

Cannabis in the Ancient World

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The role of cannabis in the ancient world was manifold, a food, fiber, medicine and as a magically empowered religious sacrament. In this paper the focus will be on archaic references to cannabis use as both a medicine and a sacrament, rather than as a source of food or fiber, and it's role in a variety of Ancient cultures in this context will be examined.

Unfortunately, due to the deterioration of plant matter archeological evidence is sparse and "Pollen records are frequently unreliable, due to the difficulty in distinguishing between hemp and hop pollen" (Scott, Alekseev, Zaitseva, 2004). Despite these difficulties in identification some remains of cannabis fiber, cannabis beverages utensils, seeds of cannabis and burnt cannabis have been located (burnt cannabis has been carbonized and this preserves identifiable fragments of the species). Fortunately other avenues of research regarding the ancient use of cannabis remain open, and etymological evidence regarding cannabis use in a number of cultures has been widely recognized and accepted.

After nearly a lifetime of research into the role of psychoactive plants in human history the late Harvard University Professor of ethnobotany, Richard Evans Schultes commented: "Early man experimented with all plant materials that he could chew and could not have avoided discovering the properties of cannabis (marijuana), for in his quest for seeds and oil, he certainly ate the sticky tops of the plant. Upon eating hemp, the euphoric, ecstatic and hallucinatory aspects may have introduced man to the other-worldly plane from which emerged religious beliefs, perhaps even the concept of deity. The plant became accepted as a special gift of the gods, a sacred medium for communion with the spiritual world and as such it has remained in some cultures to the present."¹²

Not alone in this train of thought, Schultes was joined by the late Carl Sagan who speculated that early man may have begun the agricultural age by first planting hemp.³ Sagan used the pygmies from southwest Africa to demonstrate his hypothesis; the pygmies had been basically hunters and gatherers until they began planting hemp which they used for religious purposes. (Sagan 1977). (The pygmies say they have been using cannabis since the dawn of time, which more likely means; since the pygmy's conception of

¹From an essay *Man and Marijuana*.

²Evidence of cannabis use as a fiber goes back 10,000 years.

³ A view similar to that held by other researchers: Entheobotanist Christian Ratsch writes "No other plant has been with humans as long as hemp. It is most certainly one of humanity's oldest cultural objects. Wherever it was known, it was considered a functional, healing, inebriating, and aphrodisiac plant. Through the centuries, myths have arisen about this mysterious plant and its divine powers. Entire generations have revered it as sacred... The power of hemp has been praised in hymns and prayers."(Ratsch 1997). Pointing out the wide spread religious use of hemp throughout the ancient Near East, amongst the Babylonians, Assyrians, Scythians and Hebrews, as well as the early spread of its cultic use from northern Europe, to Siberian Asia, China, India, Asia minor and Southeast Asia, the famed anthropologist Weston La Barre, suggested that "cannabis was part of a religio-shamanic complex of at least Mesolithic age, in parallel with an equally old shamanic use of soma..."(La Barre 1980).

time⁴.)Indeed, as we look at cannabis' role in a variety of ancient cultures we find this only serves to strengthen the claims of Sagan and others.

The archeological record documents that stone-age man was not only familiar with cannabis' fibers, but also with the effects of burning the plant as well. Oxford archeologist Andrew Sherrat points to the use of cannabis incenses at a gravesite of a group known as the Proto-Indo-Europeans, the Kurgans, who occupied what is now Romania 5,000 years ago. The discovery of a smoking-cup which contained remnants of charred hemp seeds at the site documents that 3,000 years before Christ humanity had already been using cannabis for religious purposes for millennia. From remnants of the charred hemp seeds we can see that the combustible (and psychoactive) parts of the plant – namely flowers and leaves – had been consumed and the hard shell like residue of the seeds left behind. Sherrat also points to even older ceramic tripod bowls, believed to have been ancient incense burners of cannabis due to the use of hemp cords to place impressions upon them, as further indications of humanity's primordial relationship with cannabis.

It was likely from an even earlier such group that the primordial cannabis cult arose and spread out reaching all the way from the Orient, throughout the middle east, into Europe, India and Africa. Considering this it is not surprising to find that the root word for “cannabis” “canna” occurs in the Indo-European language, the primordial dialect that accounts for similarities in the English, German, Latin, Greek, Persian and Sanskrit languages. Canna came to refer to the long cane like stalks of the multi-purpose cannabis crop grown in the ancient world, for both fibrous and pharmacological properties, and the term cane itself is derived from *cana* and can originally be identified with the multi-purpose hemp stalk.

Possibly still earlier than the Indo-European use of cannabis, is the role that hemp played in the even more ancient traditions of the Indigenous people of the Orient.

Cannabis in China

The earliest reference to the use of marijuana as a medicine is believed to have occurred sometime around 2,800 BCE⁵, in the medical compendium, the *Pen Ts'ao* of the legendary Chinese Emperor Shen-Nung. As Emperor, Shen-Nung was concerned that the priests were unable to effectively treat the maladies of his subjects by performing magical rites, and decided to find alternative remedies for the sick. Despite being emperor, Shen-Nung was apparently also an expert farmer, and had a thorough knowledge of plants. With this in mind, undoubtedly taken alongside a knowledge of indigenous folk remedies, Shen-Nung decided to

⁴A common effect noticed by novice users of cannabis is a differentiation in the usual experience of time; i.e., "It seemed like an hour but it was only a minute", or visa versa. Noticing a difference in the experience of linear time may well have played a role in the conception and formulation of the idea of time itself. (Likewise, a deeper awareness of seasonal time may have developed alongside agriculture and the necessity of keeping track of the growing season). Interestingly, both Father Time and the Grim Reaper hold a scythe, an ancient tool used for harvesting cannabis and whose imagery and name go back to the Scythian cult of the Dead, who used hemp for ritual ecstasy. Likewise, the conception of a beginning and end of time, was conceived of in the cannabis based revelations of the Zoroastrian hero, King Vishtaspa. On a more nostalgic note; the experience of time differentiation led the 1930's jazz great, Gene Kupra, to claim that with cannabis he was able to get drum beats in where it was formerly impossible to, contributing greatly to jazz drumming. Referring to Kupra's claim, the horrified father of modern cannabis prohibition, Henry Anslinger, in his *MARIJUANA: ASSASSIN OF YOUTH*, commented on the "strange quality of marijuana which makes a rubber band out of time, stretching it to unbelievable lengths. The musician who uses 'reefers' finds that the musical beat seemingly comes to him quite slowly, thus allowing him to interpolate any number of improvised notes with comparative ease. While under the influence of marijuana, he does not realize that he is tapping the keys with a furious speed impossible for one in a normal state of mind; marijuana has stretched out the time of music until a dozen notes may be crowded into the space normally occupied by one."(Anslinger 1937). In the ancient world, such an effect contributed immensely to marijuana's reputation for containing magical properties.

⁵ Although it is widely believed to have originated around this time, no original copies of the text have survived. The oldest copy of the *Pen Ts'ao* dates to about 100 AD, and was compiled by an anonymous author who claimed to have incorporated the more ancient material into his own medical compendium.

explore the curative powers of plants, using himself as the test subject. History turns to myth here, as ancient compilers state that Shen-Nung was aided in his studies by having the superman like power of being able to see through his abdominal wall and into his stomach, enabling the Emperor to observe the effects of the plants he experimented with on his digestive system!

In the Chinese cosmology, the universe is composed of two elements, the Yang, representing the strong, active, positive masculine force and Yin, the weak, passive and negative female influence. In the individual, when these forces are in balance, the body is healthy, but too much of one or not enough of another and the result is dis-ease. In the case of the application of marijuana to such an ailment, this was difficult as it had both male and female plants, and contained both yin and yang. Shen-Nung determined that it was the female plant that contained the most potent medicine, being a very high source of yin, and prescribed *chu-ma*, (female hemp, as opposed to *ma*, hemp) for the treatment of absentmindedness, constipation, malaria, beriberi, rheumatism and menstrual problems. The "Father of Chinese Medicine", Shen-Nung, was so thoroughly impressed with the beneficial effects of *chuma*, he deemed it one of the Superior Elixirs of Immortality.

