



## A World Decade for Cultural Development



**Bibliotheca Alexandrina: revival of the first universal library**

**Rediscovering the Silk Roads**

**The gondolas of Venice**

**Fernando Pessoa, many poets in one**

**Wat Phou, treasure of Khmer civilization**

# Thracian carnival

These masked figures (*sourvakari*) taking part in Shrove Tuesday festivities in a west Bulgarian village are engaged in a ritual which recalls an ancient Thracian cult of Dionysus. After going from door to door, dancing rounds and presenting their good wishes to each family, they perform a mime which is thought to represent the creation myth.



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Cover: *Born Alive in New Zealand*, composition of painted metal cut-outs by Richard Killeen, of New Zealand. Back cover: *Dancing Couple*, patchwork painting by Pacita Abad, a Filipino artist.

Both works appear in an album of artworks entitled *Unesco: 40 ans, 40 artistes, 40 pays* (see pages 18-19).

An international effort in southeast Asia to save an ancient Khmer temple from the encroaching jungle; a massive enterprise in Alexandria to create an ultra-modern institution that will be a worthy successor of one of the wonders of the Hellenistic world, the Library founded by the Ptolemies with the aim of assembling “the books of all the peoples on Earth”; a major international project to study the “Silk Roads”, the great commercial and cultural arteries which once linked China and the West; commemoration of the life and work of a modern Portuguese poet—the articles in this issue evoke just four of the many thousands of cultural activities in which Unesco is currently co-operating.

They assume a special significance this year, which marks the beginning of the World Decade for Cultural Development (1988-1997) proclaimed by the General Assembly of the United Nations and “placed under the auspices of the United Nations and Unesco”. The fundamental aim of the Decade, which is introduced in the article overleaf by the Director-General of Unesco, Mr. Federico Mayor, is to restore cultural and human values to their central place in technological and economic development.

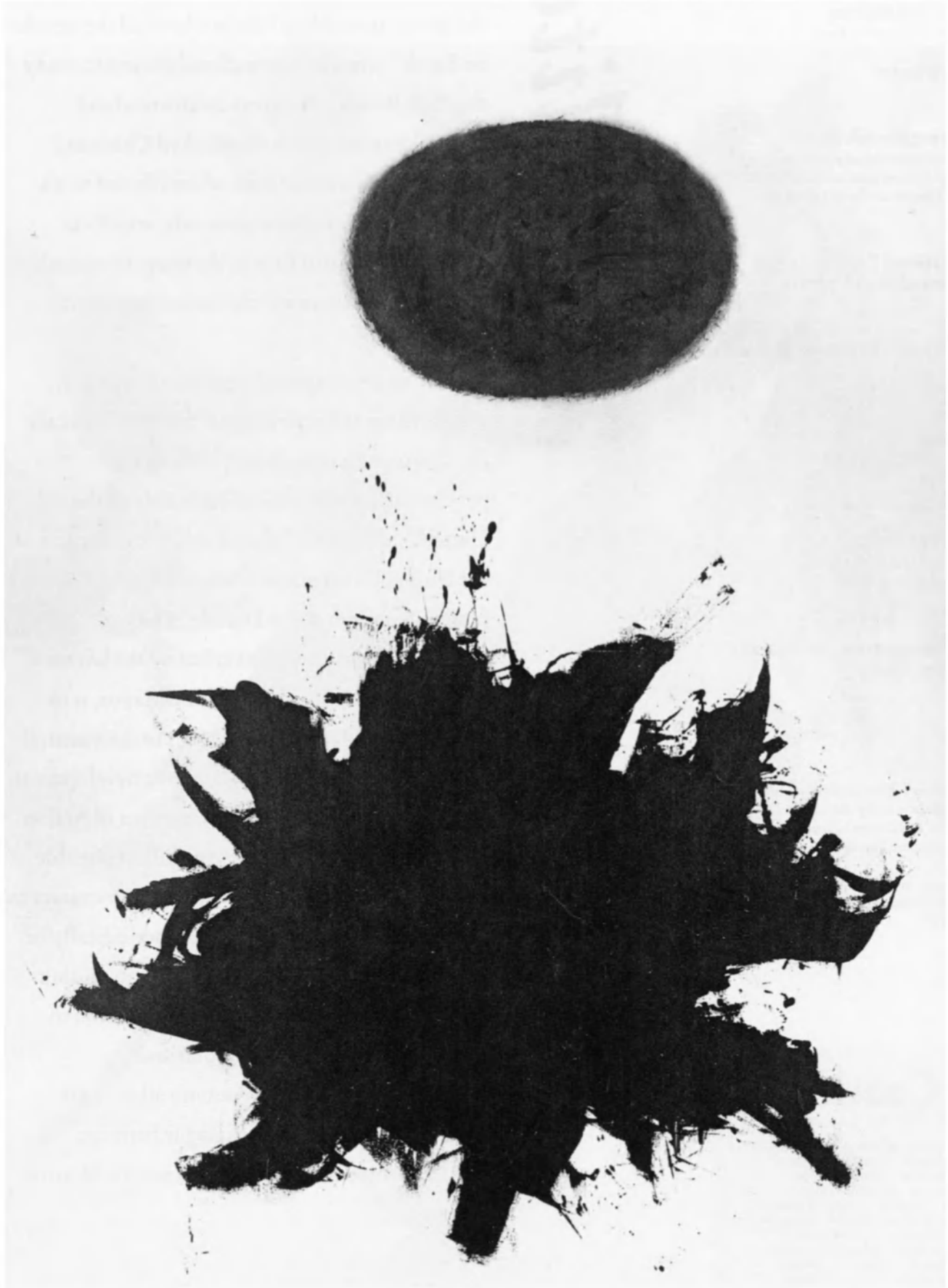
Unesco has drawn up a detailed Plan of Action for the Decade which invites the fullest possible participation from the international community as a whole. The *Unesco Courier* will periodically be publishing reports on efforts carried out within the context of the Plan, as part of its mission to present to its readers the multifarious achievements of human creativity all over the world and to encourage a dialogue between cultures rooted in mutual respect and freedom of expression.

