

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 Rgvedic 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 Rgveda 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 Rgvedic 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

papers. Arrangements for publication of the proceedings were made with the help of Prof. Michael Witzel, one of the participants in the Conference. Last but not least, I could not have devoted the time and effort, to both the organisation of the sessions and the eventual publication, without the security of a Canada Research Fellowship awarded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. I hope the present volume will serve as a fitting tribute to their continuing commitment to academic excellence in Canada.

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.

Toronto, September 1995

George Erdosy