Preface

Sir William Jones' *Third Anniversary Discourse on the Hindoos*, delivered to the Asiatic Society of Bengal on 2 February, 1786, marks the genesis of an idea which influences perceptions of South Asia to this day: to wit, the distribution of modern languages and ethnic groups, and frequently strained social relations, are all habitually expressed in terms of a racial divide, which is attributed to an "Aryan invasion" of the Subcontinent some 3500 years ago. Adherents of the "Aryan hypothesis" ranged from imperial administrators to nationalist leaders in the 19th century and from prominent scholars to religious fanatics in the 20th. Although its support of the *status quo* will probably ensure its survival on the policital stage,[1] the idea has recently been challenged by archaeologists who – along with linguists – are best qualified to evaluate its validity. Lack of convincing material (or osteological) traces left behind by the incoming Indo-Aryan speakers, the possibility of explaining cultural change without reference to external factors and – above all – an altered worldview (Shaffer 1984) have all contributed to a questioning of assumptions long taken for granted and buttressed by the accumulated weight of two centuries of scholarship.

However, archaeology offers only one perspective, that of material culture, which is in direct conflict with the findings of the other discipline claiming a key to the solution of the "Aryan problem", linguistics. The membership of Indic dialects in the Indo-European family, based not only on lexical but structural criteria, their particularly close relationship to the Iranian branch, and continuing satisfaction with a family-tree model to express these links (Baldi 1988), all support migrations as the principal (albeit not sole) means of language dispersal. In the face of such conflict it may be difficult to find avenues of cooperation, yet a satisfactory resolution of the puzzles set by the distribution of Indo-Aryan languages in

[1] In spite of spirited opposition, which has intensified recently – cf. Biswas 1990; Choudhury 1993; Telagiri 1993. Unfortunately, political motivation (usually associated with Hindu revivalism, ironic in view of Tilak's theory of an Arctic home) renders this opposition devoid of scholarly value. Assertions of the indigenous origin of Indo-Aryan languages and an insistence on a long chronology for Vedic and even Epic literature are only a few of the most prominent tenets of this emerging lunatic fringe.

South Asia demands it. The present volume aims for the first step in that direction, by removing mutual misconceptions regarding the subject matter, aims, methods and limitations of linguistics and archaeology, which have greatly contributed to the confusion currently surrounding "Aryans". Given the debates raging on these issues within as well as between the two disciplines, a guide to the range of contemporary opinion should be particularly valuable for anyone wishing to bridge the disciplinary divide. Although the studies focus on the transition from Bronze Age urbanisation on the Indus to Iron Age urbanisation on the Gaṅgā, their conclusions will profoundly affect our perception of the subsequent course of South Asian civilisation. At the same time, the range of issues addressed by the papers should find relevance well beyond the geographical confines of the Subcontinent; indeed, the volume neatly encapsulates the relationship between two disciplines intimately involved in a study of the past.

The papers presented here were first delivered during a conference on Archaeological and Linguistic Approaches to Ethnicity in Ancient South Asia, held in Toronto on the 4th, 5th and 6th of October, 1991.[2] They are organised into two sections. The first contains papers which explicitly addressed theoretical issues involved in a study of material culture, paleoethnicity and language change, particularly concerning the nature of source materials, the definition of fundamental analytical units, and procedures for the construction and testing of hyoptheses combining linguistic and material-cultural evidence. It begins with a survey of theoretical issues, along with a plea for interdisciplinary cooperation, by G. Erdosy. He argues that linguists and archaeologists have been studying two different (albeit related) problems – the current distribution of languages in South Asia on the one hand, and the transition between the Indus and Gangetic Civilisations on the other – and that much of the present confusion has been engendered by the view that an invasion of Indo-Aryan speaking races in the 2nd millennium B.C. explains both. Only recently have scholars of both disciplines begun to unscramble the

