

The Daily Star WEEKEND MAGAZINE

The Cultural Pleasures of Paris

by Imran M Vittachi

PARIS, in the hundredth year of the birth of Charles de Gaulle, is undergoing a renaissance. A wonderful sense of gaiety pervades the cafes which dot the city's grand boulevards. Parisians stroll up the Champs-Elysees or the Boulevard St. Germain with heads held high, shoulders tucked back, and spines as straight as ironing boards. They've always been a proud people these Parisians, and some think even arrogant.

But a visitor to Paris will be surprised by the warmth of the reception with good reason. There is a sense of excitement, of an eagerly awaited prosperity that is to sweep through Europe in years to come, that is changing the Parisian of old. This atmosphere is reflected in the new architecture, monuments, and museums that have popped up around Paris in recent years.

Two dates mark the birth of Paris: the 1989 Bicentennial of the French Revolution, and the unification of Europe in 1992. Appropriately, Paris was elected the European City of Culture last year. It stands proudly as the gateway to the new Europe.

Paris offers much to the visitor, and is destined to attract a great deal of business and tourism in the 1990s. According to an Air France estimate, last year Charles de Gaulle (CDG) airport handled nearly 21 million passengers. Air France in conjunction with Aeroports De Paris (ADP), is remodelling CDG into what they hope will be "the leading European hub", which by the year 2000 should be handling 60 million passengers annually.

Paris in the 1990s certainly has plenty of art, architecture and music and dance to satisfy the appetite of visitors.

First, buy yourself a Carte Musee, a museum pass which costs 100 Francs. It is sold at most museums and offers a number of advantages. With the Carte Musee, it is possible to breeze in and out of the city's major museums without having to stand in back breaking, time consuming queues. There is a network of 60 museums which operate with this card. They include the Louvre, Musee d'Orsay, Institut du Monde Arabe and La Cite des Sciences et de l'Industrie (highlighted in this guide). A Carte Musee will enable a person to visit any of these 60

museums over a three day period. Not that one necessarily needs to cram visits to 60 museums into 72 hours. But with the card one can see at least four museums, assuming a two-hour stop at each. Clustering museums into a neighbourhood or adjacent neighbourhoods -- arrondissements -- is a practical way to go about it. Buy a map of Paris and become

turally, the museums are splendid. Here's a look at some of them:

The Musee d'Orsay located at 1, rue de Bellechasse, in the seventh arrondissement, is currently the piece d' resistance of Paris museums. From the outside it is immaculate, a breath of fresh air from the overcrowded Pyramide at the Louvre where the courtyard is

open only for a few days, don't try to pour over every museum you visit. It's impossible to cover everything in such a short time. But, take a general sweeping look around each museum, to get a feel for it, then zoom in on things which interest you. This way the experience of museum going will

Pyramide isn't all that big and it doesn't necessarily take up that much space. It doesn't clash too much with the older buildings and gives the others a fresh air of modernity. It also makes getting around the Louvre a whole lot easier. Pei was commissioned to produce a new entrance to the Museum

for their exams or those who want to let their scientific literary imaginations soar.

I recently visited several main attractions at La Villette, courtesy of Air France. These included the Inventorium which is restricted to those aged 12 and below and is ideal if one is travelling with kids. Children go bananas exploring the world of science and play-

the Airbus simulator, or explore the ocean bed in a replica of the Nautilus sea probe. There is a simulation of a forest growing and also one of plants thriving without soil.

Probably the most beautiful aspect of the complex is La Geode, the silvery gigantic ball like structure. In it is a spectacular hemispheric movie theatre. The 1,000 square

