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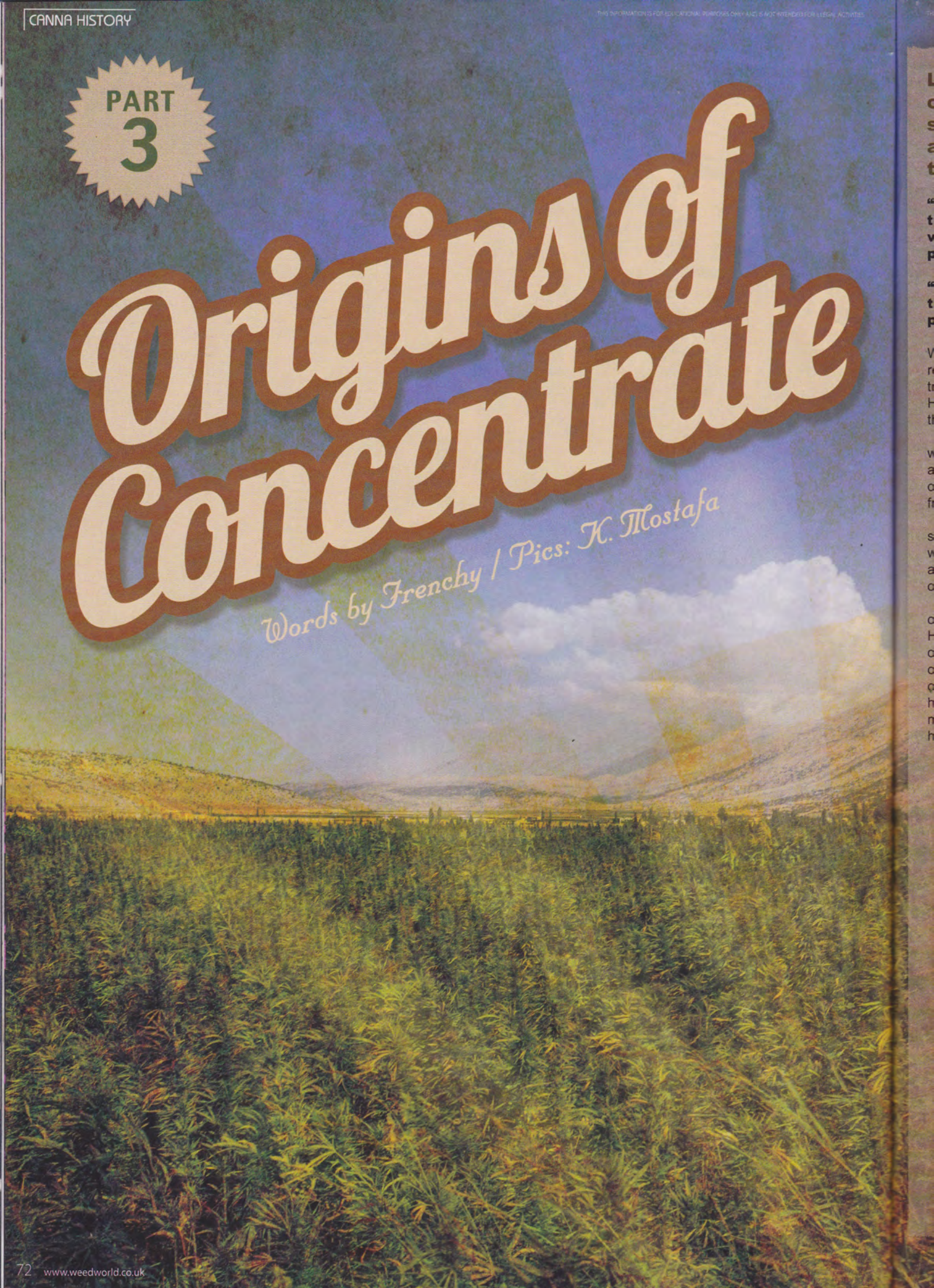
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PART
3

Origins of Concentrate

Words by Frenchy / Pics: K. Mostafa



Let's begin Part 3 with the descriptions of the words "sieve" and "Hashish" to start with a clear definition of the tool and product we will be discussing in this section.

"A sieve is a device with meshes or perforations through which finer particles of a mixture of various sizes (as of ashes, flour, sand, etc.) may be passed to separate them from coarser ones" ¹.

"Hashish is a psychoactive drug made from sieving the resin glands of the dried Cannabis flowers and pressing them with a source of heat."

We have explored the mystery of the origins of sieving Cannabis resin in Parts 1 & 2, establishing that the oldest Hashish traditions are found in the Hindu Kush Mountain range and that Hashish culture spread initially to Central Asia and the shores of the Mediterranean Sea through trade under a cloak of secrecy².