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# The World Decade for Cultural Development



*Thrust* (1959), oil on canvas by the American artist Adolph Gottlieb



Logo of  
the World Decade  
for Cultural Development  
(see photo page 6)

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BY FEDERICO MAYOR  
Director-General of Unesco

**T**HE experience of the last two decades has shown that culture cannot be dissociated from development in any society, whatever its level of economic growth or its political and economic orientation.

Culture is an intrinsic part of the life and awareness—conscious and unconscious—of individuals and communities. It is a living fund of the creative activity, past and present, which has shaped over the centuries the system of values, traditions and tastes which defines the distinctive genius of a people. Thus culture is bound to make an imprint on economic activity and define the strengths and weaknesses of a society's productive processes.

These conclusions emerge from the experience, both positive and negative, of all countries. Whenever a country has set itself the target of economic growth without reference to its cultural environment, grave economic and cultural imbalances have resulted and its creative potential has been seriously weakened. Genuine development must be based on the best possible use of the human resources and material wealth of the community. Thus in the final analysis the priorities, motivations and objectives of development must be found in culture. But in the past this has been conspicuously ignored.

From now on culture should be regarded as a direct source of inspiration for development, and in return, development should assign to culture a central role as a social regulator.

This imperative applies not only to developing countries, where economic extraversion and cultural alienation have clearly and sometimes dramatically widened the gap between the creative and productive processes. It is also increasingly vital for the industrialized countries, where the headlong race for growth in material wealth is detrimental to the spiritual, ethical and aesthetic aspects of life, and creates much disharmony between man and the natural environment.

The same imperative applies to the relations between nations and between regions, at a time when the processes of social change are rapidly becoming worldwide in scope—a phenomenon which is encouraging a growing exchange of ideas, individuals and goods and is bringing people and nations closer together, but which is also leading to a dangerous uniformity of cultural values, and increasing the inequality of opportunities for progress at world level. As a consequence, human creative diversity may be impoverished and the domination of those who define these values may increase.

A skilfully managed linkage between culture and development can make it possible to strengthen creative identities, to inhibit standardization, and to encourage greater equality of opportunity for self-expression for different cultures, thereby promoting increasingly fruitful exchanges between them. Such a linkage must be based on the rejection of any discrimination, either between nations or between individuals, and on

the assertion of the universal humanist values of democracy, justice and solidarity, without which no dialogue is possible. It must be based on the encouragement of freedom of research, invention and innovation which is the prime condition for any cultural life.

Thus every effort must be made to allow creative diversity to prevail over the dead hand of standardization, the basic aspirations of mankind to prevail over the conflicts of interest groups, and human solidarity to prevail through the free self-expression of the individual.

As I remarked at the ceremony held to launch the World Decade for Cultural Development on 21 January 1988, the aim of the Decade is to promote awareness of the cultural imperative and to foster a new state of mind that will lead to the emergence of a variety of proposals devoted to "a diversity which unites, a creativity which brings together, and a solidarity which liberates".