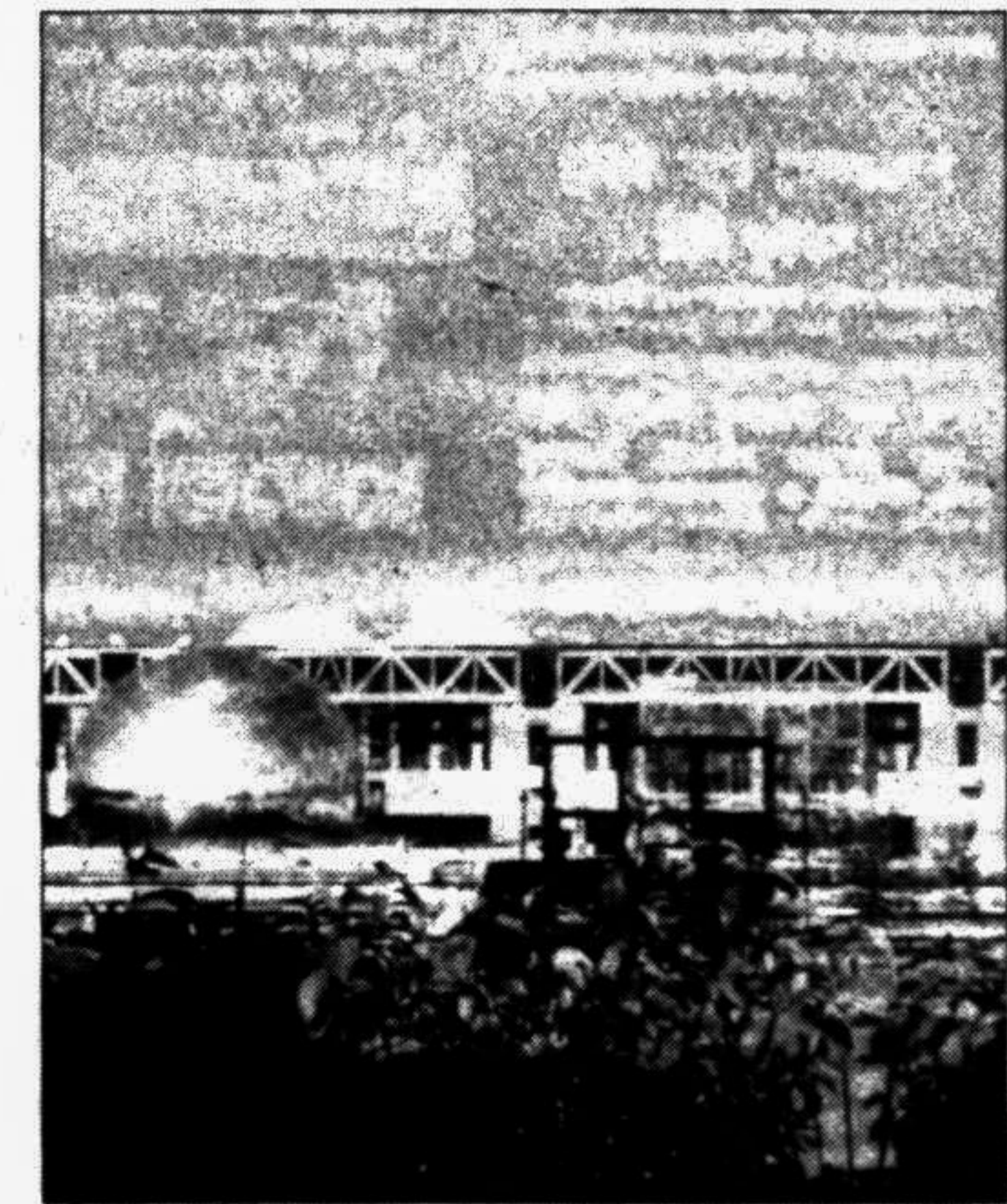
stomach-turning.

L'Institut du Monde Arabe located in the 5th arrondissement, the old Latin Quarter of Paris, offers a comprehensive overview of the Arab world. Opened last year through an agreement between the French government and signatories from Arab states, its goal is to promote a deeper understanding of Islamic culture in the West. Paris was chosen as a focal point for the interchange of ideas between the Occident and the Arab nations. The institute is part of an overall agreement for future trade, cultural cooperation, and exchange of technical ideas between both worlds. The building which houses the institute overlooks the Seine river and faces the heart of the old Paris. It is an architectural wonder in itself. It is very modern yet retains traditional Arab architectural features. Start on the ninth floor where visitors take a walking tour of the museum. As one continues downward it is possible to trace the chronological growth and development of Arab civilization. There are helpful audio-visual displays, picture shows and video programs to keep visitors interested. There is a largescale map highlighting the influence of Islam on the West. One can judge how profound the influence has been by the graphic illustration of the spread of Arab culture all the way from Iberia in the West and the Malay archipelago in the East. The institute also has conference facilities, a library and documentation section for scholars or Arabophiles, containing over 100,000 volumes, some ancient Arab texts, and 40,000 Western language texts.