A few Millennia later, Hashish lost its mythological aspect with the expansion of the Muslim Empire and the associated advances in medical science; finally Hashish rose to a position of greater "global recognition" with the introduction of tobacco from the New World³.

We have no way to determine exactly how the process of sieving Cannabis resin originated since the materials used to weave the sieve biodegrades over time, leaving no traces for archeologist to retrieve thereby making the discovery of the origins of pressing a challenge.

The act of pressing the sieved resin glands with a source of heat to create a mass of resin is a step in the evolution of Hashish manufacturing that must have been significant in the life of semi-nomadic tribes. Loose dry resin glands require a type of container that may not have been available ten of thousands of years ago. If you consider that for a few generations, they had the knowledge of Charas, which is after all a lightly pressed mass of live resin, and of the dry resin accumulating on their hands while breaking flowers open and harvesting the seeds;

how much of a stretch of imagination was necessary to start hand pressing small quantity of dry resin, discovering a new realm of smell and taste?

It is time to leave the past behind and to study "modern traditional" sieving techniques from Afghanistan, Lebanon and Morocco.

Afghanistan and Lebanon have the oldest Hashish traditions, and Morocco the newest. All the lands between Afghanistan and Lebanon are also considered as some of the earliest Hashish producers, but prohibition since the early 18th century, the more recent drug war enforcement and religious extremism have erased the past; mostly stopping all export if not truly eliminating local consumption.

The stamps usually found on Hashish for export are simply a form of marketing: it has a strong appeal in the eyes of westerners, an exotic touch that promotes sales, but does not indicate quality. Hashish is illegal in all producing countries and advertising the origins would be perilous if not downright suicidal.

Quality in Afghanistan, Lebanon, Morocco and all other producing countries is primarily defined by smell and aroma, the texture is then considered as well as the "pressing potential" of the resin glands.

Afghanistan

Afghanistan was the Mecca of Hashish with the oldest legacy, the best sieving techniques in my eyes and a long reputation for the highest quality, with traditions possibly going back to the mysterious and secretive origins of Hashish.

The production of Hashish is more complex than the simple hand rubbing technique; it involves a deeper knowledge of Cannabis resin as well as special implements to manufacture a finished product of quality, from harvesting the plants for their resin glands to pressing the resin in ways that ensures quality through curing and aging.

Interestingly, the production of Hashish in every producing





country is located in mountainous regions; a cold and dry winter climate facilitating sieving must be part of the reason.

The harvested Cannabis plants are usually dried in loose bundles in full sun at first; the drying process is next completed in a shaded room with a good airflow.

The dried, but uncured, Cannabis plants are threshed before the sieving process can take place to separate stock, stems and fan leaves from flowers. The flowers are then broken down during the actual sieving process to collect seeds and resin.

The sieving equipment in Afghanistan varies from large rectangular wood frames with a silk or nylon material tightly stretched over it, to large bowls to contain the resin and minimize impurities. The first process needs two people to shake the frame and usually a third to handle the threshed material; it is usually done in an open room or a sheltered courtyard. The other technique is more adapted to processing smaller quantity of prime flowers for their seeds while collecting the resin or processing sieved resin a second time.

Through repeated sieving of the same plant material, different qualities of resin are produced, the longer and rougher the sieving, the lower the quality. Afghani Hashishin will further sieve the resin to obtain the cleanest possible material and the highest quality.

The quality of the resin, called garda in Afghanistan, is usually classified into first, second and third grades, the first being the purest form of resin. It is mostly available un-pressed and needs additional processing to transform the resin into Hashish. The resin powder is not yet ready for consumption; it has to be cured for three months in air tight containers, pressed thoroughly by hand and finally aged to transform garda into the highest quality Hashish.

To make Hashish from loose resin glands, an Afghani Hashishin places a handful of cured resin glands in the palm of his hand and first lets his body heat transform the loose resin glands into a soft, sticky and more compact mass. The resin is then pressed and rolled between hands until the mass turns into

a more solid form with brown and red undertones. During this process the hands are kept warm by repeatedly placing them over a small fire, the resin mass is also heated over a low flame, referred to as "cooking" and a little water is sprinkled as well during the process.

The finished hand pressed Hashish comes in different shapes and forms, from flat discs to pencil like sticks, and rarely weighs more than an ounce. This traditional technique of hand pressing is time consuming and a dedication to the highest standards of quality; it is also a lost art, due to the Western market demand since the late 60's and the Russian war of the late 70s. Since then, ongoing tribal and religious warfare has brought misery and hardship to a very poor country - the quest for the highest quality became a quest for survival in a wartime zone. Most Hashish for export is now low-grade machine pressed and made in Pakistan.

