telling us something of the *Āraṇyakas*’ anticipated textuality. While this approach focuses my discussion on the *Taittirīya* and *Kaṭha Āraṇyakas*, it allows us to identify critical features of their self-representation that builds towards a working model of how the requirement for restricted recitation may accommodate the *Āraṇyakas*’ more diverse contents or be extended to a consideration of other texts.²² The remainder of this examination turns to two brief case-studies that address the following questions: How do restrictions on recitation intersect with teachings on *svādhyāya*? What changes to ritual identity does *svādhyāya* effect or restrictions control? Is there a positive relationship between textual engagement and the wilderness—could the wilderness itself contribute to desired ritual outcomes?

3.1 Negotiating recitation in the *Taittirīya Āraṇyaka*

The second book or inquiry (*praśna*) of the TĀ is dedicated to teachings on *svādhyāya* that include information about its practice, content, and anticipated impacts on the ritual actor. These details are of major interest to the study of the *Āraṇyakas* because they indicate that the requirement to recite away from human settlements occurs within a broader discussion that applies to the *Āraṇyakas* indirectly. Secondly,

they suggest that a practice, which was or became in some sense quotidian—a matter of daily religious life—may have been underscored by an understanding of textual engagement that was extraordinary and therefore restricted in its teaching. Indeed, we might recall that from the *Gṛhyasūtras*' perspective, while the first and expected stage of Vedic study qualified one to practice *svādhyāya*, study of the *rahasya*—presumably including the teachings on *svādhyāya* given in TĀ 2—were optional and reserved. This difference in registers between rituals in practice and the esoteric teachings that sit behind them reiterates the need for a careful rereading of the negotiation of village (*grāma*) and wilderness (*araṇya*) that appears in TĀ 2.11-15.

These passages commence with an account of the preparations for *svādhyāya*, involving self-purification in a place without sight of roofs followed by recitation of *om*, the *Vyāhṛtis* (*bhūr*, *bhuvas*, and *sva*), and the *Sāvitrī mantra*. These preparations realize connections between the reciter's acts, their body, and a host of 'texts' that these undertakings make favourable ($\sqrt{\text{prī}}$), and it is this change of ritual state that TĀ 2.11 emphasizes: the reciter themselves now functions as an instrument of sacrifice, a soma-filter (*pavitra*) that receives and purifies the recitation, and is yoked by the recitation to the truth of speech. This account frames the act of departure in the context of the need to establish one's purity to recite; at the same time, the concern with speech's potency is reinforced by the citation of *Ṛgveda Samhitā* (RV) 1.164.39, a verse that describes the descent of 'inspired Speech' to the human realm (Jamison and Brereton 2014, p. 353). The recollection of RV 1.164 also connects this teaching on *svādhyāya* to the Mahāvratā (AitĀ 5.3.2, ŚāṅkhĀ 2.18) and Pravargya recitations (Jamison and Brereton 2014, pp. 349–54, Houben 2000).

*brahmayajñēna yakṣyamānaḥ prācyāṁ diśī grāmād ācchadirdarśā údicyāṁ
prāgudicyāṁ vodīta ādityē dakṣiṇatā upaviyopaviśya hāstāv avanījya trīr ā cāmed
dvīḥ parimījya sakīd upaspīśya śīras cākṣuśī nāsike śrōtre hīdayam ālābhya || 1 || yāt
trīr ācāmati tēna īcaḥ prīṇāti yād dvīḥ parimījati tēna yājūṁṣi yāt sakīd upaspīśati
tēna sāmāni yāt savyāṁ pāṇīm pādaū prokṣāti yac chīras cākṣuśī nāsike śrōtre hīdayam
ālābhate tēnātharvāṅgirāso brāhmaṇānītiḥāsān purāṇāni kālpan gāthā nārāsaṁśīḥ
prīṇāti || 2 || dārbhāṇām mahād upastīryopāsthaṁ kṛtvā prān āsinaḥ svādhyāyām
ādhiyātāpām vā eṣā oṣadhīnām rāso yād darbhāḥ sārāsam evā brāhma kurute || 3 ||
dakṣiṇottaraū pāṇī pādaū kṛtvā sāvitrāv om iti prāiti padyata etād vai yājus trayīm
vidyām prāty eṣā vāg etād paramām akṣāram || 4 || tād etād ṛcābhyuktam || 5 ||*

ṛcō akṣāre paramē vyòman

yāsmin devā ādhi vīsve niṣedūr |

yās tán ná véda kīm ṛcā kariṣyati

yā ít tād vidus tá imé sám āsata ítī || 6 ||

trīn evā prāyunkta bhūr bhūvaḥ svār ity āhaitād vai vācaḥ satyām yád evā vācāḥ satyām tād prāyunkta[h] || 7 || átha sāvitṛm gāyatrīm trīr ānv āha pacchò 'rdhārcaśò 'navānām savitā śrīyaḥ prasavitā śrīyam evāpnoty átho prajñātayaivá pratipádā chándāmsi prāti padyate || 8 || TĀ 2.11²³[1] When he wants to sacrifice with the *brahmayajña*, he should sit at sunrise in a place east of the village without sight of roofs, or to the north or northeast, wearing his sacred thread to the right. He should wash his hands, sip (water) three times, wipe (himself) twice, touch (water) once, and grasp his head, eyes, nostrils, ears, and heart. [2] When he sips three times, he makes the *ṛc*-verses favourable. When he wipes twice, the *yajus*-calls. When he touches once, the *sāman*-melodies. When he sprinkles his left hand and his two feet, when he seizes his head, eyes, nostrils, ears, and heart, he makes the *atharvāṅgiras* hymns, the *Brāhmaṇas*, the *Itihāsas*, the *Purāṇas*, the *Kalpas*, the *Gāthās*, and the *Nārāsaṁsīs* favourable. [3] Having strewn a heap of *darbha* grass and made a lap, sitting to the east, he should recite *svādhyāya*. What is *darbha* is the essence of plants (and) truly of the waters. He makes *brahman* succulent indeed. [4] Placing his right hand and foot over his left as a soma-filter, he begins by reciting *om*. Verily, the *yajus* is equivalent to the threefold knowledge, it is speech, it is the supreme syllable. [5] This is enjoined by a *ṛc* –