For some, a visit to l'Institut du Monde Arabe evokes memories of the Guggenheim Museum in New York where a visit takes a spiral course. The museum might appear bare and sterile to the Western eye, but it follows Eastern themes of simplicity and clarity.

By arrangement with Executive.

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Science wonderland: La Villette in northeast Paris.

acquainted with the city's streets and boulevards. For instance, you may wish to spend the morning and part of the afternoon visiting the Louvre, without having to queue for four hours. Afterwards, cross the Seine and walk a few blocks to the Musee d'Orsay and finish off your daily museum tour there by six o'clock. Stop for dinner and a little jazz in the nearby Quartier Latin.

Some interesting new museums and monuments have opened in Paris which are a delight to the eye. Aesthetically and architecturally,

the museum, founded in 1986, is a former railway station, gare d'Orsay. It houses French and European art from the second half of the 19th century to the first half of the 20th century. The imposing building is made of steel with a glass pavilion. The exhibits, which include works by Auguste Rodin and the impressionists, are arranged on each floor according to artistic media, époque, and school. The colour coded museum map makes it easy for the visitor to pinpoint items of interest. A suggestion: If you're in

be less tedious, better for your back and more fruitful.

The Louvre is probably the most famous museum in the world, and rivalled perhaps by the Hermitage in Leningrad and the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. The Louvre begins at the historic axis of Paris that runs all the way to the Etoile and now has been extended to La Defense. The Louvre is so big it is probably the greatest concentration and diversity of art under one roof. There is everything here from Oriental to Greek, Egyptian to Roman antiquities comprising sculpture and a rich collection of paintings including the famous Mona Lisa.

The Louvre has undergone a facelift in recent years highlighted by the opening of the Pyramide last year. The museum authorities have added new, more spacious and practical rooms where people, especially those who study art or act as art professionals, can attend courses and use the new library containing over 10,000 titles, 4,000 of them in foreign languages.

The Pyramide itself has been the subject of controversy. Designed by I.M. Pei, (he also designed the Bank of China building, in Hong Kong) it attracted the same type of criticism as the Centre Pompidou when the ship-like structure imposed itself on the conservative fourth arrondissement in the mid 1970s. Many Parisians criticised the Pei Pyramide for disrupting the serene and wide open space of the Louvre courtyard. But a closer look at the Pyramide is revealing. The

which would connect the main wings of the Louvre via a new underground room, on top of which the Pyramide now rests. The Pyramide is not that impressive seen from the outside, but it offers a most interesting view of the Paris skyline from inside as you ride up the escalator.

For those with a passion for the sciences or a latent interest in the sciences, La Cite des Sciences et de l'Industrie, popularly known as La Villette is a scientific wonderland easily in the league of the Smithsonian. Situated in the nineteenth arrondissement, in the northeast corner of Paris on the site of the old Villette slaughterhouse, the place has been turned into a 55 hectare (136 acre) park area. It is attracting thousands of visitors every year, and since its opening in 1986, La Cite has added new vigour to a formerly depressed and forlorn neighbourhood.

At La Cite which is now the largest science museum in Europe, visitors will feel as if they've walked into the 23rd century. It's easy to get oneself lost in this world of the imagination. The museum which covers an area of 40,000 square metres (430,000 square feet), contains many exhibits on space, the bio and ecosphere, and water. Each display is intricate but is explained in non-scientific terms. There is a planetarium containing an astronomy simulator, and a 3-D sound system. There is a well supplied science library with over 190,000 titles on-line. It is crowded by students cram-



I. M. Pei's controversial Pyramide: Changing the Louvre's vista.

ing educational games. They learn how to use computers and find out why it snows while chasing make-believe snow flakes. They pretend to be TV anchor-kids and are filmed on video in the special TV unit. Adults can have fun too with scientific learning games Explora. Here, a visitor may pretend to be a pilot using

metre (10,760 square foot) theatre offers superb sound and Omnimax vision. The plush jetfighter like seats are positioned at a steep angle so the viewer is given the impression that the film being watched is everywhere as far as the eye can see. One impulsively fastens the seat belt to enjoy the ride, which can be

The Land of the Indus

by Bikquis Afzal

Ancient cities, some abandoned millenia ago and some still thriving in the modern age, are testimony to the fact that the land of the Indus has provided for many of the world's greatest civilizations.