Throughout the centuries, Chinese physicians continued to prescribe marijuana, and as they became more familiar with the effects of the plant, new discoveries were made about its properties. Such as that made in 200 AD, by the early and well-known Chinese surgeon, Hua T'o. Almost 2,000 years ago Hua T'o is reputed to have performed such complicated operations as "organ grafts, resectioning of intestines, laparotomies (incisions into the loin), and thoracotomies (incisions into the chest)" (Abel 1980). Moreover, these dangerous and complicated surgeries were rendered painless by an anesthetic prepared from cannabis resin and wine known as *ma-yo*. An excerpt from his biography gives us a descriptive account of how this ancient medical sage utilized cannabis in these procedures;

"... if the malady resided in the parts on which the needle [acupuncture], cautery, or medicinal liquids were incapable of acting, for example, in the bones, in the stomach or in the intestine, he administered a preparation of hemp [*ma-yo*] and, in the course of several minutes, an insensibility developed as if one had been plunged into drunkenness or deprived of life. Then, according to the case, he performed the opening, the incision or amputation and relieved the cause of the malady; then he apposed the tissues by sutures and applied liniments. After a certain number of days the patient finds he has recovered without having experienced the slightest pain during the operation." [As quoted in (Abel 1980)]

Ancient Chinese Shamans showed their awareness of cannabis medical powers symbolically, by carving serpents into a stalk of hemp and using it as a magic wand for healing ceremonies.

China's ancient use of cannabis flowers and leaves was not limited to medicine, as ancient Taoist references record that the herb was also used for mystical purposes as well." A Taoist priest wrote in the fifth century B.C. that Cannabis was employed by "necromancers, in combination with Ginseng, to set forward time and reveal future events." In these early periods, use of Cannabis as an hallucinogen was undoubtedly associated with Chinese shamanism..." (Schultes and Hoffman, 1992). A quatrain from the ancient Chinese classic 'Greater Lord of the Long Life', believed to be written around 300 BC, gives a clear impression of cannabis' importance to the mystics of the area and era.

First a yin then a yang
No one knows what I do
Jade buds of holy hemp
for the one who lives apart⁶

In the 2006 Journal of Ethnopharmacology article 'A new insight into Cannabis sativa (Cannabaceae) utilization from 2500 year-old Yanghai Tombs, Xinjiang, China' the authors discuss rare well preserved archeological specimens of cannabis and conclude that "Based on the shamanistic background of the

⁶ As quoted in 'Road To Heaven: Encounters with Chinese Hermits', (Porter, 1993)

deceased man and ancient customs, it is assumed that the Cannabis was utilized for ritual/medicinal purposes.” (Jiang et. al. 2006)

“The deceased, presumably a shaman, may have been mainly concerned with the ritual of communication between the human and the spirit world. The gift of Cannabis may have been to enable him to continue his profession in the afterlife. A shaman who knew the utility of herbal medicine also played the role of physician in ancient times.... The new discovery of hemp in the Yanghai Tombs, Turpan, China provides evidence for ancient hemp utilization in Chinese... the hemp was used for medicinal and religious rituals in NW China...” (Jiang et. al. 2006)

India

Not surprisingly, the Chinese were not the only ones to discover the benefits of the healing herb in the ancient world. The ancient Ayurvedic system of Indian medicine contains a number of references regarding cannabis. The *Ayurveda* traces its mythological roots back to gathering of sages in the Himalayas that took place about 5,000 years ago. The Sages, who arrived from all areas of the country, exchanged their knowledge of healing, and this was passed down verbally for some generations until finally being committed to writing sometime around the first century AD. “Ayurvedic physicians of India use bhang to treat dozens of diseases and medical problems including diarrhea, epilepsy, delirium and insanity, colic, rheumatism, gastritis, anorexia, consumption, fistula, nausea, fever, jaundice, bronchitis, leprosy, spleen disorders, diabetes, cold, anemia, menstrual pain, tuberculosis, elephantiasis, asthma, gout, constipation, and malaria...” (Robinson 1996).

Later Indian texts such as the *Tajni Guntu*, the *Rajbulubha* and the *Susruta* list cannabis as a treatment for clearing phlegm, expelling flatulence, inducing costiveness, sharpening memory, increasing eloquence, as an appetite stimulant, for gonorrhea, and as a general tonic.

Alongside this ancient knowledge of cannabis' medical values in India there has existed an equally old and influential role as the plant for sacred and mystical purposes. As noted by **J. M. CAMPBELL a 19th century British Raj COLLECTOR OF LAND REVENUE AND CUSTOMS AND OPIUM in Bombay in his 1894 essay ON THE RELIGION OF HEMP: [Excerpt from Campbell essay]**

To the Hindu the hemp plant is holy. A guardian lives in the bhang leaf... its thought-bracing qualities show that the bhang leaf is the home of the great Yogi or brooding ascetic Mahadev.

So holy a plant should have special rearing. Shiva explains to his wife, Parvati, how, in sowing hemp seed, you should keep repeating the spell 'Bhangi', 'Bhangi', apparently that the sound of that guardian name may scare the evil tare-sowing influences. Again, when the seedlings are planted the same holy name must be repeated, and also at the watering which, for the space of a year, the young plants must daily receive. When the flowers appear the flowers and leaves should be stripped from the plant and kept for a day in warm water. Next day, with one hundred repetitions of the holy name Bhangi, the leaves and flowers should be washed in a river and dried in an open shed. When they are dry some of the leaves should be burnt with due repeating of the holy name as a *jap* or muttered charm. Then, bearing in mind Vagdevata, or the goddess of speech, and offering a prayer, the dried leaves should be laid in a pure and sanctified place. Bhang so prepared, especially if prayers are said over it, will gratify the wishes and desires of its owner. Taken in the early morning such bhang cleanses the user from sin, frees him from the punishment of crores of sins, and entitles him to reap the fruits of a thousand horse-sacrifices. Such sanctified bhang taken at day break or noon destroys disease. Before the religious user of bhang stand the Ashtadevata or Eight Guardians with clasped hands ready to obey him and perform his orders. The wish of him who with pure mind pours bhang with due reverence over the Ling of Mahadev will be fulfilled.

.... To meet some one carrying bhang is a sure omen of success. To see in a dream the leaves, plant, or water of bhang is lucky; it brings the goddess of wealth into the dreamer's power. To see his parents worship the bhang-plant and pour bhang over Shiva's Ling will cure the dreamer of fever. A longing for bhang foretells happiness: to see bhang drunk increases riches. No good thing can come to the man who treads under foot the holy bhang leaf.

... In the ecstasy of bhang the spark of the Eternal in man turns into light the murkiness of matter or illusion and self is lost in the central soul-fire. The Hindu poet of Shiva, the Great Spirit that living in bhang passes into the drinker, sings of bhang as the clearer of ignorance, the giver of 'knowledge. No gem or jewel can touch in value bhang taken truly and reverently. He who drinks bhang drinks Shiva. The soul in whom the spirit of bhang finds a home glides into the ocean of Being freed from the weary round of matter-blinded self. To the meaner man, still under the glamour of matter or maya, bhang taken religiously is kindly thwarting the wiles of his foes and giving the drinker wealth and promptness of mind.