[6] The syllable of the verse, upon which all the gods have settled, is in the

highest heaven—

he who does not know that (syllable), what will he accomplish by his

verse? Only those who know it sit together here. [RV 1.164.39]²⁴

[7] Three times indeed is he yoked (when) he says *bhūr, bhūvaḥ, svar*. This verily is the truth of speech. He is yoked to that, the truth of speech. [8] Now he repeats the *Sāvitṛī* mantra, in the *gāyatrī* metre, three times: *pāda*-by-*pāda*, half-verse by half-verse, all in one breath. *Savitṛ* is the inciter of splendour; splendour alone he obtains. Then, with the introductory stanza that has been made known, he commences the hymns.

Although the relationship between departure from the village and the establishment of ritual purity seems clear, this passage does raise an interesting observation: while this teaching on *svādhyāya* clearly occurs in an *Āraṇyaka*, it is not so clear that the *Āraṇyakas* are intended to be recited as *svādhyāya*'s subject. Therefore, does the obligation to recite in a place 'without sight of roofs' pertain to this *Āraṇyaka*'s recitation, or does it pertain to *svādhyāya* of the Veda without the *rahasya*? An earlier statement, TĀ 2.10.6, indicates that the content of *svādhyāya* concerned here consists of stanzas of Vedic hymns (*yát svādhyāyám ádhīyiaikām apy ṛcām yájuh sāma vā tād brahmayajñāḥ sām tiṣṭhate*). For reasons that will soon become clear, I suspect the following passage, TĀ 2.12, implies this as well:

grāme mānasā svādhyāyām ādhyāyā divā naktarī vā || 1 || iti ha smāha śauca āhneyāḥ || 2 || utāraṇye 'bāla utā vācōtā tīṣṭhann utā vrājann utāsina utā śāyāno 'dhyāyāivā svādhyāyām tāpasvī pūṇyo bhavati yā evāṁ vidvānt svādhyāyām ādhite || 3 || TĀ 2.12.1-3²⁵

[1] '(When) in the village, he should recite *svādhyāya* with the mind, day or night.'

[2] So said Śauca Āhneya. [3] Or he should just recite *svādhyāya* in the wilderness when he lacks strength, or with the voice (i.e., aloud), or while standing or walking or seated or reclining. He becomes filled with ascetic fervour, pure, who recites *svādhyāya* knowing thus.

To whatever extent Bhaṭṭa Bhāskara clarifies that these are secondary rules applying to times of misfortune (*āpatkalpa*) rather than disagreements in opinion, the more important point is that the negotiation of wilderness and village occurs as part of a longer series of exceptions to behaviours that can be recognized as causes of *anadhyāya* in later Sūtra texts. Following Patrick Olivelle's detailed analysis of *anadhyāya*, the states of being seated, standing, walking, travelling, and reclining typically constitute 'improper bodily postures' for Vedic recitation, while the village is considered 'naturally unfit' (2006, pp. 312–15); yet in AitĀ 5.3.3 by contrast, these behaviours are explicitly prohibited for recitation of the Mahāvratā but not for general *svādhyāya*. The tension between *svādhyāya* and importune circumstances that typically prohibit it continues in TĀ 2.14, where components of the sacrifice (*yajña*) are identified with times of day and meteorological events. While Olivelle also classifies these circumstances as being 'naturally unfit' for *svādhyāya*, TĀ 2.14 assimilates them into the esoteric explanation of *svādhyāya* itself. According to this passage, the true knowledge of these identifications renders *svādhyāya* a powerful practice of austerity (*tapas*) and precipitates changes in the reciter's ritual status that culminate in the defeat of repeated death and in union with *brahman*:

tāsya vā etāsya yajñāsya mégho havirdhānam vidyūd agnir varṣāṁ havis tanayitnūr vaṣaṭkārō yād avasphūrjati sō 'nuvaṣaṭkārō vāyur ātmāmāvāsyā sviṣṭakṛt || 1 || yā evāṁ vidvān meghē varṣāti vidyōtamāne stanātyaty avasphūrjati pāvamāne vāyāv amāvāsyāyāṁ svādhyāyām ādhite tāpa evā tāt tapyate tāpo hi svādhyāyā iti || 2 || uttamām nākaṁ rohaty uttamāḥ samānānām bhavati yāvantaḥ ha vā imāṁ vittāsya pūrṇām dādat svargām lokām jayati tāvantaḥ lokām jayati bhūyāṁsaṁ cākṣayām cāpa punarmṛtyūṁ jayati brāhmaṇaḥ śāyujyaṁ gacchati || 3 || TĀ 2.14²⁶

[1] This sacrifice truly has the raincloud as its gift of oblation, lightning as its fire, rain for the offering, thunder for the cry *vaṣaṭ*! When it thunders, *vaṣaṭ* cries after it. The wind is its self, the night of the new moon (when moon and sun dwell together) is its perfectly made offering. [2] When one, knowing thus, recites *svādhyāya* when clouds shower down, when lightning flashes, when it crackles, when it thunders, when the wind sifts through, when (the moon and sun) dwell

together (on the night of the new moon), that is just the practice of austerity, for *svādhyāya* is austerity. [3] He mounts the heavenly vault; he becomes the utmost of equals. Truly, indeed, as much as he conquers the heavenly world (by) giving this (earth) full of wealth, he conquers the world, he defeats the greater and imperishable—repeated death. He goes to union with *brahman*.

