Looking at cannabis use through art

Shennong as depicted in a 1503 painting by Guo Xu

Cannabis is a plant native to Central Asia that has spread all over the world

by looking at the visual history of cannabis we can tell a great deal about social attitudes, what those were in the past, how they’ve changed, and also an understanding of where our current viewpoint comes from.
Shennong is said to have taught the ancient Chinese not only their practices of agriculture, but also the use of herbal drugs, including cannabis.

One of the earliest recorded mentions of cannabis is medicinal.
The spread of cultivated cannabis

- Origin: 2500 BCE
- 100 BCE
- Middle Ages
- 1000 BCE
- 1500 CE
- 1600 CE
- 1910 CE
- 2000 BCE
- 700 BCE
- 2500 BCE
- 1000 BCE

Map showing the timeline and spread of cannabis cultivation.
Bhang use in India begins around 2000 BCE

Shenung reportedly recommended the use of marijuana, or “ma” as it was referred to, for over a hundred different ailments including female weakness, gout, rheumatism, malaria, constipation and even absent-mindedness.

Egyptians Use Cannabis for Glaucoma, Inflammation, and Enemas

70 CE Dioscorides, a physician in Nero’s army, lists medical marijuana in his Pharmacopoeia.

He suggested using cannabis to treat earache and to suppress lust.

So what was cannabis used for?

Apothecary jar from Egypt around 1500 BCE contained traces of cannabis

made of milk and marijuana it was used as anesthetic or anti-phlegmatic.
In ancient Greece, cannabis is used as a remedy for earache, edema, and inflammation.

The famous Greek historian Plutarch speaks of the Thracian use of hemp and cannabis—as does Pliny the elder in his “Natural History” written in the first century AD.

Published in 1633 by John Gerarde the Herball describes a confusing amount of cannabis plants and their potential therapeutic uses including using Cannabis to Treat Depression.
The long history of medical marijuana

2700 BCE (reportedly) Cannabis was referred to, for over a hundred different ailments including female weakness, gout, rheumatism, malaria, constipation and absent-mindedness.

1213 BC - Egyptians Use Cannabis for Glaucoma, Inflammation, and Enemas

1000 BC - Bhang, a Drink of Cannabis and Milk, Is Used in India as an Anesthetic

600 BC - Indian Medicine Treatise Cites Cannabis as a Cure for Leprosy

200 BC - Medical Cannabis Used in Ancient Greece
In ancient Greece, cannabis is used as a remedy for earache, edema, and inflammation.

70 - Roman Medical Text Cites Cannabis to Treat Earaches and Suppress Sexual Longing

1500 - Muslim Doctors Use Marijuana to Reduce Sexuality

1621 - Popular English Mental Health Book Recommends Cannabis to Treat Depression

1840 - Medical Marijuana Comes to United Kingdom via William O'Shaughnessy and Reportedly Used by Queen Victoria for Menstrual Cramps
What did people think of cannabis use?

Greek historian Herodotus wrote detailed accounts of Scythian vapor hotbox rituals around 450 BCE.

“The Scythians take cannabis seeds, crawl in under the felt blankets, and throw the seeds onto the glowing stones. The seeds then emit dense smoke and fumes, much more than any vapor-bath in Greece. The Scythians shriek with delight at the fumes.”

1200 CE: Hashish figured prominently in several of the folk tales of 1001 nights.

In the story of the Hashish Eater a man eats hashish, makes a fool of himself, and gets thrown in jail after waking up in the morning naked and aroused in front of strangers at a public bath.
17th century Dutch “Genre” paintings

Adriaen Brouwer, Smokers in a tavern, 1628-30

David Teniers the Younger, Smokers in a Tavern, 1660

Adriaen van Ostade, Two men smoking in an interior, 1660-80

Hendrick Martensz Sorgh, Smoking and drinking farmers in a tavern, ca. 1650

Joos van Craesbeeck “The Smoker” 1635
Basho the Haiku Master writes:

The cannabis- How wonderful it is!
The summer drawing room.
Trees and stones, just as they are.
Ah, how glorious!
The young leaves, the green leaves,
Glittering in the sunshine!

Shimizu Taima Shukaku “Hemp Harvest” 1929

Geisha smoking cannabis.
Marijuana is exotic and romantic

Men smoking hash. Published in Frank Leslie's Historical Register of the United States Centennial Exposition, 1876
At the 1876 world exhibition in Chicago, a hash bar was installed as part of the Turkish presentation.