... To its devotee bhang is no ordinary plant that became , holy from its guardian and healing qualities. According to one account, when nectar was produced from the churning of the ocean, something was wanted to purify the nectar. The deity supplied the want of a nectar-cleanser by creating bhang. This bhang Mahadev made from his own body, and so it is called *angaj* or body-born. According to another account some nectar dropped to the ground and from the ground the bhang plant sprang. It was because they used this child of nectar or of Mahadev in agreement with religious forms that thee seers or Hishis became Siddha or one with the deity. He who, despite the example of the Hishis, uses no bhang shall lose his happiness in this life and in the life to come. In the end he shall be cast into hell. The mere sight of bhang, cleanses from as much sin as a thousand horse-sacrifices or a thousand pilgrimages. He who scandalizes the user of bhang shall suffer the torments of hell so long as the sun endures. He who drinks bhang foolishly or for pleasure without religious rites is as guilty as the sinner of *lakhs* of sins. He who drinks wisely and according to rule, be he ever so low, even though his body is smeared with human ordure and urine, is Shiva. No god or man is as good as the religious drinker of bhang. The students of the scriptures at Benares are given bhang before they sit to study. At Benares, Ujjain, and other holy places yogis, bairagis and sanyasis take deep draughts of bhang that they may Centre their thoughts on the Eternal... To forbid or even seriously to restrict the use of so holy and gracious a herb as the hemp would cause widespread suffering and annoyance and to the large bands of worshipped ascetics deep-seated anger... Bhang brings union with the Divine Spirit. 'We drank bhang and the mystery I am He grew plain. So grand a result, so tiny a sin.'⁷

End Campbell essay

Ancient Mid-East

It is widely believed that cannabis was brought to the mid-east by Caucasian tribes that lived on the borders between what is now Russia and China. Likely these tribes, now know under the collective title of the Scythians, took to their use of cannabis, from the same Oriental tribes that pushed them out of their homeland.

The Scythians played a very important part in the Ancient World from the seventh to first century BC. They were expert horsemen, and were one of the earliest peoples to master the art of riding and using horse-drawn covered wagons. This early high mobility is probably why most scholars credit them with the spread of cannabis knowledge throughout the ancient world. Indeed, the Scythian people travelled and settled extensively throughout Europe, the Mediterranean, Central Asia, and Russia, bringing their knowledge of the spiritual and practical uses for cannabis with them.

Marijuana was an integral part of the Scythian cult of the dead wherein homage was paid to the memory of their departed leaders. In a famous passage written in about 450 B.C., Herodotus describes the funeral rites

⁷ See also 'On References to the hemp Plant Occurring in Sanskrit and Hindi Literature, (1893), by G.A. Grierson, reprinted in THE CONNOISSEUR'S HANDBOOK OF MARIJUANA, (Drake, 1971)

that took place when a king died among the Scythians. After burial, he recorded, the Scythians would purify themselves by setting up small tepee-like structures covered by rugs which they would enter to inhale the fumes of hemp seeds (and the resinous flower calyxes surrounding the seeds) thrown onto red-hot stones. " *On a framework of three sticks, meeting at the top, they stretch pieces of woolen cloth, taking care to get the joints as perfect as they can, and inside this little tent they put a dish with red-hot stones in it. Then they take some of the hemp seed, creep into the tent, and throw the seeds on to the hot stones. At once it begins to smoke, giving off a vapor unsurpassed by any vapor bath one could find in Greece. The Scythian enjoy it so much they howl with pleasure.*" (It is most likely the seeds described by Herodotus, were seeded buds, and the charred seeds found by archaeologists, what was left over from the burnt buds).

Noted Hemp scholar Sula Benet commented that the "*Scythians apparently did not use hemp for manufactures such as weaving and rope-making,*" but their use of it for incense was copious, "despite the plentiful quantity of wild hemp, the Scythians cultivated the plant to increase the amount available for their use. Apparently their need for it was great indeed."⁸ Herodotus' ancient records of the Scythian hemp rites were thought to be mythical, but were later verified in 1929, with the discovery of a Scythian tomb in Pazyryk, western Altai, by Professor S.I.Rudenko. As cannabis expert Ernest Abel commented:

"....Digging into some ancient ruins near the Altai Mountains on the border between Siberia and Outer Mongolia, Rudenko found a trench about 160 feet square and about 20 feet deep. On the perimeter of the trench were the skeletons of a number of horses. Inside the trench was the embalmed body of a man and a bronze cauldron filled with burnt marijuana seeds!⁹ Clearing the site further, Rudenko also found some shirts woven from hemp fiber and some metal censors designed for inhaling smoke which did not appear to be connected with any religious rite. To Rudenko, the evidence suggested that inhalation of smoldering marihuana seeds occurred not only in religious context, but also as an everyday activity in which Scythian women participated alongside the men.(Abel, 1980)

In ancient Mesopotamia, largely regarded as the birthplace of civilized culture, cannabis was used both medicinally and oils and incenses were prepared from the plant because its "aroma was pleasing to the Gods" (Meissner 1925). In the second quarter of the first millennium B.C., the "word *qunnabu (qunapy, qunubu, qunbu)* begins to turn up as for a source of oil¹⁰, fiber¹¹ and medicine¹²"(Barber 1989). In our own time, numerous scholars have come to acknowledge *qunubu* as an early reference to cannabis¹³. "It is said

⁸Sula Benet, Early Diffusion and Folk Uses of Hemp.

⁹(The burnt seeds which were left for the archeologists to find were the remnants of the seeded buds that the ancient Scythians threw on the hot coals. The vegetable matter of the flowering tops would burn up producing psychoactive smoke inhaled by the ancient worshippers and the charred seeds are what was left behind.)

¹⁰Hemp seed oil is an extremely healthy food oil, as well as skin oil. Because of hemp's high seed yield, and the seeds high oil content, it has been used throughout the millennia in paints, varnishes, and as a lighting fuel.

¹¹Hemp is an extremely strong and useful fiber, and our modern word canvas come through a Latin variant for cannabis. A popular source for rope, it was used by the Hebrews for the construction of the Tent of the Tabernacle (de Waal 1994), and it was a religious requirement that the dead be buried in *qaneh* (or *kaneh*), ie hemp, shirts, centuries later substituted with linen.(Klein 1908)

¹²As a medicine, hemp has been referred to for its effectiveness for a number of maladies since ancient times. There are numerous books by various physicians on the medicinal use of cannabis, and in recent years, a number of national and international groups have been successfully lobbying for unfettered access to cannabis for patients who wish to use it in treatment of their illness or chronic pain. (Mikuriya, M.D. 1973, Grinspoon, M.D. & Bakalar 1993, Abel 1983)

¹³(Meissner 1932-33, Benetowa 1936, Frisk 1960-72, Benet 1975, Abel 1982, Bennett et. al. 1995, etc.). L.Lewin suggests that *qunubu* was derived from the East Iranian word for cannabis *konaba*, and through the Scythians spreading the use of the plant throughout much of the ancient world, the word eventually became our modern *cannabis*.

that the Assyrians used hemp as incense in the seventh and eighth century before Christ and called it 'Qunubu'" (Schultes & Hoffman 1979).

Recipes for cannabis incense, regarded as copies of much older versions, were found in the cuneiform library of the legendary Assyrian king Assurbanipal, and records from the time of his father Esarhaddon, cannabis, 'qunubu' as one of the main ingredients of the "sacred rites".

In a letter written in 680 BC to the mother of the aforementioned king Esarhaddon, reference is made to *qu-nu-bu*, that give clear indications as to what substance was burning in the king's incense tent. In response to Esarhaddon's mother's question as to "What is used in the sacred rites", a high priest named Neralsharrani responded that "the main items... for the rites are fine oil, water, honey, odorous plants (and) hemp [*qunubu*]"¹⁴.¹⁴ Esarhaddon's son King Ashurbanipal left us descriptions of an incense containing cannabis along with oil of cypress, aloes, myrtle and palm. in his library and this description is generally viewed as a copy of a much older recipe. (Consumers Union Report, 1972)

Apparently cannabis was used not only as an incense but in topical lotions as well. An Assyrian medical tablet from the Louvre collection has been transliterated: "So that god of man and man should be in good rapport:---with hellebore, cannabis and lupine you will rub him." (Russo 2005)

Mesopotamian use went far beyond the spiritual. The medicinal properties of the plant were well known as noted in the groundbreaking paper by cannabinoid expert Dr. Ethan Russo, 'Clinical Cannabis in Ancient Mesopotamia: A Historical Survey with Supporting Scientific Evidence'

Dr. Russo records that numerous topical applications of cannabis for medical purposes can be found throughout ancient Mesopotamian documents. "cannabis was used with the plant *El* in petroleum to anoint swelling.... [and] was also employed as a simple poultice" (Russo 2005) More interestingly, records of topical ointments used in the treatment of "Hand of Ghost" an ancient malady now thought to be epilepsy, included cannabis as a key ingredient. A prescription for the disease was "Cannabis, styrax, oak, Ricinus, Oenanthe, linseed, kelp (?), myrrh, wax of honey, lidrusa-plant, sweet oil, together thou shalt mix, anoint him therewith with oil."