[2] With the exception of contributions by P. O. Skjærvø and K. R. Norman, which were solicited in order to fill certain gaps in the range of subjects covered. Conversely, the conference included presentations by T. C. Young ('The Iranians: Medes and Persians') and K. K. Young ('Tamil identity as portrayed in Sangam literature') which, due to constraints of time, could not be revised by their authors for publication. Lack of time also prevented R. H. Meadow from participating in the revision of a joint paper with F. T. Hiebert for publication; their original presentation ('Late prehistoric interactions between Central and South Asia') is now entitled 'South Asia from a Central Asian perspective', under the sole authorship of F. T. Hiebert. Although thus excluded from the final publication, I wish – as organiser – to register my gratitude to the above scholars here for their stimulating contributions to the conference itself.

various processes conflated into an "Aryan invasion(s)", thereby laying the foundations for more meaningful cooperation. Erdosy also suggests, that for all its shortcomings, Renfrew's study of Indo-European origins[3] is on a sound methodological footing when it insists on comparisons of cultural dynamics derived independently from linguistic and material-cultural data, instead of the traditional grouping for languages and linguistic boundaries in the archaeological record. This point is illustrated with reference to the problems of the initial dispersal of Indo-Iranian languages, and of the widespread adoption of Old Indo-Aryan in South Asia after its arrival there, in the context of the transition from the Indus to the Indo-Gangetic cultural tradition.

The second paper, by K. A. R. Kennedy, offers of a historical overview of linguistic, archaeological and, particularly, physical-anthropological research. The author's principal conclusion, based on his own studies, is that while discontinuities in physical types have certainly been found in South Asia, they are dated to the 5th/4th, and to the 1st millennium B. C., respectively, too early and too late to have any connection with "Aryans". What is more, since the latter are a cultural, not a biological, construct, they could never be identified in the osteological record.

Questions of identity, and the nature of our source materials, so crucial to the resolution of the "Aryan problem", occupy the attention of M. M. Deshpande, as well. Written from the standpoint of the linguist, to complement the preceding statements by, respectively, an archaeologist and a physical anthropologist, his paper assesses the quality of the linguistic data preserved in the Ṛgveda. It also revisits the controversies surrounding the contact and convergence of Indo-Aryan and Dravidian languages in prehistoric times, as exemplified by the development of retroflex sounds in the former. In his conclusions, Deshpande argues for the careful separation of ethnic, linguistic and cultural groups; and while he deplores their loose identification with archaeological assemblages, he remains cautiously optimistic about interdisciplinary cooperation.

The succeeding contribution, the first of two by M. Witzel, also begins by assessing the quality of linguistic (and historical) data obtainable from the Ṛgveda, along with the potential of a study of linguistic stratification, contact and convergence. Next, the evidence of place names, above all hydronomy, is scrutinised, followed by an evaluation of some of the most frequently invoked models of language change, in light of this analysis. As Witzel stresses, images of mass migration may have originated with 19th century linguists, but exist today principally in the minds of

[3] presented in the greatest detail in Renfrew 1987, although anticipated in Renfrew 1973, and summarised in Renfrew 1988 (followed by an extensive critique from a variety of authors), 1989 and 1990.

archaeologists and polemicists. In conclusion are outlined some obstacles to a writing of early South Asian history, including outmoded models of language change, overreactions to them (by denying the validity of any migrationist model) by both archaeologists and Hindu fundamentalists, and the continued uncritical use of late, Epic and Puranic, materials in research.

Placed against Witzel's contribution, the paper by J. Shaffer and D. Lichtenstein will illustrate the gulf still separating archaeology and linguistics. It reflects recent disillusionment with the traditional paradigms dominating archaeological explanation be the cyclical models of cultural growth-florescence-decay, the continuing prominence – in South Asian archaeology at least – of diffusionism, or the obsession with the "Harappan Civilisation" at the expense of other social groups constituting the cultural mosaic of the Greater Indus Valley. Apart from the influence of 19th century ideas on the civilising mission of European powers, such views have also been fostered by an inadequate definition of "cultures" as recurring assemblages of artefacts (after Childe 1929). The authors, therefore, attempt to construct new analytical units based on a study of material culture, with special focus on the concept of "cultural tradition". The paper builds on an earlier study Shaffer (1991), by placing emphasis on hitherto neglected structural features of cultural traditions; more importantly, it demonstrates by way of an example the potential of this method to lay bare the dynamics of long-term cultural change. The new concepts mark a significant advance in ways of handling the material culture of South Asia. Although they could certainly accommodate models of language change, however, the authors stress the indigenous development of South Asian civilisation from the Neolithic onward, and downplay the role of language in the formation of (pre-modern) ethnic identities.