My train Mohenjodaro Express left Karachi City Station at 8 p.m. As my train hurtled down Sind I could hardly sleep in the excitement. Here at last I was going to Mohenjodaro.

I must have dozed off to sleep for the railway guard rudely awakened me that we were at Dogri Station. I jumped from the upper berth caught hold of my luggage and got down on the platform just in the nick of time. It was pre-dawn. As eerie silence lay all around as I waited in the First Class waiting-room. A Tanga-wala had appeared from nowhere and had offered to take me to Mohenjodaro which was 12 kilometres from Dogri. I hold the Tanga-wala to come

at 7 a.m. for by then it would be day-light and it would be safer to move.

As I sat in the comfortable waiting room my mind was in twirl-invading Aryan hordes with chariots and horses coming here around 1500 BC, conquering the Dravidian civilisation and later moving down to the Gangetic plain borrowing many of the indigenous gods from here and adding to their present pantheon of gods. There is a reference in the Rig Veda to "Hariyapaya" the scene of a defeat of non-Aryans by the invaders, which has been linked to the modern name Harappa.

The Priest-King who ruled the Indus Valley civilisation at Mohenjodara the capital city

was killed by an Aryan arrow while bravely defending this ancient metropolis. I found certain parallels between the conquest of the Indus Valley Civilisation and the conquest of the Aztec civilisation in Central America and the Inca civilisation in South America. For the horse was an extinct animal in the Americas dying out with Folsam Man, the mastodon and the mammoth. Here too throughout the Indus Valley civilisation there is no evidence of horses. The Zebu, the huge humped oxen was the draught animal. The Aryans with their fast moving horses and chariots certainly had a strategic advantage over the Dravidians and their slow-moving Zebu. Both Cortez the

conqueror of Mexico and Pizarro the Conqueror of the Inca Empire had the same advantage — they had fast moving horses.