Ancient Mesopotamian preparations that included cannabis were also used in the treatment of certain diseases of the chest and lungs, stomach problems, skin lesions, lice, swollen joints and a variety of other maladies. (Russo, 2005)

Similar topical preparations of cannabis were used for both healing and spiritual purposes throughout the ancient world. In Egypt, where cannabis was known by the name *sm-sm-t*, the healing herb was believed to have been a creation of the Sun God Ra, and was used in ceremonies honoring the dead. (Graindorge, 1992).

According to Lise Mannich the literal translation of *sm-sm-t* is "The Medical Marihuana Plant," (Mannich, 1989) Egyptian medical texts that include references to cannabis include The Ramesseum III Papyrus (1700 BC), Eber's Papyrus (1600 BC), The Berlin Papyrus (1300 BC), The Chester Beatty VI Papyrus (1300 BC). Possibly due to the sticky and adhesive quality of honey a number of Egyptian topical medical preparations required it as an admixture to cannabis based medicines. According to the ancient papyri such topical cannabis preparations were used to treat inflammations of the vagina, and to treat ingrown toe and finger nails. (Ghaliongui 1963)

Some sources have also suggested that cannabis was an ingredient in the ancient incense and perfume of the Pharaohs, known as *khyphi*. *Kyphi* was used as an offering to the Gods. As the sun set, Egyptian worshippers would burn this fragrant mind altering preparation to the Sun God RA, praying for his return the following morning. Indicating the medical qualities of its ingredients, *Kyphi* was applied on the skin to

¹⁴From a translation in (Waterman 1930).

heal wounds. It was also considered to be a potent relaxant and an aphrodisiac. Unlike the ointments of the Assyrians the Kyphi was a rather solid and wax like concoction. A cone of kyphi was placed on the top of the head, and as the hot Egyptian Sun and body temperature of the devotee warmed it, the potent ingredients of the preparation would slowly melt and drip down off the head and onto the body.

Researchers have suggested more than 50 natural ingredients for making the Kyphi, the most popular probably being: Aloeswood, Benzoin, Cannabis Resin, Cardamom Seeds, Cassia, Cedar, Cinnamon, Copal, Frankincense, Galangal Root, Ginger, Honey, Juniper, Lemongrass, Mastic, Mint, Myrrh, Orris, Pistachio, Raisins, Red Wine, Rose Petals, Saffron, Sandalwood, Storax Balsam.

A number of scholars have suggested that one of the more influential and still existing religious cultures that arose out of the mid-east, may itself found it's original inspiration through the shamanic use of a cannabis beverage. About 2,500 years ago Iran was the source for the great Persian empire which at one time controlled much of the ancient world. Iran is located slightly to the northeast of the ancient kingdoms of Sumeria, Babylonia, and Assyria. This area was the home of the Ancient Magi, who later became known as the Zoroastrians, after their prophet Zoroaster. Zoroaster also known as Zarathustra Spitma, is thought to have lived sometime between 628-551 BC, with this date varying widely depending on the researcher. Adding to this confusion, some scholars have even suggested that the character of Zoroaster and the tales of his exploits, is the composite account of a number of different ancient Iranian shaman.

Zoroastrianism arose out of an earlier faith, Mazdaism, which was a combination of the beliefs of the Assyria-Babylonian religions and the Aryan invaders who brought down their pre-Vedic faith from the Hindu-Kush mountains, while their brothers went South and invaded India. This common ancestry accounts for the many similarities in the Hindu and Zoroastrian cosmologies and language. The religions of these two groups are preserved in the collection of Hindu Hymns, the *Rig Veda*, and the Persian, *Yashts*. The affinities between two is most apparent in the many references to a sacred plant known in India as *Soma*, and in Persian as *Haoma*. In both cultures this plant, was considered as a god, and when pressed and made into a drink, the ancient worshipper who imbibed it gained the powerful attributes of this God.

A number of different candidates have been suggested as the plant identity of *haoma/soma*, the most popular being the *anamati-muscaria* mushroom. The Fly-agaric theory was originally proposed in a hypothesis from the banker and mycologist R.Gordon Wasson, and would seem to be backed by ancient references to drinking urine in the Vedas, as well as the modern day practice of the Parsis, who drink token amounts of Bull urine in ritual (psycho-active Alkaloids from the *amanita muscaria*, pass through human urine, and can be reingested). His theory has been widely accepted by a number of scholars.

References to twigs and branches have lead religious scholar A.L Barsham, High Times editor Steve Hager, Orientalist Alain Danielou and still others to suggest hemp. In favor of the hemp/soma theory are ancient writings which indicate that the stalks of the haoma were weaved together and worn around the neck as an amulet for protection, something that would be hard to accomplish with a mushroom, but not with the fibrous *cannabis-sativa*¹⁵. Tradition also records that *haoma* grew on the mountain slopes of the Hindu Kush, an area that is still known for its powerful *ganja*. Further, *haoma* is described as being yellow or gold like in color, the same color as ripe cannabis in the Far East.

Likely due to cultural prejudice and a lack of knowledge regarding the role of entheogens at the inception of religions, cannabis was originally rejected outright by Western Historians researching the identity of the soma in the 19th century, such as Regel(1884). It was not until 1921 and the publication of Braja Lal

¹⁵ Further Vedic references to soma's fibrous qualities are pointed to by one of the more vocal proponents of the hemp soma theory, the knowledgeable editor of High Times, Steve Hager. "The restless Soma--you try to grab him but he breaks away and overpowers everything. He is a sage and seer inspired by poetry. He covers the naked and heals all who are sick. The blind man sees; the lame man steps forth." A description that certainly does have connotations of, medicinal, fibrous, and psychoactive properties. Hager has furthered the cause of the hemp/soma camp by getting the respected Ayurvedic Doctor, Depak Chopra, to acknowledge that from what we can see of Vedic descriptions, "It is possible soma was a cannabis like substance."

Mukherjee's article 'The Soma Plant' in the Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society that cannabis, or "bhang" was put forth as a serious candidate.

Mukherjee based his assertion on references in the Satapatha Brahmana that refer to a plant "usana" from which soma is made, the "u" in "usana" was a prefix carryover from the Kiratas, with whom soma originated, and when the "u" is dropped you return to one of the original sanskrit names for cannabis "sana". As well, Mukherjee notes the use of the terms similar to "soma" in cannabis names in the languages of the Tibetans "somarasta" and the Tanguts "dschoma". Of course Mukherjee, who was of Indian descent, noted the long Hindu history regarding the sanctity of bhang, its use in the worship of Shiva and also in that of his counterpart Durga, where it appears in the Soma sacrifice. Finally, like other researchers he noted the obvious parallels between ancient descriptions of the preparation of the soma and the traditional preparation of bhang

In 1939 Joges Candra Roy developed more on Mukherjee's work noting that Soma is actually called bhang in the Rig Veda (Rg Veda IX: 61:13) and from ancient descriptions, soma added a air of hilarity to the sacred feast, and this was typical of bhang intoxication.).

Respected religious scholar Alain Danielou, (1907-1994) the first Westerner to be fully initiated into the cult of Shiva, at first rejected the hemp/soma theory, but came to accept it in 1960, and defended this hypothesis up until his death.