The last two papers, contributed by O. Skjærvø and A. Sharma, broaden the horizons of the volume in different ways. The former assesses the potential of ancient Iranian (particularly Avestan) literature for a study of linguistic and cultural change on the Iranian Plateau – an issue of considerable interest to Indologists, given the close relations between Indic and Iranian languages, which argues for their common descent. Although not as extensive, or well preserved, as the Vedic tradition, the Avestan texts could shed considerable light on the evolution of Iranian languages and society, once (formidable) problems of chronology are resolved. Sharma, by contrast, outlines, and pleads for more careful consideration of, traditional attitudes towards such issues as the dating and historical veracity of Vedic literature; in addition, he considers some of the contemporary, South Asian dimensions of the "Aryan problem", which continues to inform political relations in various parts of the Subcontinent.

Although papers in the second section also contain discussions of theoretical issues, their principal aim has been to illuminate aspects of the "Aryan problem" through extensive case studies. They thus provide an excellent cross-section of the range of issues examined, and of approaches adopted, within both disciplines even if they (with the exception of Southworth's contribution) rarely venture outside their own field of specialisation. The first three papers have been contributed by archaeologists, who may be classified into two groups: those who accept that some movement of people from Central to South Asia took place in the 2nd millennium B. C., and those who feel that the dynamics of South Asian cultural traditions are sufficient to explain the transition from the Indus to the Gangetic Civilisations. The contribution of F. T. Hiebert belongs to the first category: the provides an exhaustive analysis of the history of interactions between Central and South Asia, made possible to a large extent by the recent opening up of Russian Turkestan to foreign scholars. The strength of contacts, according to this analysis, reaches a peak in the 1st quarter of the 2nd millennium B. C., when even some – small scale – population movement can be detected in the direction of the Indo-Iranian Borderlands. It is at this time that the khanate structure of Central Asia came to be adopted by South Asian social groups, leading to the type of society described in the earliest South Asia literature. It is this process, rather than the bare fact of population movements, which plays a decisive role in the course of South Asian history.

In a similar vein, W. A. Fairservis compares the social structure described in the Ṛgveda to that revealed by excavations at the major Bronze Age urban centre of Altyn Depe. Several crucial arguments follow: 1) During the Bronze Age, major urban civilisations flourished in Central and South Asia, which we may tentatively ascribe to Elamo-Dravidian speakers. 2) They were connected to one another – at least partly – by mobile pastoral groups existing on their periphery and, perhaps, speaking Indo-Iranian languages. 3) Towards the early 2nd millennium B. C. dominance shifted from the sedentary urban to the mobile pastoral group in both areas; although this may have entailed some population movement, it is this shift in power between two coexisting groups which is crucial. 4) The shift in power also fostered the adoption of Indo-Iranian (OIA) languages in South Asia along with a class based social structure first developed in Turkestan. Although the finer points of this elegant scheme remain to be worked out, it will provide a valuable stimulus to further discussion, and only deepens our sense of loss at the tragic death of the author just prior to the publication of this volume.

By contrast, the final discussion, by Kenoyer, stresses that the cultural history of South Asia in the 2nd millennium B. C. may be explained without reference to external agents. The points is illustrated by a study

of craft traditions and long distance trade networks. On the one hand, the former exhibit a surprising degree of continuity from the Indus Civilisation onwards; on the other, the latter are severed precisely at the time when the postulated "Aryan invasion" from Central Asia took place. Neither is it correct to speak of a systems collapse since several areas continued to support a hierarchy of settlements and flourishing craft traditions, the latter relying now on a more limited range of raw materials thanks to the said collapse of long distance trade networks. Such views will serve as a much needed antidote to traditional explanations, although they remain to be reconciled with the principal concern of South Asian linguistics, namely the evidence for the external origins – and likely arrival in the 2nd millennium B.C. – of Indo-Aryan languages. They are also a reaction to the concept of cataclysmic invasions, for which there is little evidence indeed, although such concepts are principally held by archaeologists nowadays, not by linguists who postulate more gradual and complex phenomena.