The four major objectives of the Decade constitute guidelines rather than a rigid framework:

– *Acknowledgment of the cultural dimension of development*: ways must be found in which production and creativity can be linked, and economics can be rooted in culture.

– *Affirmation and enrichment of cultural identities*: the encouragement of all individual and collective talents and initiatives.

– *Broadening participation in cultural life*: mobilizing the forces of freedom of expression and creativity in the individual and the community, in the name of human rights, free will and independence of mind.

– *Promotion of international cultural co-operation*: seeking, increasing and strengthening the means whereby a culture freely draws sustenance from others and in turn nourishes them, while respecting a nucleus of universally accepted truths. ■

The Director-General of Unesco, Mr. Federico Mayor (right), receives the logo of the World Decade for Cultural Development (1988-1997) from its designer, Hans Erni, at a ceremony held to launch the Decade on 21 January 1988. The artist describes his design as "Five faces from the five continents of the Earth symbolizing the manifold creativity of social and cultural life. Expressing the joy of living, they are seen against the sunlight whose rays reflect the many and varied aspects of Unesco's work."



Mahaweli Community Radio (MCR), Sri Lanka's first regional radio station, was set up with Unesco assistance and funding from DANIDA (Danish International Development Agency). The service is aimed at some one million farming families who were moved between 1977 and 1986 when dams and irrigation canals were being constructed along the course of the Mahaweli River, in the northeast of the island. The station broadcasts reports from areas where the farmers have been relocated and programmes on local cultural events. It also sponsors a street theatre group and their musicians (photos 1 and 2), who perform plays based on the daily life of the villagers and linked to development problems such as the impact of modernization, destruction of the forests, or disputes in the community. After the performance, an MCR reporter interviews village elders to record their reactions (photo 3).

The improvement of living conditions in urban settlements with a low quality of life is one of the priorities set forth in Unesco's Plan of Action for the World Decade for Cultural Development. Several Unesco-supported projects in the field are already under way, including one to rehabilitate the Barrio Río Salado (right), a riverside settlement near La Romana in the Dominican Republic.





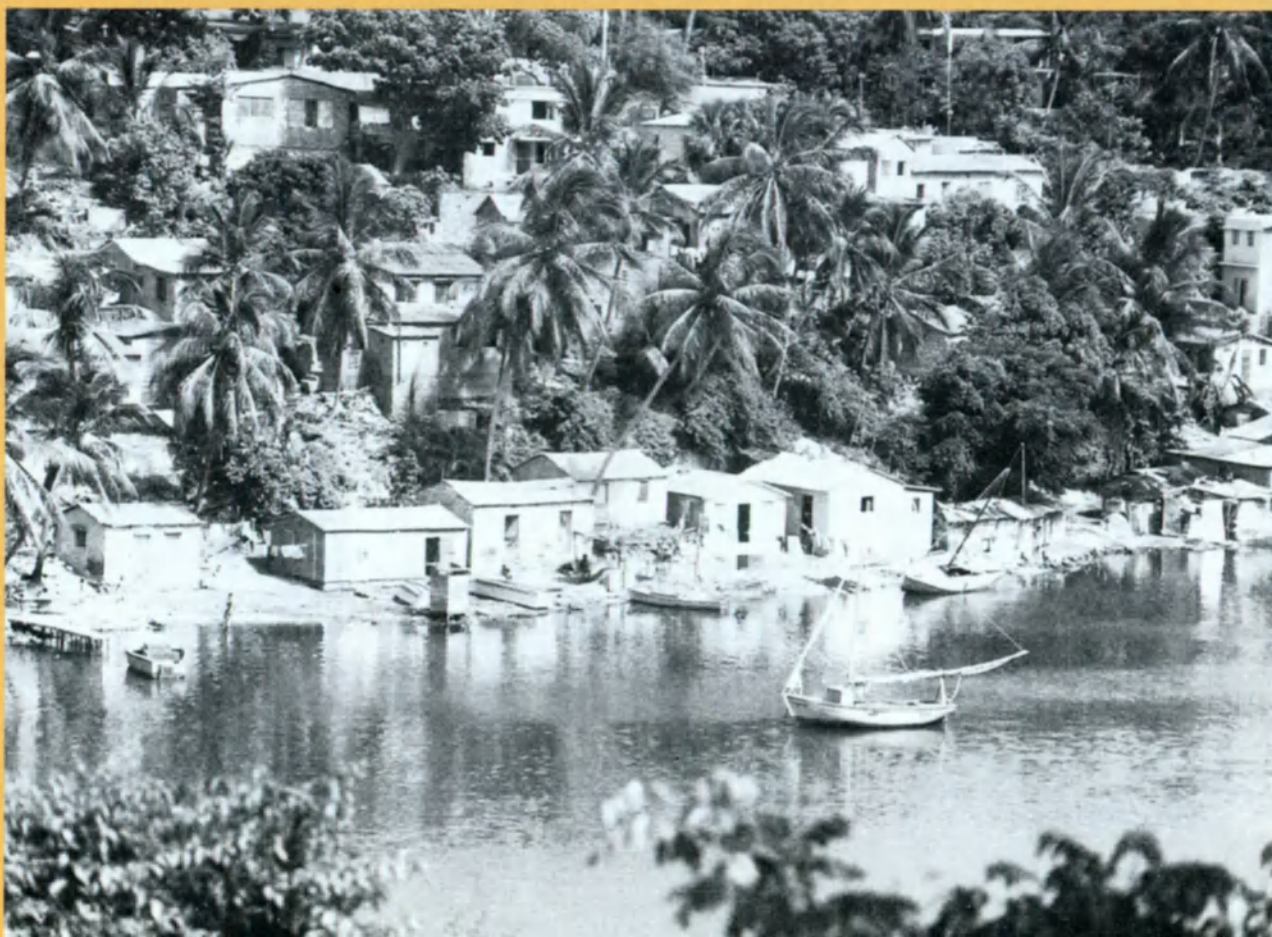
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## The revival of the world's first universal library



