The Ṛgveda: Introduction

India has a magnificent tradition of religious literature stretching over three and a half millennia, with a vast range of styles and subjects—from almost impersonal reflections on the mysteries of the cosmos, the divine, and humankind's relation to them to deeply intimate expressions of worship. This literature is justly celebrated, not only within the religious traditions that gave rise to the various works but around the world among people with no ties to those religious traditions. The Ṛgveda is the first of these monuments, and it can stand with any of the subsequent ones. Its range is very large—encompassing profound and uncompromising meditations on cosmic enigmas, joyful and exuberant tributes to the wonders of the world, ardent praise of the gods and their works, moving and sometimes painful expressions of personal devotion, and penetrating reflections on the ability of mortals to make contact with and affect the divine and cosmic realms through sacrifice and praise. Thus, much of what will distinguish later Indian religious literature is already present in the Ṛgveda. Yet, though its name is known, the celebration of the Ṛgveda is muted at best, even within its own tradition, and, save for a few famous hymns, its contents go unnoticed outside of that tradition.

India also has a magnificent literary tradition, characterized in great part by sophisticated poetic techniques and devices and a poetic self-consciousness that glories in the transformative work that words can effect on their subjects. Again,

the Ṛgveda is the first monument of this literary tradition and at least the equal of the later literature. The exuberance with which the poets press the boundaries of language in order to create their own reflection of the complex and ultimately impenetrable mysteries of the cosmos and the verbal devices they developed to mirror these cosmic intricacies resonate through the rest of the literary tradition. Yet, again, the Ṛgveda figures very little in standard accounts of Indian literature and is little read or appreciated as literature.

Thus the Ṛgveda is not only the beginning but also one of the paramount expressions of both the religious tradition and the literary tradition, combining these two roles in a text that displays great variety, skill, and beauty. Surely it deserves a modern English translation that makes these riches available to a wider audience. Yet it does not have one; the only readily available complete English translation, the nineteenth-century product of R. T. H. Griffith, conceals rather than reveals the wonders of the Ṛgveda and would (properly) discourage any sensitive reader from further pursuit of the text. Why this lacuna? The answer is quite simple: the Ṛgveda is very long and very hard. Neither of these factors alone would necessarily hinder translation—both very long texts, like the Sanskrit epics, and very hard texts, like the Avestan Gāthās, are receiving their due—but the combination of the two has proved very daunting. We two translators, after some fifteen years of concentrated effort on the translation and more than forty years of living with and working with the text, can attest to the rigors of the task—but even more to its joys. And we feel privileged to have spent so much time in intimate contact with the poets who shaped such an extraordinary religious and literary achievement at the very dawn of the Indian tradition.

In the introduction that follows we try to give readers some grounding in the world and worldview of the Ṛgveda and to provide enough information to approach the translation without undue bafflement. It is not meant as a comprehensive treatment of the many subjects touched on, but only a stepping stone to the text itself and the readers' direct experience of the hymns.

I. Who, What, Where, When?

A. VEDA AND ṚGVEDA

The Ṛgveda is the oldest Sanskrit text, composed in an archaic form of the language, known as Vedic or Vedic Sanskrit. It is a collection of over a thousand poems, composed by a number of different poets over the course of some considerable period of time. The poems are primarily hymns praising various gods and ritual elements and procedures, designed to be recited during ritual performance; that is, they are *liturgical* compositions. However, they are also finely crafted and self-conscious *literary* productions of the highest quality.

As the first text in Sanskrit, the Ṛgveda is somewhat isolated, and many of the difficulties of its interpretation stem from the fact that there are no parallel or closely contemporary texts. Yet, it is poised between two bodies of textual

material that can contribute to its interpretation, and the characteristic features from these two types of texts, mingled uniquely in the Ṛgveda, help account for its distinctive quality. On the one hand, it stands at the end of a long tradition of Indo-European and Indo-Iranian praise poetry, most nearly mirrored in the Old Avestan Gāthās attributed to Zarathustra. On the other, it stands as the earliest of the ritual texts collectively known as the Vedas and forms a part of the interlocking ritual system set forth in the Vedas.

