

ROGER D. WOODARD, Ed. *The ancient languages of Asia and the Americas*. Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008. Pp. xix, 264.

This is one of five volumes derived from the *Cambridge Encyclopedia of the World's Ancient Languages* (2006), from the same editor and publisher. The ten chapters, prepared by noted specialists, are supplemented by 24 figures, 16 tables, and a map. The contents are indexed separately for subject, grammatical and linguistic terms, languages, and establish laws and principles referred to in the text, e.g., *Bartholomae's Law*, *Grassmann's Law*. The first appendix (234 – 250) provides a comprehensive discussion of methods and problems for reconstructing ancient languages, focusing on the comparative method, while discussing questions of morphology and syntax as well, in the context of Indo-European reconstruction. This is understandable, if not ideal; after all, Indo European languages, despite the rapid advances in East Asian linguistics and especially in more recent work on Austronesian languages, the languages that make up the Indo-European taxa remain the most studied and best understood of the world's languages. The second reproduces the TOC of the *Encyclopedia* and the other volumes in this series.

We certainly agree with the remark in the Preface, “An ancient language is indeed a thing of wonder — but so is every other language” (1). Since the capacity for language is the faculty that distinguishes the category *human*, the breadth and scope of the diversity of manifestations of that faculty, along with the means to record it and extend it in space and through time, count as the supreme wonders of existence. The designation *ancient* herein is delimited by the invention of orthography, at the early end of the spectrum, and the end of the fifth century, although this admittedly somewhat arbitrary margin shifts this way and that according the facts of a variety of the languages discussed in these volumes.

The ten chapters and Appendix 1 are listed as follows:

1. Language in Ancient Asia and the Americas: An Introduction	ROBERT D. WOODARD
2. Sanskrit	STEPHANIE W. JAMISON
3. Middle Indic	STEPHANIE W. JAMISON
4. Old Tamil	SANFORD B. STEEVER
5. Old Persian	RÜDIGER SCHMITT
6. Avestan	MARK HALE
7. Pahlavi	MARK HALE
8. Ancient Chinese	ALAIN PEYRAUBE
9. Mayan	VICTORIA R. BRICKER
10. Epi-Olmec (Zapotec Appendix)	TERRENCE KAUFMAN AND JOHN JUSTESON
Appendix 1. Reconstructed Ancient Languages	DON RINGE

A glimpse of these titles suggests languages that have communicated great cultural and literary traditions. The Indo-European languages included reflect the great influence their philosophical and literary traditions have exerted on the path east from Europe to South Asia, and at times across vast empires, for great periods of time, while artifacts that remain from the represented languages of the Americas document great civilizations. Ancient China exercised hegemony in their regions through economic might and military power over East and Southeast Asia; her political superiority in the region continued uninterrupted until perhaps the last two centuries, while all would-be conquerors have been sinified. Meanwhile her cultural influence on the continent — through the writing system (for more than a millennium, reading and writing in East and Southeast Asia meant *reading and writing in Chinese*), the philosophical traditions, the highly refined literary tradition, and the arts — continues unabated. The social superiority and therefore cultural hegemony of the Indo-Europeans in South Asia has long attracted much of the world's attention. Still, Sanskrit, and later Persian, had an intense competitor in Tamil,

which produced a great literary tradition of its own, and which still resists the dominance of the Indo-European successor languages.

In these articles significant emphasis is placed on the writing systems through which these languages became available to scholars in the modern era, and properly so. Unique is the situation of the Chinese orthography, where the features and development of the language make the ideographically based system continue to fit it well enough that no attempt to replace the system has offered any comprehensive benefits. The longevity of the system attests to that; casual readers of the language can read, without inconvenience beyond the occurrence of a few obsolete lexemes, words written at the time of the Qin Dynasty.

These articles provide substantial information about the languages, phonetics, morphology, syntax, and lexicon, and serve as valuable references for major diachronic developments, which help us appreciate the linguistic core of the great cultures they expressed.

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