"This ancient sacred drink was likely to resemble a drink what today is called bhang, made from the crushed leaves of Indian Hemp. Every Shivaite has to consume bhang at least once a year. The drink, which intensifies perceptivity, induces visions and above all leads to extreme mental concentration. It is widely used by Yogis. Details concerning its preparation are to be found as early as the Vedic period. The description of the way soma was prepared and its immediate use without fermentation, can only apply to bhang and is identical to the method employed today." (Danielou 1992)

A view shared by other religious scholars as well "The drink prepared from the plant...was made with great ceremony in the course of the sacrifice, when the herb was pressed between stones, mixed with milk, strained, and drunk on the same day...The effects of soma... are rather like those attributed to such drugs as hashish. Soma may well have been hemp, which grows wild in parts of India, Central Asia and South Russia, and from which modern Indians produce a narcotic drink called 'bhang'".(Basham 1961)

A look at the ancient references themselves do indeed seem reminiscent of the pressing of hemp leaves and flowers in the preparation of the beverage bhang.

...O king Soma, O Soma which the priest carefully prepares.
...High with power that is real,
its flowing blends together,
together blend the fragrances of the fragrant,
purifying you by the formula, O wild god.
Flow, O elixir, for Indra all around!

There where the priest, O purified Soma,
Speaking the language of poets,
Is exalted by Soma, holding in his hand the stone,
Creating ecstasy for himself through Soma.
Flow, O elixir, for Indra all around!

Even the stones used for crushing the soma, were invoked as a deity, the clacking of their work likened to speaking. Note the references to the rocks pressing the soma as being turned green in the process and also the reference to soma as "the purple tree" in what seems to be a clear description of the color of ripened cannabis indica.

Let these (stones) speak.... Ye solid, quick moving stones, you utter the noise of praise... full of the Soma juice.

They roar like a hundred, like a thousand men; they cry aloud with green-tinted faces; obtaining the sacrifice, the pious stones... partake of the sacrificial food...

They speak, they received into their mouth the sweet (Soma juice)...chewing the branch of the purple tree, the voracious bulls have bellowed.

Splitting, but unsplit, you, O stones... enjoying the Soma, flowing green (with Soma), they made heaven and earth resound with their clamor.

The stones proclaim it with their clamor at the issue of the Soma-juice,... like cultivators sowing the seed, they devouring the Soma, mix it, and do not hurt it.

...Proclaim the praise of (the stone), which has effused (the Soma-juice); let the honored stones revolve.

A little research into the Iranian counterpart of the Soma, the Haoma, also offers us some interesting insights. Haoma consumption originated in Persia with the Zoroastrian priests who brought it with them in their ancient Exodus from the Hindu-Kush Mountains. Zoroastrian mythology has it that their prophet was conceived after his body came down to earth through heavenly rain, which brought forth plants which were consumed by cows belonging to the people selected to become his parents. The cows gave milk which was pressed with haoma and drunk by the prophet's parents, who later conceived him while making love for the first time.

In the case of Persian references, a number of orthodox Zoroastrian sources see haoma as "very possibly 'marijuana' or 'hashish' (Cannabis Sativa)", (The Zarathustran Assembly, www.zoroastrian.org). Ali A. Jafarey, who has been writing on the Zoroastrian religion for over forty years, states that the "mushroom seems to be farfetched" and the commonly used modern ingredient for the haoma ceremony, Ephedra, is "void of all the qualities described in the Avesta and the Vedas, is definitely a late substitute. The author, a teetotaler, has drunk large glassfuls of hûm juice in Yazd without feeling any side effects. Ephedra supplies 'ephedrine' medically used to treat low blood pressure. Ephedrine is a decongestant. It does not push a person 'high' but it does make one feel 'hyper'!"

Jafarey makes an interesting point in reference to the "Saka tribes" of Central Asia, a group more popularly known as the Scythians, and who were referred to in the writings of Herodotus (440 BC) in reference to their use of cannabis to achieve ecstasy as discussed earlier.

As Jafarey explains of the soma....

"The description of the plant that it was greenish in color (zairi/hari), grew on mountains well north of the Indus Valley and was traded by outsiders, had a special ritual to prepare, was an instant intoxicant prepared from pounding and extracting its juice, and that the Saka tribes of eastern Central Asia are called "haumavarka" (haoma-gatherers) by Achaemenians; all point, in my opinion, to what is now known as Indian hemp (cannabis sativa)".

"...the ceremony resembles... the present practice of solemnly pounding... extracting and straining its juice, and mixing it with water, milk, poppy seeds, and almonds by sufis, faqirs, pirs, sadhus, and other Muslim and Hindu mystics of certain orders and circles in Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India, particularly those connected with shrines and holy places. It still has a halo around it!.... The drink, an instant psychoactive mixture, is greenish in color. It is called "dûgh-e vahdat" (unity milk) by Iranian mystics and "thâdal" (cooling, refreshing) by Sindhi sufis. One description says its addicts "never die," a far echo of "dûraosha" for haoma." (Jafarey 2,000)

The Roots of the Soma Cult

Recent archeological evidence has emerged from Russian excavations in the Kara Kum desert of Turkmenistan which gives the cannabis-soma theory an element of legitimacy that the other candidates cannot top. “[F]or the first time in the world archeological practice, monumental temples were found in which intoxicating beverage of the soma-haoma type were prepared for cult ceremonies.... The excavations documentally proved that poppy, cannabis and ephedra were used for making the soma-haoma drinks, and thickets of these plants were found in excess in the vicinity of the excavated temples of Margiana.”(Sarianidi, 2003)

Soviet archeologists uncovered a large shrine, about the size of a football field dating from 2,000 BC and consisting of two parts, one of which was obviously for public, but the other, as researcher Richard Rudgeley describes "hidden from the gaze of the multitude, an inner sanctum of the priesthood. In one of these private rooms were found three ceramic bowls. Analysis of samples found in these vessels by Professor Mayer-Melikyan revealed the traces of both cannabis and Ephedra. Clearly both these psychoactive substances had been used in conjunction in the making of hallucinogenic drinks. In the adjoining room of the same inner sanctum were found ten ceramic pot-stands which appear to have been used in conjunction with strainers designed to separate the juices from the twigs, stems and leaves of the plants. In another room at the other end of the shrine a basin containing remains of a considerable quantity of cannabis was discovered, as well as a number of pottery stands and strainers that have also been associated with making psychoactive beverages.”(Rudgley, 1998)

Remnants from vessels recovered at the site and involved in the preparation of the sacred drink have impressions from cannabis seeds left in the gypsum that settled over the millennia and the remnants of ephedra, poppy and mostly cannabis in the white sediment stuck to the sides of ancient pots and pitchers. Russian archeologist Victor Sarianidi says this proves these plants “were used for making the soma – haoma drinks...”(Sarianidi 2003)

Seeds of Dissent

Contradicting Sarianidi’s analysis of the seed imprints found in a number of the pots used to make the sacred beverage, Prof. Bakels has suggested that the seed imprints in question are too small to have been cannabis seeds (Bakels 2003). Contrarily as noted by Robert Connell Clarke (1981), cannabis seeds occur in sizes ranging from 2mm to 6mm in length and 2 to 4 mm in maximum diameter. Here in figure 1 we see just how wide the variation of seeds are (figure 1) “Mature Cannabis seeds vary widely in size, shape, color and seed – coat pattern. Colors range from light gray to black, and from buff to dark brown.” (Clarke H. 1998) That ancient world seeds were generally of the smaller size is clearly indicated by seeds collected from the Scythian burial site in Pazyryk (figure 2). “Modern 'Novosadska' hemp, Pazyryk Iron Age and British medieval Cannabis seeds.” (Clarke and Fleming, 1998). Finally, modern cannabis breeders, in search of early flowering strains, have bred varieties of indica with it’s older uncultivated predecessor Ruderalis, developing, one would consider, a strain of cannabis possibly similar to that of those in question from Margiana, as cultivation of the plant then was much closer to it’s origins than now. The seeds of this strain of cannabis, popularly known as “Might Mite” are of the smallest and darkest variety to be found, being of a solid color, almost black and about 2mm in length.

Thus it can clearly be seen that Sarianidi’s original analysis of the seed imprints at Margiana, are well within the range of seed size and shell pattern, or rather lack thereof, for cannabis, and that this range fits well within those put forth by both archeological and botanical evidence.