Gaetano Previati: Las Fumadoras De Hachis. (Women Smoking Hashish, 1887)
Sidney Sime Illustrated “HASCHISCH HALLUCINATIONS” by HE Gowers which was published in *The Strand Magazine* for December 1905

“A servant brought him a cup of coffee. He says the cup seemed a huge tankard, beautifully chased all over with dragons that extended all round the world. The girl appeared to stand for an hour smiling”
The spread of cultivated cannabis
In 1850 cannabis is added to the US Pharmacopeia, it listed marijuana as treatment for numerous afflictions, including: neuralgia, tetanus, typhus, cholera, rabies, dysentery, alcoholism, opiate addiction, anthrax, leprosy, incontinence, gout, convulsive disorders, tonsillitis, insanity, excessive menstrual bleeding, and uterine bleeding, among others.
Anti Marijuana sentiment in the 1930’s and 40’s

Loss of inhibitions

Poor decision making

Delusions and hallucinations

Enhanced sexual appetite

"How many murders, suicides, robberies, criminal assaults, holdups, burglaries and deeds of maniacal insanity it causes each year, especially among the young, can only be conjectured... No one knows, when he places a marijuana cigarette to his lips, whether he will become a joyous reveler in a musical heaven, a mad insensate, a calm philosopher, or a murderer..."

HARRY J ANSLINGER

Commissioner of the US Bureau of Narcotics

1930-1962
In books and magazines...

Uncontrollable violence

"Marijuana inflames the erotic impulses and leads to revolting sex crimes"
Daily Mirror (1924)
Even in the 70’s and 80’s!

Marijuana is a gateway drug
What properties do all of these ads, books, movies etc… attribute to cannabis?

Even today
Marijuana and creativity?

“When you return to this mundane sphere from your visionary world, you would seem to leave a Neapolitan spring for a Lapland winter - to quit paradise for earth - heaven for hell! Taste the hashish, guest of mine - taste the hashish!”

Alexander Dumas, 'The Count of Monte Cristo', 1844
“We always looked at pot as a sort of medicine, a cheap drunk and with much better thoughts than one that’s full of liquor.” Louis Armstrong
“There are 100,000 total marijuana smokers in the U.S., and most are Negroes, Hispanics, Filipinos and entertainers. Their Satanic music, jazz and swing, result from marijuana use. This marijuana causes white women to seek sexual relations with Negroes, entertainers and any others. … The primary reason to outlaw marijuana is its effect on the degenerate races. Marijuana is an addictive drug which produces in its users insanity, criminality and death.”

-Henry Anslinger
Counterculture

Robert Crumb “Stoned Again” 1966

“Robert Arneson” California Artist, 1982
In 1978 the performance artist Chris Burden flew model planes carrying joints over the U.S.-Mexico border.
Under the influence

CRYSTALMETH  HUFFING GAS  SHROOMS

Bryan Lewis Saunders
Marijuana (G13)  Marijuana (Kine bud)  Pot Brownies  Marijuana Resin
Potential effects of Cannabis

- Altered consciousness
- Perceptual Distortions
- Memory Impairment
- Delusions and hallucinations
- Increased appetite
- Nausea relief
- Rapid heart rate
- Reduced blood pressure
- Drowsiness
- Pain reduction
- Reduced tremor
- Reduced spasticity
- Impairment to memory
- Impaired coordination
- Anxiety and panic
- Reduced anxiety
- Pain Modulation
- Blocking of traumatic memories
- Reduced hostility
- Increased sensitivity to smell, sight, sound, texture.

Frontal Lobe
- plays a role in working memory,
  'executive function,' social decision making

Hypothalamus
- Governs metabolic processes such as appetite

Amygdala
- Plays a role in emotions

Hippocampus
- Memory storage and recall

Sensory Cortex
- Body sensation (pain, heat, cold.)

Parietal Lobe
- Important for calculation, spelling, spatial perception, and body sense/position.

Motor Cortex
- Voluntary motor function

Cerebellum
- Governs balance and coordination

Brain stem
- Basic functions such as arousal, heart rate, vomit reflex, breathing, and blood pressure.

Frontal Lobe plays a role in working memory, 'executive function,' social decision making.