Hellenistic mosaic by Sofilos II represents an allegory of the city of Alexandria

The Greek mathematician Eratosthenes (284-192 BC), who calculated the circumference of the Earth, was also the father of geography. His geographical system, reconstituted in 1803 on this map by the French geographer Pascal François Joseph Gosselin, was of fundamental importance to the development of mathematical geography. Eratosthenes, called to Alexandria by King Ptolemy II, became director of the great Library there.

ALEXANDER the Great is said to have been welcomed in Egypt as a liberator. He showed great respect for the people's customs and beliefs, and as a professed defender of religion, won the support of the priests. He openly consulted the Egyptian oracles, particularly that of Amon, to which he journeyed with great ceremony. Moreover, he very quickly understood the central role which Egypt could play in the expansion of world trade, and he lost no time in lending his support to it.

One of the most far-reaching decisions that Alexander made in this connection was to found the city of Alexandria. Legend has it that he chose the location himself—a small





# Bibliotheca Alexandrina

BY LOTFALLAH SOLIMAN

Mediterranean port whose site had attracted him, as the shelter of the offshore island of Pharos formed two natural harbours, ideal as a Greek naval base. Legend also relates that Alexander personally traced out the boundaries of the new city, construction of which began in 332 BC to the design of the Rhodian architect Dinocrates.

Thanks to its favourable geographical situation and its shrewdly designed port, Alexandria became one of the most renowned commercial and maritime crossroads of Antiquity. Until it was conquered by the Arabs in 641 AD, the city played a major role in Egypt's history.

When Alexandria was first built its population included, in addition to the

indigenous Egyptians, the Macedonian guard, a colony of Greek immigrants and a Jewish minority. The city grew rapidly, and during the rule of King Ptolemy I Soter\* it welcomed many scholars and artists, who enjoyed royal protection and patronage. The king closely followed the spirit of the policies instituted by Alexander. Respectful of the local civic and political institutions, creeds and religions, he created a climate of tolerance and security in Egypt that was exceptionally favourable to cultural development. Thanks to him, Alexandria began to approach its founder's dream of an ideal capital city, an illustrious centre of intellectual and artistic influence.