Still, due to the fact that others have been unable to reproduce Sarianidi’s identification of cannabinoids in the fossilized sediment from the pots used for making the sacred beverage which were found at the site, the identification of the sacred beverage which was prepared in this 4,000 yr old temple site, remains a mystery.¹⁶

¹⁶ The terms *haoma* and *soma* may have been generic terms, used to describe a variety of drug plants and this could account for the many different botanical candidates. Possibly, when the Aryans left the Hindu-Kush mountains access to haoma became more difficult and when the original plant was not available other

Interestingly another plant drug term begins to appear in the Magi literature at the time of Zoroaster and around the time of the disappearance of haoma, and there is little question as to its identity as hemp, as the term used to describe it in the ancient writings, *bhanga*, is still in use to this day in both Persia and India (*bhang*). Because of the coinciding disappearance of haoma and appearance of *bhanga*, a number of scholars have suggested that a name change took place and the two words describe a single botanical species, cannabis. The Zoroastrian references to *bhanga* are said to have come down to us through one of the few surviving books of the Zend-Avesta, the Vendidad, (*The Law Against Demons*), which calls *bhanga*, Zoroaster's *good narcotic*. This ancient reference indicates the plant as the favored entheogen of the Persian prophet and later Zoroastrian writings refer to Zoroaster's use of hemp for shamanistic ecstasy and initiation.

According to Mircea Eliade, one of the foremost authorities on the history of religion, "*Shamanic ecstasy induced by hemp smoke was known in ancient Iran*". Professor Eliade and other respected religious scholars along with a number of hemp historians have proposed that Zoroaster used hemp to bridge the metaphysical gap between heaven and earth. Indeed, the plant was of such importance to the ancient Zoroastrians that in the Zend-Avesta hemp occupies the first place in a list of 10,000 medicinal plants.

Zoroaster, much like Moses, was a religious reformer, and he condensed the multi god\goddess pantheon of his Aryan and Chaldean ancestors into the worship of one supreme God, Ahura Mazda. Eliade has suggested that "*In the Avestan tradition, Zarathustra himself was believed to "give himself over to ecstasy"*". As Eliade explains Zoroaster's ecstasy was produced by cannabis and it was under its entheogenic influence that Zoroaster heard the voice of Ahura Mazda.

Although such a powerful experience would seem unlikely to most western users of cannabis, as Dr. Michael Aldrich explains "There is a myth that pot is a mild and minor drug. Usually in context of American usage it is, but it doesn't have to be. The hard part about expressing this, however, is that the anti marijuana people who pose visions of disaster about 'hashish' or about 'legalizing the stronger forms of cannabis' are also wrong. In and of itself there's nothing wrong with cannabis being a potent hallucinogen; this has certainly accounted for its vast popularity through these many centuries. When one seeks a shaman's drug one generally wants something more powerful than a "mild hallucinogen." Of course, knowing when and where to use cannabis at a dosage or strength suitable for real visions is also important. It's obviously not a good idea to try in an unrefined social context, or when working in the fields or factory. This use of cannabis has traditionally been confined, by rational custom in ancient societies, to rituals which help define and control, measure and magnify, the raw experience".¹⁷

In time Zoroaster perfected his method of hemp induced shamanistic ecstasy, and began to initiate others into its mysteries, including his own wife Hvovi, who prayed that she be given the "good narcotic *bangha*.. that she might think according to the law, speak according to the law and do according to the law" Amongst other cannabis initiates can be counted the Zoroastrian heroes Gustap and Ardu Viraf, who after drinking *bhang*, 'where transported in soul to heaven and had the highest mysteries revealed to them'. These ancient out of body experiences are classic examples of what is known as 'shamanistic ecstasy'. And 'shamanistic flight'. The belief that the soul actually left the body in these magical rituals, resulted in the belief that this occurred also at the point of death, giving rise to a belief in an afterlife.

Ardu Viraf's vision is of particular interest to modern readers, as they are considered by religious scholars to be the root source of the Christian concepts of Heaven and Hell. After partaking of an extremely strong psychedelic dose of marijuana Ardu Viraf lay in what appeared to outsiders as a deathlike coma and had a classic out-of-body-experience, in which the ancient psychonaut believed he traveled on the mythical

herbs were used as a substitute, and where consecrated then consumed under the collective name *haoma*. If this was the case, then eventually these continuing substitutions could have caused so much confusion among the ancient worshippers, that over a few generations the original identity of the plant was lost and forgotten and the name became one that referred to a variety of plant drugs.

¹⁷ As quoted in (Novak, 1980)

Cinvat bridge to Heaven where he witnessed "All dwell among fine carpets and cushions in great pleasure and joy....Viraf, after returning to the bridge, was then taken to hell that he might see the lot of the wicked...He saw the 'greedy jaws of hell, like the most frightful pit'. Everyone in hell is packed in so tight that life is intolerable, yet all believe that they are alone..."¹⁸ Amazingly over twenty five hundred years later, the hemp induced shamanistic-vision had by this Zoroastrian hero, still has literally millions of *faithful believers* who hope one day to join the righteous in heaven and avoid the 'greedy jaws of hell'!

Like many prophets and sages, Zoroaster passed many years unable to convince others of his profound revelation of the one god, Ahura Mazda. It was said to have been ten years after his original visions, that Zoroaster's beliefs first became noticed, when a powerful chieftain, known as king Vishtaspa, was converted by Zoroaster's philosophy and saw to it that the ancient sage was treated with his due respect, placed in a position of authority, and that his new religion was taught on a wide scale throughout the kingdom.

Apparently, Vishtaspa's conversion included initiation into the shamanistic practices of the ancient prophet and as Professor Eliade noted, under Zoroaster's guidance "Vishtaspa used hemp (bhang) to obtain ecstasy: while his body lay asleep, his soul traveled to paradise."¹⁹

The revelations received by Vishtaspa in his psychedelic voyage, are the origin of the whole concept of an Apocalypse or Holy Armageddon, and he was one of the first to conceive of a beginning and end of history, placing himself and Zarathustra at the mid-point of history. Vishtaspa's Eschatological vision was prohibited literature in ancient Rome, which is not surprising as an Oracle attributed to the king was credited with predicting its downfall. Vishtaspa's vision, known as the *Great Renovation* foretold of a coming Savior and the institution of a powerful Eucharist, the White Hom, a mythos that would directly influence the Judaic and later Christian concepts of a Messiah.

The Zoroastrian influence on the Biblical prophecies of the end of the world, extends far back through the Book of Revelation and to the earlier versions of the apocalyptic prophecies in the Old Testament in a period of time when the ancient Jews were under Persian rule. The prophet Isaiah referred to Cyrus the Great of Persia as 'the anointed of Yahweh,'²⁰ whom Yahweh himself lead, 'to subdue nations before him that gates may not be closed..' Yet historically, Cyrus, referred to in the Old Testament as "the King of Kings", and who returned the different peoples that he had conquered to their homelands and restored each of their gods to their temples, continued to worship the god of his own ancestors, Ahura Mazda. Perhaps at that point in history, little differentiation was seen between the one god of the Hebrew's, Yahweh, and that of the Persian monotheists', Ahura Mazda.

Probably seen as even more controversial than the debate about the identification of the haoma'soma as cannabis are the ancient Hebrew references that a growing number of researches are starting to identify as cannabis.

Although it is little known to most modern readers, a number of sources have noted that psychoactive plants and inebriants played a very important role in ancient Hebrew culture and originally appeared throughout the books that make up the Bible's Old Testament. The Bible openly discusses the use of mandrake, which is psychoactive, along with intoxication by wine and strong drink so the Hebrews were more than familiar with altering their consciousness. What will be surprising to most modern readers, is the frequent use of cannabis-sativa, by both the Hebrew Priests and Kings. Indicating, as anthropologist Vera Rubin noted, that cannabis "appears in the Old Testament because of the ritual and sacred aspect of it"(Rubin 1978).

¹⁸PERSIAN MYTHOLOGY, Paul Hamlyn,(The Hamlyn Publishing Group,1973).