There are four Vedas: the Ṛgveda, Sāmaveda, Yajurveda, and Atharvaveda. The first three are the provinces of individual priests, who function together to perform the solemn rituals of the Vedic liturgical system, later, in the middle Vedic period, known as *śrauta* rituals. Each of those three Vedas also represents a different type of ritual speech. Thus, the Ṛgveda belongs to the *Hotar* priest, who *recites* or *chants* the poetry; the Sāmaveda to the *Udgātar* priest, who *sings* the poetry to set tunes called *sāman*s. The vast majority of the verbal material in the Sāmaveda is borrowed from the Ṛgveda. The Yajurveda is the realm of the *Adhvaryu* priest; his verbal product is the *yajus*, a short verbal formula that generally accompanies the *physical actions* that are the main task of the Adhvaryu. Each of these three priests is accompanied by other priests who share their principal functions. So in the later soma ritual, for example, the number of priests can be sixteen or seventeen. The Atharvaveda stands outside of this ritual system and consists primarily of hymns and spells of a more "popular" nature, often magical or healing. Despite its lack of connection to the solemn ritual, the Atharvaveda is especially important for Ṛgvedic studies because it is linguistically the closest text to the Ṛgveda and is thus the second oldest text in Sanskrit. The two texts also share a number of passages and hymns, although the Atharvaveda often varies the wording or order of verses. The Ṛgvedic hymns found also in the Atharvaveda are often drawn from the younger layers of the Ṛgveda.

We will treat the structure of the text in more detail below; here we will provide only the most general outline. The text consists of 1028 hymns divided into ten books or *maṇḍala*s (lit. "circles"), of varying lengths. The arrangement of the hymns within each maṇḍala and the arrangement of the maṇḍalas themselves attest strongly to the deliberate quality of the collection and organization of the hymns, as we will demonstrate below. Maṇḍalas II–VII are known as the "Family Books," each attributed to a different bardic family. Maṇḍala VIII contains smaller collections attributed to particular poets or poetic families, and has a somewhat aberrant character. Maṇḍala IX contains all and only the hymns dedicated to Soma Pavamāna, "self-purifying soma," the deified ritual drink at a particular moment in its ritual preparation. Maṇḍalas I and X were added to the collection later, though they both contain much that is contemporaneous with the linguistic and religious level of the core parts of the Ṛgveda, as well as some more recent and "popular" material. Both I and X contain exactly 191 hymns, a synchronicity that was clearly not by chance.

B. DATE AND CULTURAL CONTEXT OF THE ṚGVEDA

As was mentioned above, the Ṛgveda is part of the long tradition of Indo-European praise poetry, composed and performed orally and deploying inherited set verbal formulae, on which the poets also ring changes. Thus, whatever date(s) we assign to the actual composition of the particular hymns found in the text, the temporal horizon of the Ṛgveda stretches a good deal further back, in that the poetic techniques and even some of its precise verbal realizations go back many centuries, even millennia.

The dating of the Ṛgveda has been and is likely to remain a matter of contention and reconsideration because as yet little has been uncovered in the material record or in the hymns themselves that allows us to date the period of the Ṛgvedic hymns. One attempt at dating begins with an absence. Since the Ṛgveda does not mention iron but does mention other kinds of metal, it is likely a pre–Iron Age, Bronze Age text. The dates at which iron appears in the archaeological record in South Asia differ in different parts of the subcontinent. For the northwest, which comprises the geographic horizon of the Ṛgveda, iron began to be manufactured around 1200–1000 BCE. The Ṛgvedic hymns, therefore, would have to have been composed no later than this period. However, iron is attested in the Atharvaveda. While the Ṛgveda is older than the Atharvaveda, there is no basis for assuming a substantial gap in time between the end of the Ṛgvedic period and the Atharvaveda. Therefore the date of the latest portions of the Ṛgveda is not likely to be very much earlier that 1200–1000 BCE. It is also likely that the period of the composition of Ṛgvedic hymns did not extend more than several centuries before this terminus ad quem. Witzel (in Jamison and Witzel 1992: 2 n. 2) has noted that the poets and kings mentioned in the *anukramaṇī*s (indices) and in the hymns themselves comprise perhaps five or six generations. Generously rounding these numbers, we can then place the period of the composition of the Ṛgvedic hymns sometime within the period 1400–1000 BCE or, even more approximately, within the second half of the second millennium BCE. At best these dates encompass only the hymns of the Ṛgveda as we have them. The poetic conventions on which the Ṛgveda was built are very much older, extending back to the Indo-Iranian period with roots into the Indo-European period. The Ṛgveda is only the surface of a very deep tradition.

