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To find out more about the
"Origins of Concentrate",
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ORIGINS *of* CONCENTRATE

Words by Frenchy - Photos by J.C.

The origins of concentrate is lost to us. We only have diverse myths coming from the different producing countries left, most of them quite recent considering the long history of humanity and of the cannabis plant.

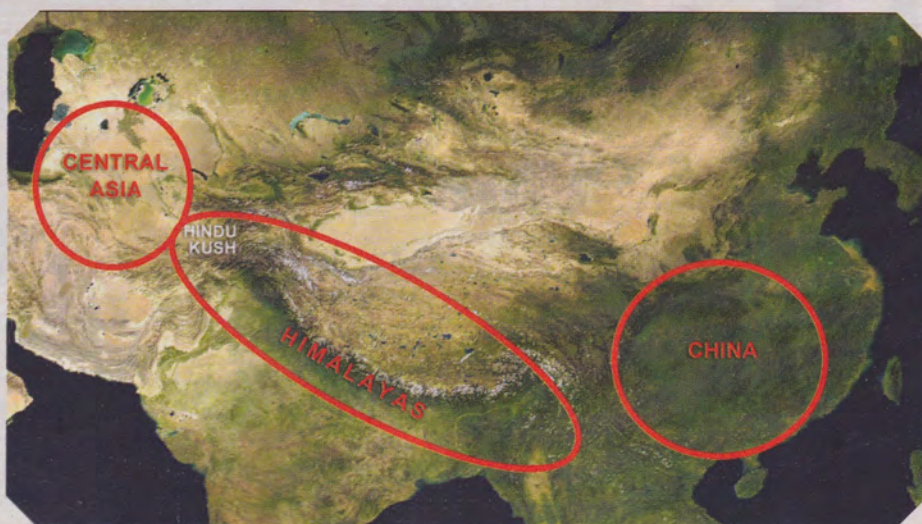
To find the origins of concentrate, we have first to find the birthplace of cannabis, which is also unknown due to the plant's ability to adapt and grow at most latitudes and climates courtesy of an early prehistoric dispersion of the plant. Three potential birthplaces have been offered, all of them on the Asian continent: the Yangtze and Yellow Rivers in China¹, the feet of the Himalayas from Bhutan to the Hindu Kush² and Central Asia³. The world's highest mountain ranges separate China from the rest of the Asian continent and since there is no evidence of the plant originating on both sides of the Himalayas, or having multiple origins for that matter, we have to take into consideration human evolution, the end of nomadic life, the birth and rise of agriculture as well as search for the oldest cannabis culture to make an educated guess, most experts believe the birth place to be Central Asia or Northern India.

The Asian continent is also the birthplace of agriculture, sedentary life and civilization, as we know it. Agriculture in China is one of the oldest, with evidences of cannabis, peas and rice farming over 10,000 years old. The Fertile Crescent in Central Asia is where

agriculture was born 15,000 years ago⁴ whilst Northern India and Southern Afghanistan are the main centers of origins of cultivated plants⁵. Excavations of prehistoric sites by Louis Dupree⁶ and other archeologists suggest that early humans were living in what is now Afghanistan at least 52,000 years ago and farming communities in Afghanistan were among the earliest in the world⁷. The Hindu Kush region has the oldest Hashish traditions and its geographic

location has to be the reason, being the epicenter of the two most likely birthplaces of cannabis. The Hindu Kush is also the portal between China and the rest of the continent, it controls the oldest and most important trade road in the history of humanity, the Silk Road, which was prevalent until the discovery of the Cape of Good Hope in 1488 and the opening of a sea route to India and the far East.

"Agriculture grew from human behaviors and from responses or changes in plants and animals, leading without conscious plan toward domestication of plants and animals"⁸. The birth of agriculture would be the outcome of an actual if not conscious breeding of plants that must predate the





first periodic occupation of site by our ancestors more than 50,000 years ago.

The amount of knowledge necessary to create an agricultural package that would trigger sedentary life and civilization is beyond vast; the oral traditions that conveyed the knowledge through so many generations are mindboggling.

"There are 200,000 species of wild flowering plants on the planet, a majority in the plant kingdom and the source of all modern crops. There are only a few thousand of these plants that are eaten by humans, a few hundred of these have been "domesticated" but provide minor food supplements. Merely a dozen of these wild flowering plants account for 80% of modern food production and

more than half the calories consumed by the world's human population today"⁹.

The fact that we have not domesticated a major new food plant since the beginning of sedentary life is the ultimate testimony to our ancestors' incredible ability of survival and their botanical knowledge.