¹⁹ A HISTORY OF RELIGIOUS IDEAS VOL.1, Mircea Eliade, translated by Willard R. Trask,1978. (Eliade refers to H.S.Nyberg's DIE RELIGION DES ALTEN IRAN'S and G.Widengren's LES RELIGIONS DE L'IRAN.)

²⁰The ancient Hebrew anointing oil contained sacred kaneh-bosm (Cannabis) as the pre-eminent psycho active ingredient.

For more than a century various researchers have been trying to bring attention to potential cannabis references within the Old Testament. "Like the ancient Greeks, the Old Testament Israelites were surrounded by marijuana-using peoples. A British physician, Dr. C. Creighton, concluded in 1903 that several references to marijuana can be found in the Old Testament. Examples are the "*honeycomb*" referred to in the Song of Solomon, 5:1, and the "*honeywood*" in I Samuel 14: 25-45" (Consumer Reports 1972). Creighton felt that in " the O.T. there are some half-dozen passages where cryptic references to hachish may be discovered... But that word, which is the key to the meaning, has been knowingly mistranslated in the Vulgate and in the modern version, having been rendered by a variant also by the LXX in one of the passages, and confessed as unintelligible in the other by the use of a marginal Hebrew word in Greek letters" (Creighton 1903).

"Hachish, which is the disreputable intoxicant drug of the East...is of unknown antiquity. It is known that the fiber of hemp-plant, **Cannabis sativa**, was used for cordage in ancient times; and it is therefore probable that the resinous exudation, "honey" or "dew", which is found upon its flowering tops on some soils, or in certain climates (**Cannabis Indica**), was known for its stimulant or intoxicant properties from an equally early date...we may assume it to have been traditional among the Semites from remote antiquity. There are reasons, in the nature of the case, why there should be no clear history. All vices are veiled from view; they are *sub rosa*; and that is true especially of the vices of the East. Where they are alluded to at all, it is in cryptic, subtle...and allegorical terms. Therefore if we are to discover them, we must be prepared to look below the surface of the text." (Creighton 1903).

Dr. Creighton is not alone in his view. A few decades later the German researcher Immanuel Low, in his *Die Flora Der Juden*, (1926\1967) identified a number of ancient Hebrew references to cannabis, here as an incense, food source, as well as cloth. In more recent times Professor Stanley Moore, chairman of the philosophy department of the University of Wisconsin-Olatteville, has stated that Biblical references to "*aromatic herbs*" and "*smoke*" could mean psycho-active drugs used in religious observances that, Moore said are as old as religion itself. "Western Jews and Christians, who shun psycho-active drugs in their faith practices, are the exception, not the norm."

Of the historical material indicating the Hebraic use of cannabis, the strongest and most profound piece of evidence was established in 1936 by Sula Benet (a.k.a. Sara Benetowa), a Polish etymologist from the Institute of Anthropological Sciences in Warsaw. Benet later stated that: "In the original Hebrew text of the Old Testament there are references to hemp, both as incense, which was an integral part of religious celebration, and as an intoxicant"(Benet 1975). Through comparative etymological study, Bennett documented that in the Old Testament and in its Aramaic translation, the Targum Onculos, hemp is referred to as *q'neh bosm* which (variously translated as *kaneh bosem*, *keneh bosem*, *kaniebosm*) and is also rendered in traditional Hebrew as *kannabos* or *kannabus*. The root "*kan*" in this construction means "*reed*" or "*hemp*", while "*bosm*" means "*aromatic*". This word appeared in Exodus 30:23, Song of Songs 4:14., Isaiah 43:24, Jeremiah 6:20, Ezekiel 27:19.

In 1980 the respected anthropologist Weston La Barre (1980) referred to the Biblical references in an essay on cannabis, concurring with Benet's earlier hypothesis. In that same year respected British Journal *New Scientist* also ran a story that referred to the Hebrew Old Testament references, (Malyon & Henman 1980). A modern counterpart of the word is even listed in Ben Yehudas Pocket Dictionary and other Hebrew source books. Further, on line, the Internet's informative *Navigating the Bible*, used by countless theological students, even refers to the Exodus 30:23 reference as possibly designating cannabis. curiously this information is still not widely known by most modern day Jews, Christians or religious scholars

Benet's etymological research regarding the Hebrew terms *q'eneh bosem*' and *q'eneh*' was based upon tracing the modern word 'cannabis' back through history to show the similarities between the cognitive pronunciation of *cannabis* and *q'eneh bosem*' and as²¹ as well as compared the term to the names used for cannabis by contemporary kingdoms, such as the Assyrian and Babylonians terms for the plant '*qunubu*' .

²¹ As with the Semetic term 'kinamon' the source of our modern 'cinnamon'.

In fact the term ‘q’neh bosem’ is the Hebrew transliteration of an earlier Indo-European term for the plant ‘*canna*’. This term left traces through the vernacular ‘*an*’ seen in various modern terms for c’*an*’nabis, such as the Indian bh’*a*’ng, the French ch’*an*’vre, the Dutch c’*an*’vas and the German h’*an*’f.

This use of an Indo-European word in the Semetic language shows that the ritual use of cannabis came to the Hebrews from foreign sources and as an item of trade, it retained the core aspects of its original name. Indeed, in both the Jeremiah and Ezekiel references referred to by Benet, cannabis is identified as coming from a foreign land, and indeed as the additional references noted by Benet tell when put into the context of the Biblical storyline, this foreign association with the plant may in fact have been the cause of its disfavor amongst the ancient Hebrews. Initially appearing in favor, as part of a list of ingredients in a holy anointing oil, which when bestowed upon a chosen individual made him ‘the anointed one’, which in Hebrew is rendered the ‘Messiah’ and later in Greek the ‘Christ’. But this love affair was not to last... As Prof. Carl Ruck a linguist and mythologist, along with his equally educated co-authors have also noted:

“Chrismation was „,a mode of administering healing balms. In the Old Testament, chrismation involves pouring the anointing oil over the head, which functions to purify (obviously in a spiritual sense, not to cleanse physically) and to confer power, strength, or majesty. Its most common occurrence is the coronation of kings, which sometimes is accomplished by Yahweh, himself; but priests and prophet-shamans are also anointed, as also are objects to set them aside from profane use. In *Exodus* 30,23 sq., Yahweh specifies the ingredients for the chrism, making clear that such unguents contained herbal additives to the oil: **Cannabis sativa** (*kaneh bosm*, usually translated "aromatic cane") is combined with perfuming spices (cinnamon, cassia, and myrrh) in oil. ...

”The psychoactivity of the "spices" in the anointing oil, in addition to the **Cannabis**, deserves attention. Cinnamon and cassia are mild to moderate stimulants. Myrrh is reputed to have medical properties. ...

”„,Cannabis, usually thought to be of Scythian origin, has a much earlier occurrence in Semitic languages and appears several times through out the Old Testament. The word in question is *kaneh bosm*, ... It is now translated as "calamus," the mistranslation starting as early as the Septuagint. *Kaneh bosm* occurs also in *Song of Songs* 4.14, where it grows in an orchard of exotic fruits, herbs, and spices: on the *Song of Songs* as an ethnobotanical encomium of the entheogen. It occurs also in Isaiah 43,24 where Yahweh lists amongst the slights not received in sacrifice... and *Jeremiah* 6,20, where Yahweh, displeased with his people, rejects such an offering; and *Ezekiel* 27.19, where it occurs in a catalogue of the luxurious items in the import trade of Tyre. Benet concludes that these references confirm that hemp was used by the Hebrews as incense and intoxicant. This conclusion has since been affirmed by other scholars. It is ironic that calamus "sweet flag," the substitute for the alleged **cannabis**, is itself a known hallucinogen for which TMA-2 is derived.” (Ruck et al. 2001)

These passages are particularly telling of how the disappearance of cannabis from the Old testament script came about. Isaiah 43:24 “Thou hast bought me no sweet²² cane (*q’neh* with money, neither hast thou filled me with the fat of thy sacrifices: but thou hast made me to serve with thy sins, thou hast wearied me with thine iniquities.” Here Yahweh condemns the Hebrews for not bringing both cannabis and enough of the lavish animal sacrifices common in the Old Testament to him. A further reading of the texts shows that these items are being sacrificed in honor of competing deities. A situation that is compounded through the words of the monotheistic reformer Jeremiah “ To what purpose cometh there to me incense from Sheba, and the sweet cane (*q’neh*) from a far country? your burnt offerings [are] not acceptable, nor your sacrifices sweet unto me. (Jeremiah 6;20) . Here just prior to the final fall of Hebrew kingdoms, the pagan and foreign associations with the plant finally drive it underground. But it must be understood that from the time of Moses and throughout the kingdom period, the use of cannabis in a ritual context had continued. (Bennett and McQueen, 2001)

A theme more fully explored and expanded upon in my own book, *SEX, DRUGS, VIOLENCE AND THE BIBLE* co-authored with Neil McQueen (Forbidden Fruit Publishing 2001). Following in the footsteps of Benet’s

²² In the original Hebrew “sweet’ in this context can also refer to scent.

research, we were able to follow the history of the sacred anointing oil into the early Christian period, particularly amongst heretical Gnostic Christian sects, that along with pagan cults, were brutally banned at the inception of the Dark Ages and the rise of Catholicism.