While the date of the Ṛgveda remains problematic, the hymns provide information that helps identify the geographic area in which the hymns were composed. Above all, the rivers mentioned in the text help establish the place of the Ṛgveda. These rivers range from the Kabul and Kurram rivers in present-day Afghanistan to the Ganges in the east. Its center is the greater Punjab, the region of the Indus and its major tributaries. Following the likely internal chronology of the Ṛgveda, geographic references in the text suggest a movement from the northwest toward the east. Thus while the earliest parts of the Ṛgveda were likely composed in the northwest, in the latest parts of the text the area has extended further into the subcontinent, and its center has shifted toward Kurukṣetra, roughly the area of the modern state of Haryana.

One of the reasons that the Ṛgveda is difficult to date is that there is no material evidence that we can clearly associate with the people who composed the Ṛgveda, the people who called themselves Āryas. Nor would we expect very much material evidence, since the hymns make no mention of any permanent religious structures or enduring settlements. The Āryas formed instead a semi-nomadic pastoralist society, in which seasons of settlement alternated with seasons of migration. This migration likely contributed to the extension of the culture into new areas. The period of movement was also the season of conflict in the competition for land and the season of cattle-raiding, especially for younger males eager to acquire assets on which to establish their own livelihood. Cattle were the primary source of wealth, although the hymns also mention sheep, buffaloes, goats, and camels. Horses too were essential and prized, since they enabled the Āryas' mobility and contributed to their success in battle. Although the economy was fundamentally pastoral, the Āryas practiced some agriculture during the times of settlement; one hymn (IV.57) specifically celebrates agricultural divinities, and the plow is occasionally mentioned. The hymns refer to *yáva* "barley" or "field grain," which was used both for food and in the rituals. The Ṛgveda does not attest rice cultivation.

In addition to the absence of material remains, another difficulty in describing the cultural context of the Ṛgveda is that its hymns depict only a part of the religion and society at the period. First, the Ṛgveda represents the continuation of an elite tradition also attested in the Avesta and therefore quite ancient. As such, it reflects the religious practice only of the upper strata of Ārya society. Second, it is primarily a collection of liturgical hymns for use in the soma sacrifice, surely the most prestigious ritual of the period but still only one kind of ritual, representing a particular and limited set of religious concerns. Finally, the soma sacrifices were sponsored and performed by socially elite men, and they reflected the religious concerns of these men. The text did not directly address the religious lives of women or of other social classes nor indeed even other aspects of the religious lives of elite males. Thus, while the Ṛgveda is a sizable text and from it we can derive a great deal of information about the soma rite and about those who participated in it, we are still dealing only with a segment of Ārya religion and society. However, we can gather information on non-elite concerns and on the daily life and pursuits of the elite incidentally, often through similes or imagery modeling ritual elements and procedures or through the crediting of gods with activities also appropriate to humans, such as warfare.

Indirectly, we can also get some information about other aspects of religion. First, although the soma rite was primarily focused on the god Indra, already in the Ṛgvedic period it had begun to incorporate the worship of gods around whom independent ritual traditions existed. So, for example, the Aśvins were worshiped already during the Indo-Iranian period and in the Pravargya rite, which is not a soma ritual. But already in the Ṛgvedic period the Aśvins were recipients of soma, and by the time of the later Veda the Pravargya rite had been incorporated into the soma tradition. Moreover, especially in book X, there are hymns that address a

variety of religious interests separate from those of the soma rite. There are funeral (X.14–16) and wedding (X.85) hymns. There are hymns against cowives (X.145), against rivals (X.166), against witchcraft (X.155), against miscarriage (X.162), and against disease (X.161, 163). There are hymns for the safety of cattle (X.169), for conception (X.183), and for successful birth (X.184). In short the Ṛgveda already attests rites that address domestic and individual issues principally associated with the Atharvaveda. These hymns point to substantial ritual activity outside of the soma rituals.

C. WHAT DO THE HYMNS DO?

The overwhelming majority of Ṛgvedic hymns have as their major aim to praise the god(s) to whom the hymn is dedicated and to induce said god(s) to repay the praise with requested favors. To a certain extent different gods receive different types of praise, but the praise generally focuses on the appearance, qualities, and power of the gods and on their remarkable deeds. Some divinities attract particular attention to their appearance: for instance, the seductive beauty of Dawn, the glittering ostentation of the Maruts, the endlessly fascinating transformations of physical fire and its divine embodiment Agni. Others, like the Ādityas, have few if any physical characteristics, but are more celebrated for their mental and moral qualities. The supernatural powers of almost all the gods receive abundant praise, though again the types of power lauded differ from god to god.