What can we make of these teachings on *svādhyāya* and how might they increase our understanding of the *Āraṇyakas*? I suggest that TĀ 2 needs to be distinguished as an esoteric teaching on *svādhyāya*, the true understanding of which supplants regular observations of *anādhyāya* that are mapped in later Sūtra literature, but which still preferences the wilderness in satisfaction of the explicit requirements for purity of body and place (TĀ 2.15.1: *tāsya vā etāsya yajñāsya dvāu anādhyāyau yád ātmāsucir yád deśāḥ*). The relevance of distinguishing the content and purpose of the recitation in practice is reinforced by TĀ 2.15.3, a passage that relates *svādhyāya* in the context of *brahmayajña* to the payment of debts (*ṛṇa*) and asserts that it may be undertaken, with the correct knowledge, in either the village or wilderness,²⁷ whereas *svādhyāya* for the purpose of a sacrificial rite is performed in the wilderness (TĀ 2.17: *sá yēna yajñakrátunā yājāyet só 'raṇyaṁ parétya śucaú deśé svādhyāyám evaṁnam ādhiyann āsitá*). Retaining these distinctions, it is feasible that the direction to recite in place without sight of roofs in TĀ 2.11 does not directly describe the *Āraṇyakas*' own study. Nonetheless, it is also arguable that the exceptions to *anādhyāya* detailed in TĀ 2, while made permissible by the esoteric knowledge transmitted in the *Āraṇyaka*, do not apply to recitation of the *Āraṇyakas* themselves. As much may be implied by TĀ 1.32, a passage concerning the *vrata* for studying the *mantras* and teachings of the special *Āruṇaketuka* form of the Agnicayana ritual: after stating that the instruction for this regimen is as for the *Pravargya* (*pravargyavad ādeśaḥ*), the passage asserts that those who would undertake the regimen should recite in the wilderness (*araṇye 'dhiyīran*). It then directs the student to touch water with the *Mahānāmni* verses and, observing that these injunctions are in accordance with the *dharma* of *svādhyāya*, repeats the restriction on location (*evaṁ svādhyāyadharmeṇa | araṇye 'dhiyīta*).

Finally, we might note that the Ṛgvedic *Āraṇyakas* demonstrate a similar concern for esoteric teachings on *svādhyāya* (AitĀ 3.1-2, ŚāṅkhĀ 7-8, 13-14) with particularly firm restrictions placed on the recitation of their own contents (AitĀ 3.2.3-4, 5.3.3, ŚāṅkhĀ 1.1, 8.5-7). While the distinction implied here between a widespread ritual practice and the secret teachings behind it may explain the inclusion of some of the *Āraṇyakas*' more diverse contents, such as the funerary *mantras* in TĀ 6 or the construction of amulets in ŚāṅkhĀ 11, the texts' shared references to ṚV 1.164 verses 39 and 41 and to ṚV 10.71.6 occur across teachings on *svādhyāya*, the *Mahāvratā*, *Pravargya*, and *Āruṇaketuka* alike. These citations foreground a concern with inspired speech's presence in the human world and highlight restrictions on recitation as the proper mode of textual engagement needed to sustain the relationship between reciter and speech itself.²⁸

3.2 Identifying the wilderness in the *Kaṭha Āraṇyaka*

With these points in mind, let us briefly turn to some final representations of recitation and restriction that appear in the *Kaṭha Āraṇyaka*. These passages make important contributions to the picture of textuality given in the *Āraṇyakas*, for they raise a consideration that has been missing from our examination thus far: the KĀ represents the wilderness in a manner suggesting the village is inappropriate to specific changes in ritual identity that are anticipated by the *Āraṇyakas*' contents. While Olivelle has argued that the village is naturally unfit for *svādhyāya* due to the risk of ritual pollution, what I am asking by contrast is whether there is a positive relationship between the wilderness and ritual constructions of identity that could delineate the *Āraṇyakas* from similar corpora. This point again to the intellectual coherence that textuality brings to the restrictions that most broadly define the *Āraṇyakas* as a collection, suggesting that the anticipation and handling of texts, as recognized in their self-representations and teachings, can make significant contributions to their scholarly description.

Unlike the representations of *svādhyāya* in the TĀ, which cast the wilderness either in terms of purity (Veda study) or *vrata* (study of *rahasya*), the KĀ uniquely appears to assert a qualitative relationship between the wilderness and the practices surrounding the Pravargya. According to these representations, the *aranya* is not merely a location away from human settlement, but possesses qualities that the reciter seeks to gain for the success of the ritual or regimen. The first such indication occurs in the explanation of Pravargya *mantras* that provides the focus of KĀ II.1. This passage follows the sequence of *mantras* in the preceding book (KĀ I 1): as each *mantra* is presented, the explanation settles its core significance and relates this to the *mantra*'s affective function within the Pravargya ritual. It is important to note that what I have referred to as core 'significance' is perhaps more accurately regarded as a quality that is transferred from the *mantra* when it is recited, in turn becoming part of the identity of a ritual actor or object. The recitation of each *mantra* and the resulting transfer are therefore implicated in what Patton refers to as a 'complex subjectivity' that overlaps with other subjectivities and entities in the world (2012, pp. 368–69). At its simplest, this means that every identity is constructed with other identities and, when a *mantra* is recited, the speaker exerts agency over these constructions.