As noted the term 'Christ' itself is Greek rendering of the Hebrew 'Messiah' and this means the 'anointed one' making reference back to the original anointing oil as described in Exodus 30:23. Indeed even in the New Testament Jesus does not baptize any of his own disciples, but rather in the oldest of the synoptic Gospels Jesus sends out his followers to heal with the anointing oil "they cast out many devils, and anointed with oil many that were sick, and healed them." (Mark 6:13). Likewise, after Jesus' passing, James suggests that anyone of the Christian community who was sick should call to the elders to anoint him with oil in the name of Jesus (James 5:14). "Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord."

It should also be understood that in the ancient world, diseases such as epilepsy were attributed to demonic possession, and to cure somebody of such an illness, even with the aid of certain herbs, was the same as exorcism, or miraculously healing them. Interestingly, cannabis has been shown to be effective in the treatment of not only epilepsy, but many of the other ailments that Jesus and the disciples healed people of, such as skin diseases (Matthew 8, 10, 11; Mark 1; Luke 5, 7, 17), eye problems (John 9:6-15), and menstrual problems (Luke 8:43-48).

According to ancient Christian documents, even the healing of cripples could be attributed to the use of the holy oil. "Thou holy oil given unto us for sanctification... thou art the straightener of the crooked limbs" (The Acts of Thomas).

One ancient Christian text, The Acts of Peter and the Twelve Apostles, which is older than the New Testament, estimated to have been recorded in the second century AD, has Jesus giving the disciples an "unguent box" and a "pouch full of medicine" with instructions for them to go into the city and heal the sick. Jesus explains that you must heal "the bodies first" before you can "heal the heart."

As Jesus and his followers began to spread the healing knowledge of cannabis around the ancient world, the singular Christ became the plural term "Christians," that is, those who had been smeared or anointed with the holy oil. As the New Testament explains: "The anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit—just as it has taught you, remain in him" (1 John 2:27).

The Christians, the "smeared or anointed ones," received "knowledge of all things" by this "anointing from the Holy One" (1 John 2:20). Thereafter, they needed no other teacher, and were endowed with their own spiritual knowledge. "Residues of cannabis, moreover, have been detected in vessels from Judea and Egypt in a context indicating its medicinal, as well as visionary, use."(Ruck 2003)²³

²³ A archeological dig in Bet Shemesh near Jerusalem has confirmed that cannabis medicine was in use in the area up until the fourth century. Thus it would seem to stand to reason that it was used for these purposes throughout the intervening Christian period. In the case of the Bet Shemesh dig, the cannabis had been used as an aid in child bearing, both as a healing balm and an inhalant. Scientists commenting on the find noted that cannabis was used as a medicine as early as the 16th century BC, in Egypt. (Abel 1980 This find garnered some attention, as can be seen from the Associated Press article, "Hashish evidence is 1,600 years old", that appeared in Vancouver newspaper The Province, on June 2, 1992:

"Archaeologists have found hard evidence that hashish was used as a medicine 1,600 years ago, the Israel Antiquities Authority said yesterday.

Archaeologists uncovered organic remains of a substance containing hashish, grasses and fruit on the abdominal area of a teenage female's skeleton that dates back to the fourth century, the antiquities authority said in a statement.

Anthropologist Joel Zias said that although researchers knew hashish had been used as a medicine, this is the first archeological evidence." (Associated Press 1992).

In the first few centuries AD, Christian Gnostic groups such as the Archontics, Valentians and Sethians rejected water baptism as superfluous, referring to it as an "incomplete baptism". (The Paraphrase of Shem.) In the tractate, the Testimony of Truth, water Baptism is rejected with a reference to the fact that Jesus baptized none of his disciples. (Rudolph, 1987) Being "anointed with unutterable anointing", the so-called "sealings" recorded in the Gnostic texts, can be seen as a very literal event. "There is water in water, there is fire in chrism." (Gospel of Philip). "The anointing with oil was the introduction of the candidate into unfading bliss, thus becoming a Christ." (Mead, 1900) "The oil as a sign of the gift of the Spirit was quite natural within a semetic framework, and therefore the ceremony is probably very early. . . In time the biblical meaning became obscured." (Chadwick, 1967)

The surviving Gnostic descriptions of the effects of the anointing rite make it very clear that the holy oil had intense psycho-active properties, which prepared the recipient for entrance into "unfading bliss". In some Gnostic texts like the Pistis Sophia and the Books of Jeu, the "spiritual ointment" is a prerequisite for entry into the highest mystery. (Mead, 1900)

In the Gospel of Philip it is written that the initiates of the empty rite of Baptism:

"go down into the water and come up without having received anything. . . The anointing (chrisma) is superior to baptism. For from the anointing we were called 'anointed ones' (Christians), not because of the baptism. And Christ also was [so] named because of the anointing, for the Father anointed the son, and the son anointed the apostles, and the apostles anointed us. [Therefore] he who has been anointed has the All. He has the resurrection, the light. . . the Holy Spirit. . . [If] one receives this unction, this person is no longer a Christian but a Christ."

Similarly, the Gospel of Truth records that Jesus specifically came into their midst so that he:

"might anoint them with the ointment. The ointment is the mercy of the Father. . . those whom he has anointed are the ones who have become perfect."

The apocryphal book, The Acts of Thomas, refers to the ointment's entheogenic effects as being specifically derived from a certain plant:

Holy oil, given us for sanctification, hidden mystery in which the cross was shown us, you are the unfolder of the hidden parts. You are the humiliator of stubborn deeds. You are the one who shows the hidden treasures. You are the plant of kindness. Let your power come by this [unction].

Although the idea that Jesus and his disciples used a healing cannabis ointment may seem far-fetched at first, when weighed against the popular alternative (one that is held by millions of believers) that Jesus performed his healing miracles magically, through the power invested in him by the omnipotent Lord of the Universe, the case for ancient accounts of medicinal cannabis seems a far more likely explanation. When one considers that Jesus himself may have healed and initiated disciples with such topical cannabis preparations, the modern reintroduction of cannabis based medicines becomes, if not a miracle, at least a profound revelation..

In light of this profound history, some have come to see the use of cannabis as a freedom of religion issue. But after 15 years of researching the cross-cultural history of cannabis, and following it's use from the stone age to present, I have come to see that the right to cannabis is even more fundamental than religious freedoms, for humanity created religion, but no matter what god you believe in, you had better believe that god created cannabis. Even from an atheistic standpoint, from the cross cultural perspective, as possibly our oldest cultivated crop, humanity has had a evolutionary partnership with this plant that stretches back more than 10,000 years. Indeed humanity has a natural indigenous right to all the plants of the earth, all people and all plants, any law that stands in the way of that natural relationship is an abomination to both God and Nature²⁴.

²⁴ Preservation is an issue that must be addressed, as extinction of a species threatens our collective inheritance, endangered species must be protected for the benefit of all.