Their powers are actualized in their deeds, the recounting of which occupies a large portion of many Ṛgvedic hymns. Some gods have a robust narrative mythology, and episodes from this mythology are constantly related or alluded to; the most prominent example is Indra with his catalogue of great victories over both divine and mortal enemies. Those without much narrative mythology tend to be credited with general cosmogonic deeds or with the regular maintaining and ordering of the world and its inhabitants.

This praise of divine powers and deeds is not a disinterested act, for the aim is to persuade or constrain the gods to mobilize these same powers on behalf of their worshipers and to replicate their great deeds in the present for the benefit of these same worshipers. In the all-pervasive system of reciprocity and exchange that might be termed the dominant social ideology underlying the Ṛgveda, praise of the gods *requires* requital: they must provide recompense for what they receive from those praising them. Worshipers are not shy about specifying what they want in exchange: the good things of this world—wealth, especially in livestock and gold, sons, and a long lifespan—and divine aid in defeating opponents, be they enemies in battle or rival sacrificers. The sign that the praise has been successful is the epiphany of the god(s) addressed, so that many hymns urgently invite the dedicand(s) to journey to the particular sacrifice in which the poet is participating and then jubilantly proclaim the arrival of the god(s) at that particular sacrificial ground as the ritual is taking place.

This epiphany at the sacrifice brings us back to the liturgical role of the hymns, for it should never be forgotten that almost all the hymns in the Ṛgveda were composed to accompany the physical acts of the ritual, which are happening simultaneously with the recitation. But the word "accompany" here is too weak. The hymns are not merely verbal background music, as it were. As will be discussed further below, another important aspect of Vedic ideology is the belief in the power of the word: words make things happen. The physical actions of ritual alone would be insufficient; it is the skillfully crafted, properly formulated hymn, the verbal portion of the ritual, that makes the liturgical acts effective.

While the great majority of Ṛgvedic hymns have a liturgical form that obviously reflects the soma rite, there are examples in which this model is not evident. Among them are the *ākhyāna* or "narrative" hymns, as Oldenberg (1883, 1885) called them, which take the form of a dialogue between two or more figures. These hymns occur in the later portions of the Ṛgveda, especially book X. They include, for example, dialogues between the sage Agastya and his wife Lopāmudrā (I.179); between Yama and his twin sister Yamī (X.10); between the celestial Apsaras Urvaśī and her abandoned mortal husband Purūravas (X.95); among the monkey Vṛṣākapi, the god Indra, and Indra's wife Indrāṇī (X.86); and between Indra's dog, Saramā, and the tribe of Paṇis (X.108). It is possible that some of these hymns comment on the soma rite, but others were composed for different ritual purposes, which have to be surmised, if they can be surmised at all, from the contents of the hymns. Our introductions to individual hymns discuss possible applications. A few may represent individual or domestic concerns, such as the recovery of lost cattle (X.108); others may embody the differing viewpoints of ongoing ritual controversies (I.179) or provide a dramatic modeling of a particularly important ritual (the Horse Sacrifice in X.86) or the mythological underpinning for a series of hymns (X.10 for the following funeral hymns). An evergreen controversy concerns the form of the ākhyāna hymns. Oldenberg (1885) argued that the oldest type of epic composition mixed poetry and prose. The poetry principally consisted of the words spoken by characters in the narrative, and the prose provided the narrative context for the verses. This form is found in the Pāli Jātakas, the stories of the Buddha's former births, for example, in which the verses are considered canonical but the connecting prose is not. Oldenberg suggested that the ākhyāna hymns conformed to this type and that what we have preserved is a skeleton of canonical dialogue that originally had prose narrative attached to it. Oldenberg's theory has the advantage of explaining why these hymns are difficult to interpret and why even the speakers of particular verses are not readily identifiable. While we find the theory attractive, many scholars have found it unnecessary and understand these hymns to have been recited as they are transmitted to us.

There are also hymns that, though they may be ritually employed in the later Veda, were perhaps not composed for ritual use. Gonda (1978: 25–38) compares some of these hymns to medieval stotras: expressions of emotion, praise, and devotion to the gods. However, such functions do not preclude their application in rites, even if their

