**SOMA** (Sanskrit for "pressed juice,” from the root *su,* to press), in Hindu mythology the god who is a personification of the soma plant *(Asclepias acidd),* from which an intoxicating milky juice is squeezed. Soma is the Indian Bacchus, and one of the most important of the Vedic gods. All the 114 hymns of the ninth book of the Rig Veda are in his praise. He is celebrated as a dual divinity with Indra, Agni, Pushan or Rudra, in other books. The preparation of the soma juice was a very sacred ceremony, and the worship of the god is very old, soma being identifiable with the Avestan *homa,* prepared and cele­brated in the Indo-Iranian period. The plant’s true home is heaven, and soma is drunk by gods as well as men, and it is under its influence that Indra is related to have created the universe and fixed the earth and sky in their place. In post-Vedic literature soma is a regular name for the moon, which is regarded as being drunk up by the gods and so waning, till it is filled up again by the sun. In both the Rig Veda and Zend Avesta soma is the king of plants; in both it is a medicine which gives health, long life and removes death. In both the celestial is distinguished from the terrestial soma, and the liquor from the god. The first soma is supposed to have been stolen from its guardian demon by an eagle, this soma-bringing eagle of Indra being comparable with the nectar-bringing eagle of Zeus, and with the eagle which, as a metamorphosis of Odin, carried off the mead.

See A. A. Macdonell, *Vedic Mythology* (Strassburg, 1897).

**SOMALILAND, a** country of East Africa, so named from its Somali inhabitants. It is also known as the “ Eastern Horn of Africa,” because it projects somewhat sharply eastwards into the Indian Ocean, and is the only section of the continent which can be spoken of as a peninsula. In general outline it is an irregular triangle, with apex at Cape Guardafui. From the apex the north side extends over 600 m. along the south shore of the Gulf of Aden westwards to Tajura Bay, and the east side skirts the Indian Ocean south-west for over 1000 m. to the mouth of the Juba. Somali also inhabit the coast region and considerable areas inland, as far south as the Tana river. The country between the Tana and Juba rivers now forms part of British East Africa (*q.v.*), and in this article is not included in Somaliland. Inland the limits of Somaliland correspond roughly with the Shoan and Harrar Hills, and the Galla dis­trict south of Shoa and east of Lake Rudolf. The 40° east may be taken as the western limit of Somali settlements. The triangular space thus roughly outlined has a total area of about 356,000 sq. m. The population is estimated at about 1,100,000, but no trustworthy data are available. It is partitioned between Great Britain, Italy, France, and Abyssinia as under:—

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| --- | --- | --- |
|  | Area in sq. m. | Population. |
| British Somaliland . | 68,000 | 300,000 |
| French Somaliland . | 12,000  146,000 | 50,000 |
| Italian Somaliland | 400,000 |
| Abyssinian Somaliland @@1. | 130,000 | 350,000 |
| Total | 356,000 | 1,100,000 |

Somaliland was not generally adopted as the name of the country until the early years of the 19th century. The northern and central districts were previously known as Adel, the north­east coast as Ajan. By the ancients the country was called *τegio romataica,* from the abundance of aromatic plants which it produced.

*Physical Features.—*The whole region is characterized by a re­markable degree of physical uniformity, and may be broadly described as a vast plateau of an average elevation of 3000 ft., bounded westwards by the Ethiopian and Galla highlands and northwards by an inner and an outer coast range, skirting the south side of the Gulf of Aden in its entire length from the Harrar uplands to Cape Guardafui. The plateau, known as the Ogaden plateau, everywhere presents the same monotonous aspect of a boundless steppe clothed with a scanty vegetation of scrubby plants and herbaceous growths.

The incline is uniformly to the south-east, and apart from the few coast streams that reach the Gulf of Aden during the rains, all the running waters are collected in three rivers—the Nogal in the north, the Webi Shebeli in the centre, and the Juba (*q.v.*)

in the south—which have a parallel south-easterly direction towards the Indian Ocean. But so slight is the precipitation that the Juba alone has a permanent discharge seawards. The Nogal sends down a turbulent stream during the freshets, while the Shebeli, notwithstanding the far greater extent of its basin, does not reach the sea. At a distance of about 12 m. from the coast it is inter­cepted by a lone line of dunes, which it fails to pierce and is thus deflected southwards, flowing in this direction for nearly 170 m. parallel with the coast, and then disappearing in a swampy de­pression (the Bali marshes) before reaching the Juba estuary.@@2

*Geology.—*The Somaliland plateau is chiefly composed of gneiss and schist. In the north the plateau is overlain by red and purple unfossiliferous sandstones, capped near its edge by a cherty lime­stone also unfossiliferous but possibly of Lower Cretaceous age. The plains inland from Berbera, and the maritime margins between the coast and foot of the plateau, consist of limestones of Lower Oolitic age with *Belemnites subhastatus.* At Duba some limestones may belong to the Lower Cretaceous.