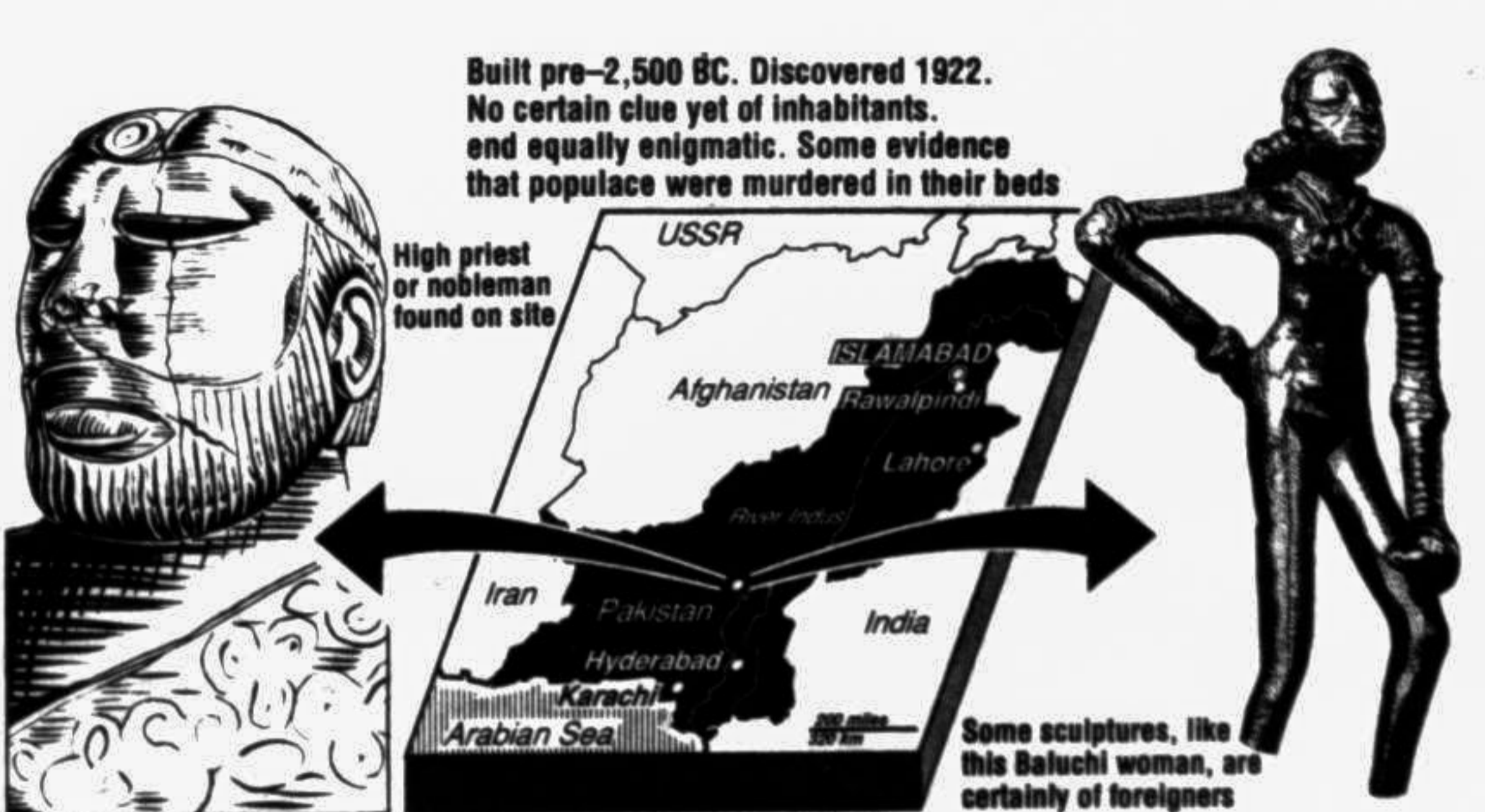
While I was whirling in the Time-Machine of the Past I was brought back to the reality of the present by the Tanga-wala who had come precisely at 7 a.m. to take me to Mohenjodaro.

Frequently we met young Sindhi school-boys who waved to me and said welcome in Sindhi as our Tanga jingled passed them. Sometimes I came across women in colourful 'gagras' and 'cholis' and dupatta like the Rajasthan women. My Tanga-wala told me that they were Hindus.

My Tanga-wala took my luggage to the Dak Bangalow where I had reserved a room a day earlier through the department of Archaeology, Karachi. I handed my letter for the Curator to the bearer at the Dak Bangalow who took me to the beautifully furnished and carpeted conference room. I ordered breakfast and waited for the curator of the Museum. As it was early in the morning the Curator was still sleeping. As I was luxuriating in the lovely Conference Room, having a lavish breakfast after a tiresome journey the Curator came in. I was given Room No. 1 upstairs. The bearer took my baggage upstairs to my room where after a shower and a change of dress I was ready as the Curator had asked me to report at his office at 10 a.m. so that I may be able to cover the main Mohenjodaro sites and the Museum in one day. When I reached the Curator's office I was given a guide, who took me on a tour of the main sites.

Today, after many years of excavation, Mohenjodaro has come to be known as one of the most spectacular ancient cities of the world. Whether it shared its leadership with Harappa or not, it was certainly a metropolis of the first order.

It had mud-brick and baked-brick buildings, an elaborate covered drainage system with soak-pits for disposal bins, straight parallel roads, a large state granary, a public bath, a College for Priests, a spacious pillared



hall, a citadel mound and a large and imposing palace — the residence of the Priest-King who died so heroically for his people and his Indus Valley civilisation. His name is still unknown as the Mohenjodarian script and records in papyrus was burnt by the marauders from the North. But the Priest-King remains immortal through the centuries as the first archaeologists here found his huge imposing statue with the blunt half-broken nose against a bearded face, robed in 'ajrak', the printed cloth of ancient Sind. His jeweled head-gear and other ornaments are now in the British Museum.