original ritual context is not clear to us. A better possibility for non-liturgical hymns is the type that comments on the ritual and its meaning. Generally occurring in the latest strata of the Ṛgveda, these include X.129, the Nāsadīyasūkta ("that not existing did not exist"); X.121, the Hiraṇyagarbhasūkta ("Golden Embryo"); X.90, the Puruṣasūkta ("Hymn of the Man"); and I.164, the "Riddle Hymn" of Dīrghatamas. These are sometimes called the "philosophical" or "speculative" hymns of the Ṛgveda, but this is a misleading description, since they are not primarily abstract philosophic reflections on the nature of things. Rather, they are better viewed as forerunners of the Brāhmaṇa and Āraṇyaka texts that interpret the ritual in general, particular rituals, or aspects of the ritual. So, for example, X.90 comments on the sacrifice through the symbol of the "Man," which represents both the world and the sacrifice. X.121 concerns the royal consecration rite, and X.129 sets forth the creative power of knowledge and therefore the power of the poets and priests who possess it. In many of these hymns the meaning of the ritual is expressed in terms of a cosmogony or cosmology. While such hymns share many themes and draw upon common stores of symbols, there is not a single Ṛgvedic cosmogony or a single Ṛgvedic cosmology to which they refer. Rather, they represent imaginable worlds that explain why things are as they are. To force the hymns into the straitjacket of a unitary view of the world underestimates the power and originality of the poets who produced these cosmogonic and cosmological models.

D. THE POET

Who is the poet, and why is he composing poetry? The poets participate in an elaborate patronage system. They are hirelings, but of a very superior sort. As craftsmen of the word, their contribution to the success of the sacrifice that establishes and maintains the mutually beneficial relationship between men and gods is critical, and they serve the patrons, often royal patrons (whatever "royal" meant at this period), who arrange for and underwrite the sacrifice. The poet provides the praise poetry that the patron needs to put the gods in his debt, and he speaks on behalf of his patron, in making specific requests of the gods for goods and services. The poet's reward comes as a second-hand or indirect benefit of the success of his verbal labors: the patron should receive from the gods what he asked for, and he provides some portion of that bounty to the poet in recompense. This payment from his patron is sometimes celebrated by the poet at the end of his hymn, in a genre known as the *dānastuti*, literally "praise of the gift," in which the largesse of the patron—cows, horses, gold, women—is catalogued and glorified. Or, if it is less than expected or desired, scorned. The tone of the dānastuti is often teasing and jokey, and the language colloquial.

But the making of poetry is not simply a business proposition. Poets take great pride in their work and often reflect on their part in the poetic tradition and also on their ability to use the tools of the tradition in innovative and creative ways. They are self-conscious, naming themselves and addressing themselves, calling attention

to their verbal tricks and achievements and their ability to bring fame and material success to their patrons and glory to their gods. Some poets have very distinctive poetic personalities, as we will have occasion to remark throughout the translation.

The Ṛgvedic poet's social position and his role in the patronage economy was clearly inherited from Indo-Iranian and Indo-European times, and one of the closest parallels is found in ancient Greek, in the poetry of Pindar (5th century BCE), who was hired to celebrate the victors in the various Greek games and did so in verse as elaborate, finely crafted, and deliberately obscure as that found in the Ṛgveda. For further on the Indo-European poet, see Watkins (1995).

E. STRUCTURE OF THE ṚGVEDA

The Ṛgveda comprises 1028 *sūkta*s or hymns, which contain a total of slightly more than 10,500 verses and which are divided into ten maṇḍalas, or books, of uneven size. Within each maṇḍala there is a further division of the hymns into *anuvāka*s or "recitations" consisting of several hymns. The number of hymns in an anuvāka varies within a maṇḍala, and the number of anuvākas in each maṇḍala varies from maṇḍala to maṇḍala. As its name suggests, the anuvāka division was created principally to provide convenient units for memorization and recitation. Although this division is occasionally indicated in editions of the Ṛgveda, we have not included it in the translation. There is a second division of the Ṛgvedic corpus into eight *aṣṭaka*s, but this is a purely mechanical arrangement also created to facilitate memorization. In this latter division each of the eight aṣṭakas has eight *adhyāya*s, each adhyāya has thirty-three *varga*s, and each varga has five verses. Since unlike the division of the text into maṇḍalas, neither of these divisions reflects the contents of the Ṛgveda, therefore we will use the division into maṇḍalas exclusively.

Invaluable work on the organization and history of the Ṛgveda was done by Bergaigne (1886, 1887) and Oldenberg (1888: 191–270), ably summarized and amplified by Witzel (1995a, 1997). Following their work, the structure of the Ṛgveda and the broad outlines of its compositional history are as follows. The core of the Ṛgveda and its oldest part are the "Family Books," so called because the hymns in each maṇḍala are attributed to poets belonging to the same family lineage. These comprise Maṇḍalas II–VII. The family lineages are the following:

II	Gṛtsamada
III	Viśvāmitra
IV	Vāmadeva
V	Atri
VI	Bharadvāja
VII	Vasiṣṭha

Within the Ṛgvedic corpus, the six Family Books are generally ordered according to the increasing number of hymns in each successive maṇḍala. So Maṇḍala II contains the fewest number of hymns and VII the greatest. Within each Family Book

the hymns are ordered first by deity. Thus the hymns to Agni come first, followed by those to Indra. After these collections are the hymns to other deities, generally arranged by the decreasing number of hymns to each deity within the maṇḍala. Within each deity collection the hymns are arranged by their length, beginning with the longest hymns. If two hymns are of equal length, they are ordered according to meter, with the hymns in longer meters placed before those in shorter meters.