In KĀ II.1, this development of ritual identity is seen in the construction of the Pravargya (or Mahāvīra/Gharma) vessel as it is composed using qualities contained in the Pravargya *mantras*. The particular *mantra* that concerns us here is KĀ I 1.4 (= ṚV 1.40.1c *ūpa prā yantu marútaḥ sudānavaḥ*) from which the quality of 'wildness' (*āranya*) is derived from the Maruts and the wilderness (*aranya*) where they belong and the Pravargya vessel is prepared. In order to preserve the context of the transference of *āranya* to the Pravargya vessel, I cite the relevant passage within its broader compositional sequence, highlighting the role of speech in the construction of ritual identities.

yuñjáte mána ity āhavanīye juhōti. mánasā vái [prajā]patir yajñám atanuta, táto vācā tátaḥ kármaṇā. mánasaiváitád yájamāno yajñám vitátya, táto vācā, tátaḥ kármaṇā karoti. devásya vas savitúḥ prasavá ity ābhrīr ādatte. savitṛprasūta eváinā devátābhir ādatte. cātasra ādatte. cātas[ro vái dí]śo. digbhyāḥ pravargyās sámbhriyate. digbhyā evá pravargyāṁ sámbharati. vānaspatyā bhavanti. vānaspátibhir vái pravargyās sámbhriyate. vānaspátibhir evá pravargyāṁ sámbharaty. úttiṣṭha brahmaṇaspata ity úttiṣṭhati. bṛhaspátir vái bráhmaṇaspátir. bṛhaspátir evá bhūtvóttiṣṭhaty. úpa práyantu marútas sudānava itī. sudānava vái marúta āraṇyā. āraṇye pravargyās sámbhriyaté. rāṇya evāraṇyāṁ karoti. práitu bráhmaṇaspátir itī prátitiṣṭhati. bṛhaspátir vái bráhmaṇaspátir. bṛhaspátir evá bhūtvā, prátitiṣṭhaty. ā devy ētu sūnṛtēti. vāg vái devī sūnṛtā. vācā pravargyās sámbhriyate. vācāivá pravargyāṁ sámbharaty. || (KĀ II.1.1-6²⁹)

With the words ‘they engage the mind,’ (the Adhvaryu) offers into the *āhavanīya* fire. It was with the mind, surely, that Prajāpati extended the sacrifice – then with speech, then with the ritual act. It is with the mind, therefore, that the sacrifice’s patron (firstly) spreads out the sacrifice – then he does it with speech, then with the ritual act.

With the words ‘at the pressing of the god Savitṛ (I command) all of you,’ (the Adhvaryu) takes the wooden shovel. Pressed by Savitṛ in this way, he takes (the shovel) by means of the deities. He takes the four. Four, indeed, are the directions. The Pravargya vessel is composed from the directions; from the directions, he prepares the Pravargya vessel. They (= the shovels) are made of wood. The Pravargya vessel is composed with trees; with trees, he prepares the Pravargya (vessel).

At the words ‘arise, lord of *brāhmaṇ*!’ (the Brahman) stands up. Clearly, the lord of *brāhmaṇ* (the sacred formulas) is Bṛhaspati. Becoming Bṛhaspati, he stands up.

(The Adhvaryu recites) ‘may they press forth, the Maruts of good drops!’ The wild Maruts possess good drops indeed. The Pravargya vessel is composed in the wilderness; in the wilderness, surely, he makes it (the Pravargya vessel) belong to the wilderness.

At the words ‘the lord of *brāhmaṇ* must proceed!’ (the Brahman) holds firm. Clearly, the lord of *brāhmaṇ* is Bṛhaspati. Becoming Bṛhaspati, he holds firm.

(The Adhvaryu recites) ‘the goddess Sūnṛtā must come forth!’ The goddess Sūnṛtā clearly is Vāc. The Pravargya vessel is composed with Vāc (speech); with Vāc, he prepares the Pravargya vessel.

This passage contains the only two attestations of the term *āraṇya* in the KĀ. While this leaves its exact implications unclear, the action of making the Pravargya vessel ‘wild’ does suggest that the wilderness possesses a value beyond the preservation of secrecy or purity alone. This is implied again by the KĀ’s description of the *avāntar-adikṣā* regimen that prepares the student for the study of the Pravargya mantras (KĀ

I) and *brāhmaṇa* exegesis (KĀ II–III). Here, however, the importance of the wilderness is more clearly connected to the construction of the ritual actor's identity: KĀ III 219 directs the student to depart to a place in the wilderness 'without sight of roofs' but substantiates this with a description of the village as Death's 'cow-pen'. The wilderness, this passage claims, belongs to the gods and the one who knows the truth of this identification conquers repeated death.

[áthaiṣa vratām carīṣ]yānn, áraṇyam parétya, śúcau bhūmyavakāśé grāmā[d aśchadīr-darśe 'dhyāpaya]ti. mṛtyór vā eṣā goṣthó yád grāmo; 'thaiśá devānām yád á[raṇyam. ápa punarm]ṛtyūm jayati, yá evām védódita ādityé pūrvāhné pūrvapakṣá udagáyané 'dhyītaítád vái trīśukriyam. trīśukriyo bhavati, yá evām véda || (KĀ III 219³⁰)

Now when he will be performing the regimen, he departs to the wilderness and undertakes instruction on a pure patch of earth (away) from the village without sight of roofs. Death's, surely, is this cow-pen which is the village – the wilderness belongs to the gods. One who knows thus conquers repeated death. When the sun rises in the morning in the fortnight of the waxing moon during the sun's northward course he should recite. This indeed is triply blazing. He becomes triply blazing, who knows thus.