An illustration of the last statement is provided by the first of three contributions by linguists. F. Southworth begins by defining speech communities as basic units of analysis and continues by examining the history of the two most prominent speech communities in South Asia, namely Indo-Aryan and Dravidian. Their internal subdivisions and evolution are studied, followed by their interaction in pre- and protohistoric times. The central theses are that the distribution of Dravidian speakers must have been much wider in the past and, based on the evidence of substratum influences on Indo-Aryan, that they must have adopted an Indo-Aryan language throughout the northern part of South Asia. Acculturation, therefore, and not genocide or forcible expulsions are responsible for the present dominance of Indo-Aryan languages.

Southworth's broad survey is followed by the much keener focus K. R. Norman on the existence of dialectal variation in Old Indo-Aryan. This must largely be reconstructed from Middle Indo-Aryan due to the suppression (in oral transmission) of much of the variation in the earlier literature under the influence of Pāṇini. In particular, MIA variants of forms that are clearly Indo-Aryan, but are unattested in Old Indo-Aryan, are brought together in order to show the existence of OIA dialects. The existence of such dialects is, in turn, ascribed to the arrival of Indo-Aryan speakers in several waves, and to their subsequent isolation from one another, and interaction with the speakers of non-Indo-Aryan languages, within South Asia. Dialect variation also occupies the attention of R. Salomon, who takes his analysis a step further: apart from identifying dialectal variation he examines whether they may be correlated with certain literary genres and whether the latter can, in turn, be ascribed to certain social groups.

Together, the last three papers exemplify the painstaking research required even to create the building blocks for linguistic theories, and the progress already made in that direction. Similarly, M. Witzel's second paper demonstrates that the study of the spatial and temporal parametres of the Ṛgvedic hymns has advanced far beyond the simplistic notions generally held, especially in English (only)-speaking academic communities. His study (one in a series of important contributions – see also Witzel 1980, 1987, 1989, 1991) takes a major step towards the writing of early South Asian history, by removing two misconceptions: 1) that the Ṛgveda is a particularly difficult, indeed impenetrable, text and 2) that its study for the reconstruction of history is ultimately not very rewarding.

Rounding off the volume are two papers concerning the *soma/haoma* cult, which is at the centre of Old Indo-Aryan literature and ritual. The first, by Asko Parpola, draws on recent archaeological discoveries in Bronze Age Margiana and refines this author's earlier views regarding the spatial and chronological relationships of Indo-Iranian languages and of archaeological cultures in Central and South Asia (Parpola 1988). Parpola's paper is complemented by a study of the botanical evidence by H. Nyberg. He concludes that the effects of certain substances on humans, the characterisation of *soma/haoma* in Ṛgvedic ritual texts, and the geographical distribution of certain plant species, when considered systematically, suggest *ephedras* as the likeliest raw materials for the sacred Indo-Iranian libation.

Acknowledgements

In conclusion, it is my pleasure to thank numerous individuals and institutions for their assistance both in the organisation of the conference and in the publication of its proceedings. Funding was provided by a grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada under their Aid to Occasional Scholarly Conferences program; it was supplemented by a donation from the Department of East Asian Studies of the University of Toronto. Support for the original grant application was provided by the Centre for South Asian Studies, and its directors Profs. Milton Israel (past) and Narendra Wagle (present). Logistical support – booking of accommodations and venues for the various sessions – was kindly extended by Professors Tim Barnes (Department of Classics and Trinity College, University of Toronto) and Frank Hoff (Department of East Asian Studies and Victoria College, University of Toronto). The smooth flow of the conference would not have been possible without the constant and cheerful assistance of Winnifred Louis and Nusha Keyghobadi; to the former I am also indebted for typing and initial editing of the