All writers are emotional. I get emotional when I think or write about Mohenjodaro. For the history of Mohenjodaro is an ancient crime story. I do not want to dwell in the darkness of the past. It was here in the Indus Valley that the war like Aryans from the steppes of Eurasia turned agriculturists and learnt the other rudiments of civilisations. They came in two big migrations, the first round 2000 BC and the second, the larger wave, around 1400 BC, after they had been displaced from Iran.

A great amalgamation of race and culture took here in this melting pot of the Indus valley before the Aryans poured into the Indo-Gangetic Plain. By the time the Aryans reached Indo-Gangetic plain a

great transformation had taken place in their religious attitudes. The Dravidian gods of Mohenjodaro — Shiva, Hunuman Ganesh were now in the Hindu pantheon of gods, so was ritualistic bathing. The caste system developed from here.

I left the next morning for Larkana by Tourist Coach Service. At Larkana I went by Tanga to the Bus stand to take an air-conditioned coach to Sukkur. On the way to Sukkur saw stretches of rice-fields, the same Mohenjodaro type of houses of mud-bricks and herds of water-buffalows.

On arrival at Sukkur I hired a baby-taxi to reach Rohri Railway Station. On the way the baby-taxi driver who was a Mujahir showed me a spot under a bridge where only a few months ago PPP hoodlums had gunned down many Mujahirs. On the way to Rohri we crossed the Indus and at the river's bend I saw a huge white Hindu temple. At this point it was almost looking like a scene from Bangladesh somewhere near Bhatrab Bazar only difference was that there were a very few river crafts at this wide confluence of the River Indus. I reached Rohri Railway Station at 11 a.m. and bought tickets for the Jhelum Express which was scheduled to leave Rohri around 12 a.m. Just out from clean sanitation-conscious Mohenjodaro I was disgusted by the stench of modern

Pakistan especially at railway stations.

Multan was on the route to Lahore. So I decided to drop off at Multan and see this ancient city. Multan was already an important trading centre when Alexander the Great came here in 327 B.C. Alexander is supposed to have laid siege for two years and then finally conquered Multan. So here I was in Multan as guests of a typical Punjabi Family. My host had come here on his vacations and took me to his elder brother's home. It was a typical middle class home with the 'agan' (courtyard) and the 'chagry'. I sat in the clean night air in the courtyard and had dinner with thick chapatis, yogurt and stuffed kachas and the host's three little girls looking at me in wonder as I was wearing a sari. When I offered my lasha prayers my Punjabi host and hostess were very impressed and inquired of me: did the majority of Bangladeshis offer prayers. They told me that the people in East Pakistan had come under Hindu influence and that is why the Pakistan Army had to crack-down to save the Muslims of East Pakistan from the clutches of the Hindus. This kind of rigmarole I often heard repeatedly while in Pakistan. But the animosity and hatred towards Bengalis have gone. Wherever I went I was struck by the friendliness of the Pakistani people for their former country-men.



The Great Bath used by the inhabitants of Mohenjodaro for ritual purpose, measured about 30 X 25 feet and 8 ft. deep with anti-chambers (for changing clothes) on the three sides. Its floors were approached by a flight of steps on either end. Near the south-west corner is an outlet for the water disposal through a high drain with a corbelled arch.

Since the Harappans, who built the world's oldest advanced civic culture some 5,000 years ago, many have come and gone or come and stayed in and around the Indus Valley. From those early times through the Vedic and Buddhist eras and on to the world of Islam, the Pakistanis of today are the common inheritors of some of the greatest cultural traditions of humanity.

Emanating from the historical continuity of intensely human values, the cultural strength of the Pakistanis has grown not inspite of but because of the fact that so many people have chosen the Indus as a home, and even invaded it to fulfill their dreams.

It was against this historical background that I crisscrossed the Indus Valley sometimes by train, sometimes by Tanga, sometimes by baby-taxi, tourist bus and air-conditioned coach meeting people of different walks of life