After stating that understanding of the indicated times for recitation leads the ritual actor to become 'triply blazing' as per the brightness of the rising sun, the waxing moon, and the sun's northward course,³¹ KĀ III 219 lists the restrictions that apply to the study of the *mantras*. These include constraints that implicate avoidance of human settlements: the *brahmacārin* must not study near cows or around the death of a two-footed or four-footed animal, nor after having seen the death of a two- or four-footed animal, or meat, bone, blood, a *Caṇḍāla*, or something impure (*ásuci*). The passage then states that the *brahmacārin* must not come into contact with the sight of village animals when he has not performed the appeasement that concludes the regimen. It is also of note that meteorological events are cited here, in the context of *Āraṇyaka* recitation, as causes of *anadhyāya*:

nābhreṣu, ná samauhé, ná gávām ánte, ná párvopaparvayor: ātmánó 'hiṁsāyai. ná mṛtām dvipádāñ cātuṣpadām práty: ātmánó 'hiṁsāyai. ná, mṛtām dvipádām cātuṣpadām, māṁsám, ásthi, lóhitañ, caṇḍálám, áśuci vā dṛṣṭvāmedhyāni, vā etāni: medhyatvāya. ná, pūrvedyúr māṁsám attvā. ná, pūrvedyúr abrahmacaryām upétya. ná tad áhaḥ pūrvāhné keśaśmaśrū lomanakhāni vāpayen, návalikhen, nāñjyān, nābhyaññjyān, ná snāyāt: téjasó 'navabhrañśāya. ná grāmyāññāñ paśūnām sandárśanenāśāntikṛtas sámśrjeta... (KĀ III 219)

Not when there are thunderclouds, not when there is a whirlwind(?), not near cows, not on the day the moon changes or the day before that – for the purpose of not harming oneself. Not around the death of a two-footed or four-footed animal – for the purpose of not harming oneself. Not having seen the death of a

two-footed or four-footed animal, meat, bone, blood, a Caṇḍāla, or (something) impure – these are truly foul – for the purpose of being fit to sacrifice. (He must not recite when he has) eaten meat on the day before, nor having been unchaste on the day before. In the morning of this day, he should not trim his head and beard hair or his body hair and nails, he should not scratch, he should not anoint (himself), he should not adorn (himself), he should not bathe – for the non-destruction of his vital power. He should not come into contact with the sight of village animals when he has not performed the appeasement...

The constraints placed on the study of the Pravargya mantras and *brāhmaṇa*—that is, on the entire extant text of the KĀ—indicate that contact with the daily activities of village life does pose a risk of ritual impurity, a lack of ‘fitness to sacrifice’ (*medhyatvá*), or harm to the self. And, given the polarity of village and wilderness that appears at the commencement of KĀ III 219, we might infer that the *aranya* is sufficiently removed from the village to be free of these compromising influences. However, I think it would be mistaken to read the avoidance of what is foul or impure (*amedhyá*) simply in correlation to the sacredness of the texts studied or even as the primary concern that relegates the Āranyakas to the wilderness. The array of restrictions and purposes listed in KĀ III 219 are connected by the intention of controlling the changes to the *brahmacārin*’s ritual identity that are anticipated to result from his environment and behaviour. While this construction of identity admittedly prepares the *brahmacārin* for the study of the Āranyakas, an earlier passage (KĀ III 198) makes it clear that ritual attributes beyond purity/impurity also require management through restrictions on behaviour and recitation. In this example, the *brahmacārin* is directed to suspend the activities of speaking aloud and looking at objects, by which means he places vitality or radiance in himself (*tēja evātmān dhatte*). After enjoining restrictions on physical behaviour which maintain this state of being ‘with radiance’ (*satejastvá*), the text directs the *brahmacārin* to repeat the Pravargya mantras. This recitation deprives the *brahmacārin* of radiance alongside a number of qualities connected to their social and ritual identity.³² Finally, by recommencing structured activities of speaking and looking, the *brahmacārin* reconstitutes himself with the qualities lost through the recitation of the mantras, which ostensibly restores his status as a social participant.

tējasā vā eṣā prajāyā paśubhir brahmavarcasēnānnādyena ca vyṛddhyate yó brahmacārī. yān nābhivyāhāratī nābhīprēkṣate, tējo evātmān dhatte. yāt kanyām abhivyāhāraty abhiprēkṣate, prajāṁ evātmān dhatte. yād vatsām abhivyāhāraty, abhiprēkṣate, paśūn evātmān dhatte. yādādityām abhivyāhāraty abhiprēkṣate, brahmavarcasām evātmān dhatte. yāt kṣīraudanām abhivyāhāraty abhiprēkṣate, ‘nnādyam evātmān dhattē. ‘tho tejasvī prajāvān paśumān brahmavarcasy ānūrādho bhavati, yá evām veda || (KĀ III 198³³)

The *brahmacārin* is deprived of radiance, offspring, livestock, the lustre of *brahman* and proper food. When he does not speak and does not look, he places radiance in himself. When he speaks to a young woman, when he looks, he places offspring in himself. When he speaks to a yearling, when he looks, he places livestock in

himself. When he speaks to the sun, when he looks, he places the lustre of *brahman* in himself. When he speaks to rice boiled with milk, when he looks, he places proper food in himself. Indeed, he becomes possessed of radiance, offspring, livestock, the lustre of *brahman*, and happiness, who knows thus.

A final observation is in order. While these KĀ passages allow us to conclude that the wilderness is an appropriate location for the study of this Āraṇyaka's contents because it removes the actor from influences that would compromise their textual engagement and thus allows them to manage changes to their identity in a structured manner, the same correlations between wilderness and recitation are not made so explicitly in the Ṛgvedic Āraṇyakas. Nonetheless, I would argue that the latter texts do contain a similar conceptual framework in which restrictions on textual engagement are intended to control changes to the reciter's identity. A pertinent example of this appears in Śāṅkhā 1.1, which commences with a warning that directs attention to another risk of improper recitation, namely, the unwanted transferral of the intended ritual outcome from the reciter to someone else. As has been discussed elsewhere, the restrictions articulated in this passage draw their coherence from personhood's complexity and imply that recitation acts on the formative relationship between speaker and text (Caley Smith 2017, pp. 168–69). Thus, while the following restrictions are not explicitly connected to the need to recite in the wilderness, they point to a concern with controlled textuality shared by Ṛgvedic and Yajurvedic Āraṇyakas alike.