The arrangement of the Family Books and their hymns, therefore, functions like an index. If you know the poet (and therefore the family of the poet), the deity to whom the hymn is addressed, the number of verses in the hymn, and the meter, then, in principle at least, you can locate the hymn within the collection. Perhaps for that reason, the oral recitation of a Ṛgvedic hymn is traditionally preceded by the identification of the poet, deity, and meter. It is this kind of information that is provided by the anukramaṇīs or indices to the Ṛgveda. Because the anukramaṇīs come from a later period, there has been some question about the value of their information for the Ṛgvedic period. Some of the identifications of poets, in book X in particular, are derived from the content of the hymns and can be rather wonderfully fantastic. In that book, for example, there are hymns attributed to serpents (X.76 and 94), to the "Golden Embryo," Hiraṇyagarbha (X.121), to the god Indra (X.48–50), and to Yama (X.14) and Yamī (X.154), the first humans. Such identifications are not exclusive to book X. Among the possible composers of VIII.67 are listed Matsya Sāmmada, king of the sea creatures, and fish that have been caught in a net. Also, in the ākhyāna hymns and any other hymn in which the verses are supposed to be spoken by a god or a legendary being, the anukramaṇīs ascribe authorship to that god or being. Thus, the composition of the dialogue among the monkey Vṛṣākapi, the god Indra, and his wife Indrāṇī (X.86) is attributed to the three of them.

However, these creative identifications are much more the exception than the rule. Even though the anukramaṇīs were composed and redacted long after the Ṛgvedic period, they are an invaluable resource, for, by and large, their identifications of the poets of hymns are plausible. The collections they mark by assigning groups of hymns to certain poets or poetic circles correspond to the organization of the Ṛgveda and to verbal, metrical, and thematic connections among these hymns. The great majority of the roughly five hundred poets named in the anukramaṇīs also appear in Pravara lists of brahmin ancestors (Mahadevan forthcoming), which supports the plausibility of the anukramaṇī identifications. Therefore, the traditions transmitted in the anukramaṇīs can be a helpful guide in understanding relationships among hymns, in identifying collections of hymns, and in determining the relative ages of hymns.

Generally younger than the Family Books, Maṇḍala VIII largely comprises the hymns of two poetic traditions: that of the Kāṇvas (in 1–48 and 60–66) and that of the Āṅgirases (in 67–103). The hymns of the Āṅgirasa group are probably somewhat younger than those of the Kāṇva group. However, not all the hymns in either of these two groups are from Kāṇva or Āṅgirasa poets. Rather, both collections

include hymns by poets who belong to other families and are known in other maṇḍalas. These hymns were probably added to book VIII because they were composed in forms and meters characteristic of the hymns of VIII. Both the Kāṇva and the Āṅgirasa collections in VIII consist of a large number of hymns whose verses are arranged in *pragāthas* or *tṛcas*, that is, in sequences of units (strophes) consisting of two or three verses. There are pragāthas and tṛcas outside of VIII and non-strophic hymns in VIII, but because of the predominance of these structures in that book, pragātha and tṛca poetry of various poets was relocated into VIII. The significance of this collection is not entirely clear, although the marked forms of the hymns suggest that they or the priests who produced them may have had a distinct ritual function, and it is noteworthy that a large proportion of the Ṛgvedic material borrowed into the Sāmaveda comes from VIII. It may be that the priests who created Maṇḍala VIII were, like the Sāmavedic priests, those who chanted Ṛgvedic verses. The arrangement of hymns in VIII generally follows that of the Family Books: they are first organized by poet or poetic circle and then by deity. But the organization of the book is less transparent than that of the Family Books.

