

PREFACE

In embarking upon the venture of a new monograph on the ancient Indian god Mitra some words of justification do not seem to be out of place. These can be brief. There have been three reasons for undertaking the task. First, the only monograph existing, A. Eggers, *Der arische (indo-iranische) Gott Mitra. Eine sprach- und religionsgeschichtliche Studie*, Dorpat 1894, dates back to the last decade of the last century and is, though useful as a collection of facts, nowadays in many respects antiquated. The author's views of the god and his functions are no longer tenable. A. Hillebrandt's still older disquisition *Varuṇa und Mitra. Ein Beitrag zur Exegese des Veda*, Breslau 1877 has for similar reasons been largely superseded by the investigations carried out in the course of the past century. It seems therefore time for a new collection and discussion of the relevant facts, the more so as nowadays more texts are accessible than eighty or ninety years ago and our views of the Vedic pantheon and of gods of ancient peoples in general have in the meantime changed considerably. In the second place, the gods Varuṇa, Mitra and Aryaman have in the last few decades been the subjects of several books and some other contributions, part of which polemical, to a better understanding of the Vedic and ancient Iranian religions. However fruitful and important, these studies fail to convince the present author in every respect and, at least, to satisfy him that finality can be claimed for all theories contained and conclusions drawn in them. The immediate inducements to go more deeply into the problems connected with Mitra were, lastly, the invitation to deliver a lecture on the Indian god on the occasion of the International Congress of Mithraic Studies at Manchester in July 1971 and the wish of the editorial board of the series *Nisaba* to be published by Messrs. Brill, Leiden to write a monograph on the same divine figure. As however the size of this disquisition proved to exceed the limits of the volumes of that series, it is now published separately.

However, it was the author's endeavour not to belie the expectations of the editors of that series who would like him to translate and critically to discuss all relevant text-places and to deal with all aspects of the god as exhaustively as nowadays is possible. This history of the publication may, to a considerable extent, explain its outward form.

It will mainly consist of a (nearly) complete collection and, as far as may be desirable, thorough interpretation of the relevant Vedic text-places. This collection is at the same time intended to be a comprehensive and illustrative survey of all aspects of the divine figure as it presented itself to the ancient Indians and of the ideas entertained by them in connection with it. Although it will of course voice the author's views of the god without any reserve, polemical argumentation is either avoided or reduced to reasonable proportions and dismissed to footnotes. Speculation concerning that on which the texts are silent has, wherever possible, been dismissed. Being intended, not only for indologists and students of Indian culture, but also for those interested in the historical and comparative study of religions, the book includes some material and observations which might be not indispensable to some readers belonging to the former category, but, on the other hand, only a comparatively small number of unexplained technical terms or untranslated quotations from the original Sanskrit. For reasons of space and in spite of the drawbacks of monographs dealing with one single member of the pantheon, the character of the god Varuṇa will not, after section I, be systematically discussed and in most chapters mentioned only incidentally and as far as his relations to Mitra may require.

Some words may finally be added on the presentation of the subject-matter and the disposition of the many text-places, comments and observations contained in this volume. As a considerable part of the data may be viewed from more than one angle or combined with several other data, some repetitions could not be avoided. On the other hand, some passages in which the god is said to be concerned with 'friendship' are omitted or dealt with summarily to be discussed in an article on Mitra and mitra which is to be published separately. It seemed advisable to let, as far as possible, the facts speak for themselves. Moreover, it proved impossible to draw hard and fast lines between the different aspects and functions of the god. That is why the pertinent text-places could be arranged only in a rough—and, consequently, perhaps arbitrary—manner into a limited number of sections. These may be regarded as an attempt at avoiding an impression of confusion and at putting at least part of those places which from some point of view belong together into a definite order. Readers, especially those who would have preferred another classification or systematization, may be invited to let themselves be guided by the indexes.

J. GONDA