prajāpatir vai saṁvatsaras tasyaiṣa ātmā yan mahāvratam tasmād enat parasmai na śaṁsen net sarveṣāṁ bhūtānāṁ ātmānaṁ parasmin dadhānīty aho indrasyaṣa ātmā yan mahāvratam tasmād enat parasmai na śaṁsen ned indrasyaātmānaṁ parasmin dadhānīty aho yam evaitam ṛimayaṁ yajurmayaṁ sāmamayaṁ puruṣaṁ saṁskurvanti tasyaiṣa ātmā yan mahāvratam tasmād enat parasmai na śaṁsen net sarveṣāṁ chandasāṁ ātmānaṁ parasmin dadhānīti kāmāṁ tu sattriṇāṁ hotā śaṁset pitre vācāryāya vātmane haivāśya tacchandastaṁ bhavaty ātmanaiva tad yajñam samardhayati... || Śāṅkhā 1.1 ||

Prajāpati is the year; this is his body which is the Mahāvrata. Therefore, one should not announce this to another, nor (should one say) 'I place the body of all beings in another'. Likewise, this is the body of Indra which is the Mahāvrata. Therefore, one should not announce this to another, nor (should one say) 'I place the body of Indra in another'. Likewise, this which is the Mahāvrata is the body of this person made of the *ṛc*, *yajus*, and *sāman*, whom they complete. Therefore, one should not announce this to another, nor (should one say) 'I place the body of all the metres in another'. However, one may freely announce it as the *hotṛ* of the Sattrins for (one's) father or teacher, for that is recited just for oneself. Just with oneself does one fulfill the sacrifice.

While such passages reinforce scholarly appraisals of the Mahāvrata and Pravargya as providing the Āraṇyakas' core focus, they also do something much more relevant

to the question of their definition—they frame themselves with a concern for how their teachings are engaged with on the basis of the personal changes they are perceived to instigate. This concern is explicit in restrictions on recitation; however, a careful consideration of the *Āraṇyakas*' contents, their applications, and intertextual references shows that the concern with recitation and ritual identity is comprehensive in degree and can be expressed in many forms. And in this matter, despite chronological differences and compositional diversity, the *Āraṇyakas* show little internal discord.

4. Conclusions

We are finally in a position to return to the question of whether and how the *Āraṇyakas* can be regarded as a coherent collection with an identifiable contribution to make to our understanding of Vedic culture. Rather than forging decisive conclusions based on this preliminary examination, I offer a few responses and general observations.

A general survey of scholarly reactions to the *Āraṇyakas* from the late nineteenth to early twenty-first centuries shows that the singularly most significant issue complicating their definitive description has been their diversity both internally, on a text-by-text basis, and across the collection as a whole. This has largely resulted in accounts that are either so strongly focussed on the contents the *Āraṇyakas* do share that their diversity becomes secondary, left aside as an extrinsic and somewhat meaningless accretion of later materials, or which succumb to that diversity because, in lieu of explanation, the possibility of the *Āraṇyakas*' integrity is represented instead as miscellaneity. Nor has the full extent of their diversity been addressed in this study: for the purposes of an initial investigation into whether we can identify coherence behind the numerous interests and contents presented by these texts, I have preferred to focus on a 'control' based, firstly, on the four *Āraṇyakas* by name and, secondly, on the restrictions that have served a definitive function in their traditional representation and handling. My intention in doing so has been to compare accounts for patterns that illuminate why these restrictions have mattered and whether they represent a conceptually consistent response to concerns with recitation and secrecy.

But is there any value in attempting to define the *Āraṇyakas* in the first place? There is if our struggle to discuss these texts meaningfully has informed a lack of scholarly interest in what they contribute to our understanding of Vedic culture or a desensitization to their ongoing role in that culture and its evolutions. While there is little surprise in the fact that modern and traditional conceptualizations of these texts have differed, the critical extent of this difference should alert us to the equal fact that concerns with compositional style and chronology were unlikely to have been the major issue at stake for the *Āraṇyakas*' historical recipients, or indeed for their composers and compilers. I argue that if we are to locate different answers, we need to ask different questions—questions that, ideally, are responsive

to those that were asked by the people engaged in the pursuit of learning the Āraṇyakas and reciting their teachings. Thus, we learn from the Gṛhyasūtras that while content matters, textual engagement also distinguishes Vedic corpora and expresses ritual anticipations in ways that content alone may not. By heeding the attention to *vrata* and the optionality of studying the *rahasya*, we begin to see the nuance in the Āraṇyakas' restrictions and self-representations: if content informs differences in restrictions, the functional coherence of recitation in the construction of ritual identity shows these differences to be mutually explicable and reveals the necessity of the wilderness in a new light.

Finally, although I acknowledge the history that only linguistic chronologies can tell, it has been more pertinent to return to textuality and its self-representation. Unlike chronologies, textuality provides a polythetic basis on which to start appreciating the Āraṇyakas' value as multilayered texts: with the restriction on recitation both in place and grounded in controlled constructions of identity, it is understandable that secret recitations can occur alongside instructions for secret rituals, or that secret teachings can surround quotidian practices, or that earlier or later materials whose textuality was similarly anticipated were appended to these collections. Perhaps most compelling is the question of why later Sūtras see the Āraṇyakas' recitation to be cause of *anadhyāya* when later Upaniṣads endorse their recitation in the renunciation of orthodox practices and aims. It is, after all, worth considering what the commentators meant when they said that these entire texts were to be learned in the wilderness.

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Data availability

The data underlying this article are available in the article and in its online supplementary material.