Maṇḍala I also consists of two collections. One, I.51–191, probably dates from around the time of the Kāṇva hymns of VIII, and the other, I.1–50, is slightly later than the Āṅgirasa hymns of VIII. The collection of I.51–191 consists of the hymns of nine groups of poets, organized according to the same principles as the Family Books. The collection of I.1–50 consists of hymns in six groups, each attributed to a single poet. Within each of these six groups, the hymns are collected by deity, but the six differ in their arrangement of the hymns within the deity collections. The groups of I.1–50 are also distinguished by the prevalence of hymns in *gāyatrī* meter and in pragāthas, like the hymns of VIII, while the hymns of I.51–191 are primarily in *triṣṭubh* and *jagatī* meter.

Maṇḍala IX is unusual, because it is a liturgical collection of hymns to Soma Pavamāna, the soma "purifying itself" as it runs across or through the sheep's wool filter. It includes hymns by poets already known from the Family Books as well as by later poets. The collection is dominated especially by poets from books I, V, and VIII. It was therefore created after the Family Books and contains hymns from various periods. Like the Family Books, it is arranged in groups according to meter and then within each metrical grouping, according to decreasing number of verses.

Maṇḍala X is a collection of hymns that belong to the youngest strata of the Ṛgveda and forms a kind of appendix to the text. However, it shows organizational principles comparable to those we have seen in the other books. It consists of collections of hymns by individual poets, which are ordered according to the decreasing number of hymns in each collection or, when collections contain an equal number of hymns, according to the number of verses in the first hymn of the collection. By roughly the second half of X, the collections are reduced to single hymns by individual poets. Finally, there is a short and late supplement to the Ṛgvedic collection, the Vālakhilya hymns, which are collected in VIII.49–59.

While this is the general organization of the text, there are many exceptions to these ordering principles. So, for example, we remarked above that the Family Books, II–VII, are ordered from the shortest to the longest. While this is generally true, it is not completely the case. Consider the list of the Family Books and the total number of hymns in each:

II 43 hymns
III 62 hymns
IV 58 hymns
V 87 hymns
VI 75 hymns
VII 104 hymns

Although we would have expected the sequence of maṇḍalas to show a steadily increasing number of hymns, instead book IV has fewer hymns than III and book VI fewer than V. In a similar fashion, hymns can appear out of order within the various groupings that make up both the Family Books and the other books of the Ṛgveda. Such discrepancies have arisen through insertions of hymns and redactional combinations and divisions of hymns. These alterations occurred after the initial collection of the Ṛgveda, when the order of books and hymns was established, and by the time or at the time of Śākalya's final redaction of the text around the middle of first millennium BCE. Attention to these discrepancies can be an effective tool in reconstructing the compositional history of individual hymns and of groupings of hymns, since they allow us to see where an alteration has occurred. Oldenberg (1888: 193–94) provides the following example. In a series of single hymns with decreasing numbers of verses, V.83 is a hymn to Parjanya of ten verses and V.85 is a hymn to Varuṇa of eight verses. Between the two is V.84, a hymn to Earth of three verses. Clearly the hymn to Earth is out of sequence and was likely inserted between the hymns to Parjanya and to Varuṇa. While the fact of its insertion is obvious, there are several possible explanations for how and why this occurred. For example, V.84 could be a later composition that was later added to the Ṛgveda, or it could have been composed earlier but have been moved to its current place within the collection. In either case, this little hymn is actually a riddle depicting Earth during a violent storm and must have been felt as an appropriate pendant to the Parjanya hymn (see Jamison 2013).

II. History of the Ṛgvedic Text

A. LANGUAGE AND COMPOSITIONAL TECHNIQUE

The Ṛgveda was composed in an archaic form of Sanskrit that is richer in forms and less grammatically fixed than Classical Sanskrit, but essentially identical in structure. For further discussion of the language, see section VII below. The text

was composed entirely orally and transmitted entirely orally for a very long time, probably several millennia. But it was a type of oral composition very different from what that designation now generally brings to mind in scholarly, especially Homeric, circles. It was not an anonymous floating body of infinitely variable verbal material (re-)composed anew at every performance, generated in great part from fixed formulae that formed the poet's repertoire. In contrast to the vast sprawl of epic, on which the usual model of oral-formulaic composition was formed and tested, Ṛgvedic oral composition was small-scale and verbally complex. Though orally composed and making use of traditional verbal material, each hymn was composed by a particular poet, who fixed the hymn at the time of composition and who "owned" it, and it was transmitted in this fixed form thereafter.