Lebanon

Hemp fiber was most certainly central to the development of every naval empire from the dawn of time to the birth of nylon because there is simply no other natural fiber that is as resistant to water, especially salt water. It is used for sails, ropes and rigging, the second most important material in shipbuilding after wood.

Early seafaring powers from the Mediterranean to the North Sea would have been dependent on some source of hemp fiber, which must have been a major crop, to grow or trade. The oldest historical evidence of the use of hemp fiber for sailing vessels in the Mediterranean Sea can be dated as far back as the early Roman Empire (400 BC)⁴ but must have logically been used long before.

Lebanon and the Fertile Crescent, birthplace of agriculture and homeland of the Phoenicians⁵, were most certainly one of the primary production centers around the Mediterranean Sea as it was at the time of the Roman Empire⁶.

Lebanon is divided into four distinct physical geographic regions: the coastal plain, the Lebanon Mountain range, the Beqaa valley and the Anti-Lebanon Mountain range.

There are three main types of Hashish in Lebanon: the Blond, the Red and the rare and exceptional White Lebanese. They all appear dark on the outside when pressed adequately and "show their colors" when cut open, a light yellow, a dark burgundy and a light grey very similar to high quality Afghani Hashish. The difference in color is most certainly due to the stage of ripeness of the plants at harvest. An early harvest of milky and light amber resin glands produces the White and Blond Lebanese. Altitude is also a factor, where climatic conditions dictate an earlier harvest at higher altitudes. A late harvest of plants left in the fields until the end of their cycle, drying standing, will produce the Red Lebanese; the superiority of its quality may be due to the full ripeness of the trichomes.

As in Afghanistan, the harvested Cannabis plants are dried in loose bundles in full sun at first; the drying process is also finished in a shaded storage room that is often also used for all aspects of sieving. The Cannabis flowers are first gently broken up, followed by a cleanup of stems and fan leaves to facilitate the sieving process.

In Lebanon the sieving technique is quite different to other producing countries; it is done in a closed room and more akin to separating chaff from grains or sieving flour or sugar for baking. The Lebanese also use different sizes of sieves to further separate and maximize quality; a gentle handling of the material at all times, added to the use of the appropriate sieve size, have maintained Lebanese hashish excellence throughout time. The resin is usually lightly pressed using a hand press covered in a white cotton material that is unique to Lebanese hashish.

Morocco

The history of Hashish in Morocco is relatively recent, however the introduction of Cannabis may date back to the first Arabic invasion of Morocco in the 7th century, when the Islamic empire stretched from India to North Africa and Spain. Today around seventy percent of the world's Hashish comes from Morocco, and it all comes from the tiny province of Ketama - in the Rif Mountains. Rif people are a culture apart with their tribal traditions of warriors, they have fought many would-be invaders from their mountains for centuries, the actual reason to their right to cultivate and produce Hashish in the 21st century⁸.

Cultivation and Hashish production is prohibited anywhere else in the country, as is smoking cannabis by-products.

In Morocco, Cannabis is known as kif or Kief, from the Arabic word Kayf meaning pleasure⁹; it is also the name of a mixture of chopped flowers and dark tobacco that is smoked in clay pipes called Sepsi.

The definitive manufacturing, production and export of Hashish may be as recent as the early 1960s, which is hard to believe as evidence found in medieval Muslim literature¹⁰ and medical treatises¹¹ of the 9th century indicate the knowledge of Cannabis and Hashish's psychoactive and medicinal properties.

It is interesting to notice that the smallest producing region with the most recent knowledge of the technique has become the biggest exporter of Hashish in the world in a very short time (a little over half a century). The techniques used in Morocco are a fusion of sieving and pressing techniques imported by hippies in the 60s from older Hashish cultures.

Pre-drying in direct sun is a standard process found in all producing countries and it would be interesting to study the science behind this. Is it just a way to deal with extreme climatic conditions or a process that actually maximizes the decarboxylation and transformation of the terpenes profile during curing?

The sieving techniques used in Morocco differ wildly, each family having their own preference, but the principle remains the same; a gentle first sieve of well-primed material to obtain the highest quality in a contained environment and/or container.

The resin is mostly lightly pressed for export. It is, however, always hand-pressed prior to consumption by local and western connoisseurs as in all other producing countries.

Morocco, the latecomer in the Hashish industry, has become the world foremost Hashish exporter and is the only producing country that has improved the quality of its export product despite the increasing demand from the Western market. This is due, in part, to the experience gained by local farmers but also to new genetics brought into the country by Westerners¹², which in Morocco does not alter the ancient genetic pool and so has had no fatal repercussions, as is the case in other producing countries with original landraces genetics¹³.

It may well become the first producing country to legalize the recreational use of Hashish¹⁴.

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