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Notes

- 1 For a comprehensive overview of the disagreement over concepts such as experience and its applicability in a South Asian textual context, see Frederick Smith (2006, pp. 15–23). This discussion is complemented by Laurie Patton's theorisation and examination of the evidence for ritual agency and imagination in the late-Vedic Grhyasūtras (2012).
- 2 According to Sāyana's introductory comments on Taittirīya Āraṇyaka, four sections of the text were transmitted in the Brāhmaṇa of the Kāthaka school and do not have the restriction on learning in the wilderness applied to them; see verse 12: *nāraṇyādhitiniyamah sāvitṛādicatuṣṭaye | atas tadbrāhmaṇagranthe śrutam vyākhyātam apy adaḥ ||* Bhaṭṭa Bhāskara likewise identifies these sections, but states that the exception pertains to whether the prescribed regimen for study (vrata) is undertaken (Sastri and Rangacharya 1985, p. 1). It is likely, however, that the restriction on learning in the wilderness is implicit in Bhāskara's statement.
- 3 The attention to secret and dangerous rituals as a defining characteristic is reinforced by references to modern performances of the Mahāvratā and Pravargya; see for example Lopez (2022, p. 20) and Knipe (2015, p. 219) on the dangerous character of the Pravargya, and Knipe (2015, pp. 230–32) for the transgressive nature of the Mahāvratā. For the latter, see also the statement that much is done on the Mahāvratā day that is 'forbidden' (*bahu vā etasminn ahani kiñca kiñca vāraṇam kriyate*) repeated at Aitā 1.1.3, 1.2.1, 1.2.2, and 1.5.3 (x2).
- 4 TU 1 = Kaṭha Śikṣa Upaniṣad 11; see Witzel (1977). Note also that Sāyana refers to TU 1 as a *saṁhitopaniṣad*, which could be compared to the *Samhitā Upaniṣad* presented in Aitā 3 and Sāṅkhā 7-8.

- 5 Clearly asserted at *Āśvalāyana Gr̥hyasūtra* 1.1.1-4.
- 6 For a detailed discussion of ascetic practice in the *Gr̥hyasūtras* and the claim that material and spiritual benefits resulted particularly from undertaking the more rigorous *vratas* required for study of the esoteric portions of the Veda, see [Lubin \(2013\)](#).
- 7 *ĀGS* 3.4.5-6: *athāpi vijñāyate sa yadi tiṣṭhan vrajann āsinaḥ sayāno vā yanyam kratum adhite tenatena hāsyā kratuneṣṭam bhavatīti | vijñāyate tasya dvāv anadhyāyau yad ātmaśucir yad deśaḥ |* Compare *TĀ* 2.15.1 for the two restrictions and see *ŚB[M]* 11.5.7.4 for the permission to study when lying on a couch or while being anointed, adorned, etc. While these allowances appear to be acceptable in the case of ordinary *svādhyāya* (i.e., not including the *rahasya*), their acceptance is not so clear in the study of secret texts.
- 8 *ĀGS* 3.3.1 specifies the *ṛcs*, *yajus*, *sāmans*, the *atharvāṅgiras* hymns, the *Brāhmaṇas*, the *Kalpa Sūtras*, the *Gāthās*, the *Nārāsaṁsis*, the *Itihāsas* and the *Purāṇas*. Compare *ŚB[M]* 11.5.7.5.
- 9 For use of the term *rahasya*, see the discussion in [Lubin \(1994, p. 203\)](#) and, for example, the statement of *Mānava Gr̥hyasūtra* 1.23.21 (*rahasyam adhyeṣyamānaḥ pravargyam*). A distinction between study of the Veda and its secret texts is also suggested at *Mānava Dharmaśāstra* 2.165 (...*vedaḥ kṛtsno 'dhigantavyaḥ sarahasyo dvijanmanā*). The separation of the formal period of study and the advanced study of secret texts requiring special observances is clearly stated at *ŚāṅkhGS* 2.11.13.
- 10 For example, see Bhaṭṭa Bhāskara's statement *etad āraṇyakaṁ sarvaṁ nāvratī śrotum arhati* in his introduction to *TĀ* ([Sastri and Rangacharya 1985, p. 1](#)), repeated verbatim by Sāyaṇa in his introduction to the same ([Mitra 1872, p. 2](#)).
- 11 The *svādhyāya* of the *Āraṇyakas* is described in *ŚāṅkhGS* 6. The distinction between these passages appears to have been missed by both [Oldenberg \(1886, pp. 8–11\)](#) and [Lubin \(1994, p. 217\)](#) who regard *ŚāṅkhGS* 6 as a repetition and elaboration on *ŚāṅkhGS* 2.12. However, *ŚāṅkhGS* 6 clearly states that its subject is *svādhyāya* of the *Āraṇyaka* (*SGS* 6.1.1: *svādhyāyāraṇyakasya niyamān udāhariṣyāmaḥ*) whereas the preamble to *ŚāṅkhGS* 2.12 refers to the teacher's decision to impart the secret texts after the main period of Vedic study has been completed (*SGS* 2.11.13: *pūrṇe kālē carite brahmacarye śamyor bārhaspatyānte vede 'nūkte rahasyaṁ śrāvayiṣyanakālāniyamāṁ cādeśena pratiyeta*).
- 12 A *sūtra*-type text attributed to *Āśvalāyana* that apparently supplements the *Āśvalāyana Śrauta-* and *Gr̥hyasūtras*.
- 13 *MDhŚ* 4.123; cf. *Yājñavalkya Dharmaśāstra* 1.145 listed in [Olivelle \(2006\)](#).
- 14 Following the analysis of *ŚāṅkhGS* 2.11-12 by [Oldenberg \(1886, p. 8\)](#) and [Lubin \(1994, pp. 205–07, 212–14\)](#).
- 15 According to Masato [Fujii \(1997, p. 91\)](#), the *GGs*'s *aupaniṣada* relates to the *Kauthuma Chāndogya Upaniṣad* or the *Chāndogya Brāhmaṇa* (= *Mantra Brāhmaṇa* + *ChU*), while the *JGS*'s *aupaniṣada* pertains to the *Aupaniṣada Parvan* of the *Jaiminiya Āraṇyakagāṇa*. A different analysis of the latter is given by [Caland \(1922, p. 26\)](#), who suggests that this regimen corresponds to the study of the *Jaiminiya Brāhmaṇa*, *Vamśa Brāhmaṇa*, *Upaniṣad Brāhmaṇa*, *Kena Upaniṣad*, and the *Ārṣeya Brāhmaṇa*.
- 16 For the ritual orientation of *JUB*, see for example [Bodewitz \(2019, pp. 86–87\)](#): 'Let it be clear that every *Brāhmaṇa*...presupposes a systematic treatment of the ritual. Every text that does not suit this description is not a *Brāhmaṇa*. Therefore *JUB* is not a