Ṛgvedic verbal formulae work very differently from those in epic composition. Rather than deploying fairly sizable, metrically defined, and invariant pieces—ready-made surface structures, in the felicitous phrase of Paul Kiparsky (1976: 83)—our poets seem to operate with *deep-structure* formulae. Invariant repetition is fairly rare, and when it occurs, the repeated formulae tend to be short, generally shorter than the *pāda* (= verse line) and not necessarily metrically fixed. But the poets often assume knowledge of an underlying formula, which seldom or never surfaces as such, but which they ring changes on—by lexical or grammatical substitution, scrambling, semantic reversal, and the like, confounding the expectations of their audience while drawing upon their shared knowledge of the underlying verbal expression. These deep-structure formulae tend to be shared across bardic families, and we can in fact sometimes identify cognate formulae in other Indo-European poetic traditions, especially in the Old Avestan Gāthās.

B. PRESERVATION AND TRANSMISSION

The structure of the Ṛgveda points to several stages in the creation of the Ṛgvedic text as we now have it. Collections of hymns were first made by the families of poets who produced them, and these early collections defined the various poetic traditions and helped train new poets within those traditions. At some point a unified consolidation was made of six family traditions, which formed the original collection of the Family Books, II–VII. As discussed above, the books were arranged from shortest to longest and the hymns of each book were organized according to the same principles. Then, probably at several intervals, the hymns of books I and VIII (except for the Vālakhilya hymns) were added, and book IX was assembled from hymns composed by poets of the other books of the Ṛgveda and from hymns of younger poets. The last major additions to the collection were the hymns of book X.

We do not know the precise mechanism for the formation of the Ṛgvedic collection or the circumstances that brought it about. There must have been some centralized authority or agency that could consolidate the different family traditions and impose a single set of organizational principles on their collections. Michael

Witzel (cf. 1995a, 1995b, 1997, 2003) has suggested that this authority was first the Bharata tribe, as it attained hegemony over the other Vedic tribes during the Ṛgvedic period, and then later the Kuru state, which arose around 1000 BCE. In his view, the initial collection and organization of the Family Books, the Kāṇva hymns of VIII, and the nine collections of I.51–191 occurred under the Bharatas, and the complete collection of the Ṛgveda under the Kurus. These consolidations of the religious traditions supported the political consolidations of the Bharatas and of the Kurus and reinforced their rule by means of a unified religious practice approximating a state religion. The Kuru period saw the creation not only of the complete Ṛgveda but also of the other *saṃhitā*s, and the fixation and canonization of Vedic sacrifices. The Vedic rites created at this time were composites, fashioned from different family traditions. They included extended recitations constituted of verses extracted from various parts of the Ṛgveda and thus from various family traditions. The purpose of such composite rites was to create a ritual system that represented the unity of the Vedic tradition. This process is already apparent in late hymns of the Ṛgveda itself (cf. Proferes 2003a). For example, ṚV IX.67 is a hymn to "self-purifying" soma. Rather than being the product of a particular poet or even a particular family of poets, it includes verses from poets representing the principal brahmin lineages. It reflects an attempt to create an "ecumenical" liturgy, as Proferes (2003a: 8) calls it, one in which all the major poetic traditions had a place.

The creation of the Ṛgvedic Saṃhitā reflected a significant ritual change, since it marked an emphasis on liturgical appropriation and repetition of earlier material rather than, as in the Ṛgvedic period itself, on the creation of new hymns. However, the tradition of Ṛgvedic composition did not simply come to a halt at the close of the Ṛgvedic period. The Ṛgveda Khila (Scheftelowitz 1906) is a collection of hymns that do not form part of the Śākalya recension. Some of these hymns may go back to the Ṛgvedic period, but most were likely composed in the following period, during which the hymns, chants, and recitations of the Atharvaveda, the Sāmaveda, and the Yajurveda were composed or assembled. The Atharvaveda itself also represents the extension of hymnic composition into a wider variety of ritual contexts, a process already visible in Ṛgveda book X. Beyond the Veda, elements and techniques typical of Ṛgvedic composition appear in later *praśasti*s, epic poetry, and even in *kāvya* (see Jamison 2007: chap. 4).

The Ṛgveda did not remain unchanged after its collection. As described above, the collection of hymns was arranged according to definable principles, but the text of the Ṛgveda we have does not always follow these principles. Most of the changes were made at an early period since they are reflected in all the versions of the Ṛgveda that we have or that are described in later literature. These versions were the product of Vedic schools or *śākhā*s, which became the institutions through which the Ṛgveda collection was preserved and transmitted.

The Ṛgveda translated here is the Ṛgveda of the Śākala school, established by Śākalya, a teacher of the late Vedic period. There were other schools that produced other recensions of the Ṛgveda, although most of these other recensions are now