*Climate.—*In general the climate is dry and bracing all over the plateau. Temperature is as a rule high but with considerable variation, from 60° F. or less in the early morning to 100° or over in the early afternoon. On an average the coast-belt temperatures are some 10° higher than those of the plateau. Four seasons are recognized—January-April, very dry and great heat; May-June, cooler and the "heavy ” rains; July-September, the season of extreme heat and the south-west monsoon; October-December, the “ light ” rains. The “ heavy ” rains are little experienced in the coast districts. The rainfall is from 4 to 8 in. a year. In con­sequence of the elevation of the plateau and the dryness of the air, the heat is less oppressive than is indicated by the tempera­tures recorded. Malaria prevails in the valley of the Webi Shebeli.

*Flora.—*The highlands, which in an almost continuous line traverse East Africa, have to a great extent isolated the flora of Somaliland in spite of the general resemblance of its climate and soil to the country on the western side of the band of high ground. In the northern mountainous regions of Somaliland the flora resembles, however, to some extent, that of the Galla country and Abyssinia. On the plateau many forms common elsewhere in East Africa, such as the *Borassus* palm and the baobab tree, are missing. The greater part of the country is covered either with tall coarse grasses (these open plains being called *ban),* or more commonly with thick thorn-bush or jungle, among which rise occasional isolated trees. The prevalent bush plants are *khansa* (umbrella mimosa), acacias, aloes, and, especially, *Boswellia* and *Commiphora,* which yield highly fragrant resins and balsams, such as myrrh, frankincense *(olibanum)* and “ balm of Gilead.” The billeil is a thorn-bush growing about 10 ft. high and covered with small curved hooks of great strength. The bush contains also numerous creepers, one of the most common being known as the *armo.* It is a vivid green and has large, fleshy, heart-shaped leaves. Of the thorns, the *guda* and the *wadi* often grow from 30 to 50 ft. high and have large flat-topped branches. In places there are forests of these trees. On the summit of the Golis range the cedars form forests. Among the larger trees are the mountain cedar, reaching to 100 ft. ; the *gob,* which bears edible berries in appearance something like the cherry with the taste of an apple, grows to some 80 ft., and is found fringing the river beds; the *hassādan,* a kind of euphorbia, attaining a height of about 70 ft. ; and the *darei,* a fig tree. There are patches of dense reeds, reaching 10 ft. high, and thickets of tamarisk along the river beds, and on either side the jungle is high and more luxuri­ant than on the open plateau. Of herbaceous plants the *kissenia,* the sole representative of the order Loasaceae, which is common in America but very rare elsewhere, is found in Somaliland, which also possesses forms belonging to the eastern Mediterranean flora.

*Fauna.—*Somaliland is rich in the larger wild animals. Among them are the lion (Somali name *libah)* and elephant, though these have been to a large extent driven from the northern coast districts; the black or double-horned rhinoceros, common in central Ogaden ; leopards, abundant in many districts, and daring—they have given their name to the Webi Shebeli (“River of the Leopards”); panthers; spotted and striped hyenas (the latter rare); foxes, jackals, badgers and wild dogs; giraffes and a great variety of antelopes. The antelopes include the beisa oryx, fairly common and widely distributed; the greater and lesser kudu (the greater kudu is not found on the Ogaden plateau) ; the Somali hartebeest *(Bubalis Swaynei),* found only in the Haud and Ogo districts; waterbuck, rare except along the Webi Shebeli and the Nogal; the dol or Somali bushbuck; the dibatag or Clarke’s gazelle; the giraffe-like gerenuk or Waller’s gazelle, very common; the aoul or Soemmering’s gazelle, widely distributed ; the dero *(Gazella Speki)* ; and the small dikdik or sakaro antelope, found in almost every thicket. The zebra *(Equus grevyi)* is found in Ogaden and places to the south, the wild ass in the northern regions. There are wart hogs, baboons (maned and maneless varieties), a tree monkey, jumping shrews, two kinds of squirrel, a small hare, rock rabbits

@@@1 See also Abyssinia.

@@@2 It is probable that a divergent branch leaves the Shebeli some distance above the swamps and that at high water an overflow into the Juba occurs (see *Geog. Journ.,* Nov. 1909).