regular Brāhmaṇa. On the other hand a real Upaniṣad (after an opening which clearly shows the connections with the relevant Vedic branch) does not take too much heed of the ritual as such. Therefore the JUB is not a real Upaniṣad. This text has too many connections with the Sāmavedic ritual. Indeed, an Āraṇyaka it may be.’

- 17 The correspondences between JUB and the Ṛgvedic Āraṇyakas may also be cited in support of the identification of JUB as an Āraṇyaka (e.g., JUB 1.9.5 ≈ AitĀ 5.3.2, JUB 3.3.2 ≈ AitĀ 2.1.4, JUB 3.3.6-13 ≈ AitĀ 2.2.3 ≈ ŚāṅkhĀ 1.6, and JUB 3.3.5 ≈ ŚāṅkhĀ 1.5). On the other hand, as Brian Black (2011) and Steven Lindquist (2011, 2023) have argued, the adaptation of earlier Vedic narratives and teachings play a critical role in establishing the authority of new genres. This strategy is particularly visible in the Upaniṣads.
- 18 The Āraṇyakas, including texts recognised as such in the Gṛhyasūtras, have a number of contents in common. These include the Pravargya mantras (TĀ 5, KĀ 1, Āraṇyagāṇa 6), the Mahānāmni verses (AitĀ, Āraṇyaka Saṁhitā), the *puriṣapādāni* appended to the Mahānāmni verses and which also appear embedded in TĀ 1.20 and 1.23, and the Mantha recitation (ŚāṅkhĀ 9, ŚB 14). The role of these contents in the identification of Āraṇyakas or in descriptions of the corpus has not, to my current knowledge, been subject to close examination.
- 19 Sāyaṇa states the need for care explicitly in his introduction to TĀ (v. 7ab): *kāṇḍam āraṇyakam sarvaṁ vyākhyātavyaṁ prayatnaḥ* |
- 20 See Sāyaṇa and Bhaṭṭa Bhāskara’s discussions of this in their introductions to the TĀ, in which case the issue is the acknowledgement that certain of the TĀ’s contents have been (separately or previously?) transmitted in the *Kāṭhaka Brāhmaṇa*. Regarding AitĀ, Sāyaṇa states that the *āraṇyakakāṇḍa* of the *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* – including all five of its sections – is known as such due to the requirement that it is studied in the wilderness (introduction to AitĀ vv. 5–6ab in Mitra 1876, p. 2). This expectation – and the fact that it provides a sufficient basis for the inclusion of diverse texts – is also articulated in Sāyaṇa’s comments on AitĀ 5, which he states has been included in the Āraṇyaka due to the intention that it be subject to the restriction on location (Mitra 1876, p. 236).
- 21 The key characteristics of the Upaniṣads’ approach to representing their secrecy via rhetoric and narrative have been summarised by Brian Black (2011). In this essay, Black pertinently observes that while the Upaniṣads might describe their teachings as secretive, it is possible to see the Upaniṣads as ‘less cryptic or enigmatic’ and the earlier Vedic texts as ‘more inherently secretive’ (2011, p. 120). See also Lindquist (2023, pp. 211–12).
- 22 Although both Ṛgvedic Āraṇyakas present restrictions on recitation, neither text contains explicit references to the wilderness. It is however arguable that the restrictions on location found in the TĀ and KĀ share a conceptual framework with the restrictions in the AitĀ and ŚāṅkhĀ, especially given the texts’ common references and shared intertextual citations. Unfortunately, the level of detail required for such an analysis is beyond the scope of the present essay.
- 23 Malamoud (1977, p. 108).
- 24 ṚV 1.164.39 translation by Stephanie Jamison and Joel Brereton (2014, p. 358).
- 25 Malamoud (1977, p. 109).
- 26 Malamoud (1977, pp. 109–10).
- 27 TĀ 2.15.3 (Malamoud 1977, p. 110): *yā evāṁ vidvān mahārātrā usāsy ūdite vrājāṁs tiṣṭhann āsīnaḥ śāyāno ’rāṇye grāme vā yāvattarāsaṁ svādhyāyām ādhīte sārvaṁl lokāṁ jayati sārvaṁl lokān anṛṇo ’nusāṁ carati...*

- 28 ṚV 10.71.6 is cited at AitĀ 3.2.4, ŚāṅkhĀ 8.6, and TĀ 1.3.1 and 2.15.1. ṚV 1.164.39 occurs at TĀ 2.11, while ṚV 1.161.1-41 is required by AitĀ 1.5.3, 5.3.2 and ŚāṅkhĀ 2.18, and ṚV 1.164.41 is cited at TĀ 1.9.6 (Mysore ed.). In addition, references to ṚV 1.164.31 occur at AitĀ 2.1.6, KĀ 2.101, and TĀ 4.7.1 and 5.6.4.
- 29 Witzel (2004, p. 16).
- 30 Witzel (2004, pp. 82–84).
- 31 Witzel (2004, p. 85) translates ‘dreifach glänzend.’ The connotation of *śukriya* as the name of certain Pravargya *sāmans*, not to mention the broader association of the Pravargya and the sun, may well also be intended here.
- 32 Malamoud (1977, p. 83) observes the same deprivation of the reciter in the TĀ.
- 33 Witzel (2004, p. 76).