Cannabis was one of the first plants domesticated by humanity; therefore we must assume that we have had a "rapport" with the cannabis plant that must go far back to the Dawn of Time.

Before extrapolating further on the question, I would also like to point out three key factors that must have played a major role in the discovery of the cannabis plant and its eventual domestication.

The first and foremost factor is the ability for cells in mammals to synthesize cannabinoids within a receptor system that is the result of an evolution that dates back to the unicellular common ancestor of animals and plants, over six hundred million years ago¹⁰. We are and have always been connected to this specific plant at the cellular level; it is in our DNA. Hundreds of millions of years of evolution created a unique bond with the botanical world, we share a profound biological co-evolution with the cannabis plant.

The second important factor to keep in mind is the basic necessities of life for the survival of our ancestors; medicine, sources of food that are light and nutritious with a long shelf life, like seeds and grains, as well as fiber to shape anything from containers to simple ropes. Weaving is the oldest human craft along with tool making and has been central to the survival of our species.

The third key issue is the size of the flora on the earth at that time which would be in proportion with the size of the Megafauna mammals roaming the earth so long ago that became extinct only 20,000 years ago.

A cannabis plant at the time of the wholly mammoth must have been a sight to behold.

Around two and half million years ago, *Homo erectus* migrated out of Africa and dispersed throughout Europe and Asia. It took our distant ancestors



roughly 800,000 years to move from the African continent to Asia, as confirmed by stone tools found in Malaysia that have been dated to be 1.8 million years old. How hard and challenging a journey it must have been is just impossible to imagine. Generation after generation of discovery and adaptation, every plant, animal and event analyzed and memorized and passed down for the survival of the species.

By the time *Homo erectus* was discovering the Asian continent we can assume that a vast amount of knowledge was at play on their continual search for food, medicine, fiber and the means to create tools.

How long would it take a master forager to find a plant the size of a tree, that offered the three most important necessities to survival (food, medicine, fiber), with which there is a connection at the DNA level and that is so hard to hide in the twenty first century?

A hundred years or three generations?

A thousand years?

A hundred thousands?

Five hundred thousands?

A million?

To pinpoint a date would be totally preposterous on my part but let's speculate that it took our ancestors as long to discover the cannabis plant as it took them to migrate from South Africa to Asia; that would bring it to somewhere around 900,000 to 800,000 BC and the earliest known use of fire.

Now let's imagine, using a logical approach, that first ancestor meeting with a cannabis plant/tree in his ceaseless quest for medicine, food and fiber. It is pretty much impossible to access the seeds, the fiber or any part of a Cannabis plant without building rapidly a layer of resin on the hands and fingers; this first accumulation of resin on our ancestor hands was the first concentrate ever made, what will be called Charas¹¹ hundreds of thousands of years later.

Millions of years of methodic discovery of every aspect of every plant encountered during their long migration meant that the chances for our ancestors to ingest some of that aromatic resin are rather high.

The psychoactive properties of ingested cannabis resin may well have been discovered before the nutritious and medicinal properties of its seeds or the quality of its fiber.

It is most probable that the plants would not be handled standing, for obvious reason of safety and practicality, but brought back to camp to be processed. The knowledge and "technology" to harvest and separate

chaff from seeds and grains had been perfected during the million or so years of our migration from Africa, the "apparatus" has not changed since and is found in every ancient and tribal culture on the planet, a long and wide loosely woven basketry with low side wall on three side.

Working comfortably and safely next to their fire, breaking down the flowers and separating seeds from chaff, which we may as well call sugar trims, it would not take long for the flower "waste" to finish in the fire and the discovery of the psychoactive properties of the smoke emanating from the burned sugar trims must have followed closely.

The probabilities that our ancestors had the understanding of all aspects of the psychoactive properties of Cannabis resin from the beginning of their contact with the plant are simply undeniable.

The possibilities that our ancestors picked the healthiest genetics are likewise very high, the simple fact that those plants had a greater chance to reproduce in a richer soil generated by human refuse and waste around campsite is logical¹² and could actually be considered the first step in breeding and cultivating cannabis and important in its survival of the Last Ice Age.

Charas is the oldest form of concentrate; it is the simplest and most adapted method to collect fresh resin from wild Cannabis plants at the peak of flowering in the high humidity climate, which was vital to support the "Megafloora" of the time.

It is still the main way of collecting resin at the feet of the Himalayas in Bhutan, Nepal and Northern India.

The birth and evolution of dry sieving will be the subject of the second part of "Origins of Concentrate", in our next issue (#114, available from December 1st).

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