

# Ancient skeleton covered in cannabis shroud unearthed in China

October 6 2016, by Bob Yirka

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(Phys.org)—A team of archaeologists led by Hongen Jiang with the University of Chinese Academy of Sciences working in the Turpan Basin in a northwestern part of China has unearthed the skeleton of a man who died between 2,500 and 2,800 years ago and was covered with a cannabis shroud when he was buried. In their paper published in the journal *Economic Botany*, the team describes how they were continuing work on exploring an ancient cemetery looking for clues about early cannabis use and happened upon the unusual find.

Humans have a long history of using cannabis for a variety of purposes—as hemp, it has been used to make rope and clothes; its seeds have been consumed to gain nutrition from the oils they contain, but perhaps most notoriously, the plant has been burned or eaten to gain a feeling of euphoria. In this new find, it appears the plant may have been used as part of a burial ritual.

The skeleton has been identified as once belonging to a Caucasian man approximately 35 years old at the time of his death. Those that had buried him had placed a willow pillow under his head and had then placed a shroud of (13) [cannabis plants](#) over his chest reaching from below his pelvis at one end to the side of his face on the other. The skeleton lay in one of the 240 graves in the area known as the Jiayi cemetery. The people that lived in the area at the time were part of a Kingdom from 3,000 and 2,000 years ago known as the Subeixi. Prior research has shown the people lived there because it was an oasis in the desert, one that had become an important place for travelers to rest

during their trek along the Silk Road.

The researchers note that other examples of cannabis use have been found in the other nearby graves, but not as shrouds—mainly they were simply seeds or just leaves tossed into a grave site before burial. They point out that their find is the first to have full cannabis plants and the first time it has ever been seen used as a shroud. They believe the inclusion of whole plants suggests that the plants were grown locally—also the ripeness of the heads suggested they had been harvested and buried in the latter part of the summer. And because the heads were covered in glandular trichomes, which contain THC, the active ingredient in such plants, they believe that it was normally used as a psychoactive drug.

**More information:** Hongen Jiang et al. Ancient Cannabis Burial Shroud in a Central Eurasian Cemetery, *Economic Botany* (2016). [DOI: 10.1007/s12231-016-9351-1](https://doi.org/10.1007/s12231-016-9351-1)

### **Abstract**

An extraordinary cache of ancient, well-preserved Cannabis plant remains was recently discovered in a tomb in the Jiayi cemetery of Turpan, NW China. Radiometric dating of this tomb and the archeobotanical remains it contained indicate that they are approximately 2800–2400 years old. Both morphological and anatomical features support the identification of the plant remains as Cannabis. Research discussed in this paper describes 13 nearly whole plants of Cannabis that appear to have been locally produced and purposefully arranged and used as a burial shroud which was placed upon a male corpse. This unique discovery provides new insight into the ritualistic use of Cannabis in prehistoric Central Eurasia. Furthermore, the fragmented infructescences of Cannabis discovered in other tombs of the Jiayi cemetery, together with similar Cannabis remains recovered from coeval tombs in the ancient Turpan cemetery along with those

found in the Altai Mountains region, reveal that Cannabis was used by the local Central Eurasian people for ritual and/or medicinal purposes in the first millennium before the Christian era.

via [National Geographic](#)

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