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## [Introduction to] Sahasram Ati Srajas. Indo-Iranian and Indo-European Studies in Honor of Stephanie W. Jamison

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*Sahasram Ati Srajas*

Indo-Iranian and Indo-European Studies  
in Honor of

**Stephanie W. Jamison**

*edited by*

Dieter Gunkel

Joshua T. Katz

Brent Vine

Michael Weiss



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## Preface

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Best of teachers, staunch colleague, dear friend: Stephanie W. Jamison is not only one of the world's leading Indo-Iranists but someone for whom the presentation of a festschrift, though indubitably a ritual act, is anything but rote. In every aspect of her life she consistently finds and brings out the extraordinary, sometimes in the seemingly ordinary, and we hope that the contents of this volume will be seen as a testament to both her scholarship and her person.

A graduate of Vassar, where she majored in Classics, and then Yale, where she earned her Ph.D. in Linguistics, Stephanie is an Indo-Europeanist, Indologist, and Iranist of the first order. Like the rhinoceros, truly interdisciplinary scholars can be hard to categorize, a fact that hidebound administrators do not always appreciate; indeed, university officials took longer than they should have to bestow on Stephanie the official recognition that her students and colleagues long knew she deserved. Now Distinguished Professor of Asian Languages and Cultures at the University of California, Los Angeles, where she is also a member and sometime Chair of the interdepartmental Program in Indo-European Studies, she previously taught at Yale (in the Department of Linguistics) and Harvard (in the Departments of Linguistics and of Sanskrit and Indian Studies). Her arrival at UCLA in 2002 was a transformative event for her home department, which now has world-class coverage of Indic literature and culture, and especially for her true home, PIES, whose doctoral students emerge as masters of Vedic language and Sanskrit historical grammar, as well as having had the opportunity to pursue high-level classes and independent research projects on Avestan, Old Persian, Middle Indic, and Indo-Iranian and Indo-European poetics.

Stephanie's courses on everything from elementary Sanskrit to historical syntax are characterized by the same features that make her scholarship instantly recognizable: an insistence that solutions must make sense both linguistically and philologically, great stylistic clarity, and an unceasing sense of merriment. Major themes that have occupied her in forty years of deeply original work include animals, riddles, and sex; law and ritual; morphologically baroque verbal forms; syntactic change; women and their grammar; the bright light a knowledge of Sanskrit can shine on Greek epic and tragedy; and issues of translation. Attention to all of these has culminated in her and Joel P. Brereton's three-volume masterpiece of 2014, *The Rigveda: The Earliest Religious Poetry of India* (Oxford University Press), the first complete rendering of the *Rigveda* into English in more than a century. Thanks to the unpretentious style with which Stephanie and Joel introduce and elucidate these 1,028 very difficult hymns, what we have is more than a monument of learning that now lies open before every

Indologist and Indo-Europeanist (all who have received instruction from Stephanie at her desk can picture her with other such monuments flopped around her, in a way that teaches you exactly what such books are for); it will also be for generations the go-to reference work for students and scholars in fields from comparative literature to religious studies.

As Stephanie reminded us in her Presidential address to the American Oriental Society in 2010 (subsequently published in the Society's journal, *JAOS* 131 [2011]), texts have secret lives. When it comes to early Indic texts, no one is better at revealing the mysteries: Stephanie's readings often involve a simultaneous display of phonological, morphological, syntactic, and contextual analysis that is virtuosic and yet presented in a down-to-earth manner. If, in class, she wishes to impress on you a particular point, she pauses, looks at you from under her eyebrows, and communicates it as if she were letting you in on a slightly scandalous secret. She has a similar look when forced to listen to ideas that she thinks are just plain silly, and if you are or were her student—in which case she has all the time in the world for you and will patiently help you locate and understand what is good in what you have done—then you work hard to avoid being the object of this ironic gaze.

It is not only her students who benefit from Stephanie's critical acumen. As Associate Editor for South and Southeast Asia and (since 2010) Editor-in-Chief of *JAOS*, she has wielded her red pen with modern efficiency as well as timeless skill. We would also like to highlight her seventy-five penetrating book reviews, whose vehicles are *Indo-Iranian Journal*, *International Journal of Hindu Studies*, and *Kratylos*, to name a few besides *JAOS*: the reviews unfailingly identify the strengths and weaknesses of the works under discussion, suggest directions for future research, and evince her trademark sense of humor.

No paragraphs about Stephanie could leave out her legendary hospitality. One of her books has this noun in its title, but food, drink, and cheerful company are for her far more than academic matters. The annual "Dead of Winter" party at 10 Locke Street in Cambridge, MA has given way to the bash that follows the Indo-European conference each fall in Los Angeles, a part of the world where "dead of winter" has no meaning; the great black cat Fergus has given way to such other great cats as Puduhepa; but the atmosphere chez Stephanie remains as it ever was—joyous, feline, carnivalesque.

Two contributors passed away last year: Lisi Oliver, whose laugh-out-loud funny tribute to Stephanie captures the sense of play in her brilliant, synoptic readings, and Martin West, whose opening paragraph speaks of Stephanie as "the warm-hearted recipient of this volume." Among those who for one reason or another could not contribute, we wish to mention two: Anna Morpurgo Davies, who very much regretted that the illness that would fell her in 2014 prevented her from producing a paper, and Calvert Watkins, Stephanie's beloved husband, who (we are so glad to be able to say) learned that a festschrift was in the works shortly before his death in 2013.

This crown is for Stephanie, with great respect and great love.

The Editors, February 2016