

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 parameters of the R̥gvedic 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 R̥gveda 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 *somalhaoma* 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 *somalhaoma* in R̥gvedic 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.

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The progress of the present volume from conception to eventual birth was punctuated by the sad demise of my father in 1991, and of both founding fathers of the scientific study of South Asian prehistory, George Dales (in 1992) and Walter Fairervis (in 1994). This volume is affectionately dedicated to their memory.

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