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Abstract

Veda Section

“On Strong-Arms and Drinking Strength:
Masculinity, Violence, and the Body in the *R̥gveda*.”

This paper will consider the relationship between masculinity, violence, and ritual practices in the *R̥gveda*, especially the poetic representation and ritualized construction of a warrior’s body, which was not only conditioned through physical acts, but was also symbolically shaped through ritual performances. The paper will focus on the way in which poet-priests nurture and strengthen Indra’s body as this highlights a significant ritual strategy wherein ritual experts wield power over their war-god, other ritual participants, and martially-inclined males. Moreover, the ritual construction of Indra’s body and depictions of his physical exploits communicate to warriors and chieftains an androcentric, martial ideology that receives legitimization through ritual performances. Hence, men strategically sought bodily invigoration in the ritual arena, especially by drinking *sóma*, in order to align their own masculine identities with that of their war-god, while receiving fame and wealth in the ritual arena and among their communities. R̥gvedic ritual practices and poetry thus link being manly with being aggressive and violent, while communicating to boys and adult males that they can only become real men through physical power, control, and domination.