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CONTENTS:

EDITOR'S NOTE

ARTICLE:

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The Soma Code, Parts I-III

I. Luminous Visions in the Rig Veda

II. Soma's Birth, Purification, and Transmutation into Indra

III. Visions, Myths, and Drugs

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EDITOR'S NOTE

The evidence for actual visions of Vedic poets and priests has been downplayed in recent writings. This in spite of hymns such as the famous *laba suukta* (RV 10.119) and that of the long-haired *muni* of RV 10.136, who has drunk 'poison' and clearly represents a shaman-like figure on a quest, flying through the sky with the wind and the gods. One must also take into account the singular hymn that speaks not of vision but of aural experiences, RV 6.9.6 "apart fly my ears, apart my eyes, apart the light that has been put into the heart; my mind moves away into the distance..."

North Asian and, indeed Laurasian, shamanism (see M. Witzel in: Mother Tongue VI, see: <http://www.people.fas.harvard.edu/~witzel/MT-VI.jpg>) is also visible in rituals such as the Vūjapeya, where one has to climb up a pole to reach 'heaven,' and to stay there for a while. This is what Kham shamans in the Nepalese Himalayas still do today.

These and other Central and North Asian connections (see now J.F. Staal, How a psychoactive substance becomes a ritual: the case of Soma. *Social Research* 68, 2001, 745-778) urge us to take a closer look at shamanistic behavior and the kind of vision quests that

shamans undertake, and to compare this with Vedic practices. The matter will also be taken up later in this volume in a paper of G. Thompson.

I therefore invite readers to take a close look at the descriptions and interpretations of meditations and visions discussed here by Ph. Nicholson. They overlap with some of the images described in the Rgveda that result from sleep deprivation and the concurrent consumption of Soma.

We certainly can argue about the details of Vedic myth, religion or the preparation of the Soma drink as used and discussed in the following three papers. However, I feel that a new look at the Soma hymns and their background should be undertaken in connection with overnight ritual, the effects of sleeplessness and of sleep deprivation-induced visions.

Finally, as the following three papers can be read without actual use of diacritics they have been dispensed with here.

MW.