Ptolemy I ordered the construction of

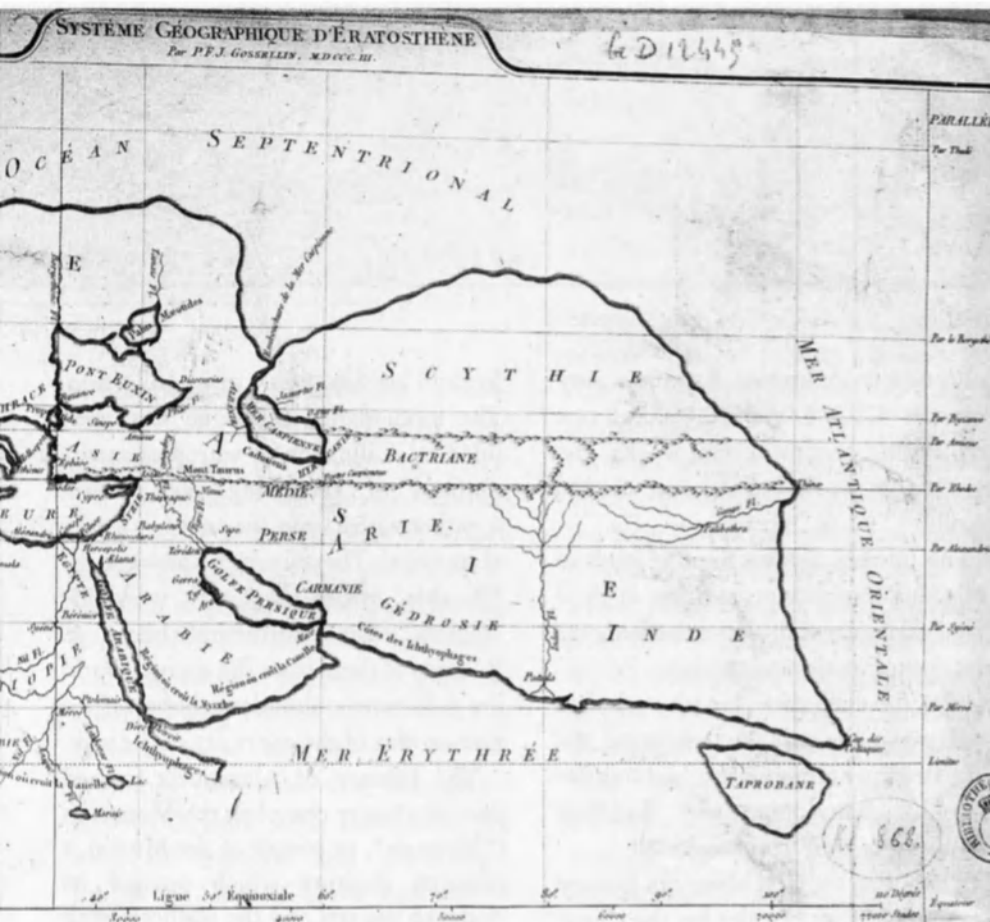
the famous Pharos lighthouse, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, and during his reign plans were laid for the most celebrated public library of Antiquity, the Library of Alexandria.

His son, Ptolemy II Philadelphus (308-246 BC), brought the library project to fruition. At the same time, he made Alexandria the world's leading commercial centre. Greeks, Romans, Ethiopians and Jews came to this cosmopolitan city to conduct their business among copyists, clerks, librarians, interpreters, ambassadors, court officials and public administrators. A patron of the arts and of literature, Ptolemy II surrounded himself with eminent scholars and poets, including Callimachus (died 240 BC), whose name would come to be associated with the expansion of the great Library.

The first known library is thought to have been built at Memphis, where visitors were welcomed by the words "Medicines for the Soul". However, when Ptolemy I decided to create a library in Alexandria, he chose to model it on that of Aristotle in Athens. He may have even acquired the books from Aristotle's library, one of the richest collections of Antiquity.

Right from the start attempts were made to obtain copies of all the works of Greek literature for the Alexandrian Library. This objective was soon achieved, however, and copies of all works of good quality in other languages were sought. Finally, complete universality became the goal, and the Library tried to obtain copies of all existing manuscripts.

Acquiring these copies became one of



\* Ptolemy Soter ("the Saviour"), Macedonian general of Alexander the Great, became ruler of Egypt (323-285 BC) on Alexander's death. *Editor.*



the main tasks of the librarians, who arranged for all known works to be sent on loan from Athens in return for a deposit, and to be borrowed long enough to make one, or sometimes several copies. Manuscripts found on ships moored in the harbour were also temporarily “confiscated” and copied.

Thanks to this gigantic effort to collect and conserve writings from all over the world, the Library of Alexandria became the first truly universal library in history and attracted the most eminent philosophers, scholars and researchers of their day. The exact number of papyrus scrolls which made up the

collection is not known. Estimates vary between 400,000 and 700,000, as one scroll could contain several works, just as a single work could cover several scrolls.

The Library did not confine itself to collecting manuscripts written in their original languages; it also embarked on a massive translation programme. For example, seventy-two Jewish scholars were given the task of translating the Old Testament into Greek, and translations of Babylonian and Buddhist manuscripts were commissioned.

It was also the first library in history to establish a set of rules for the classi-

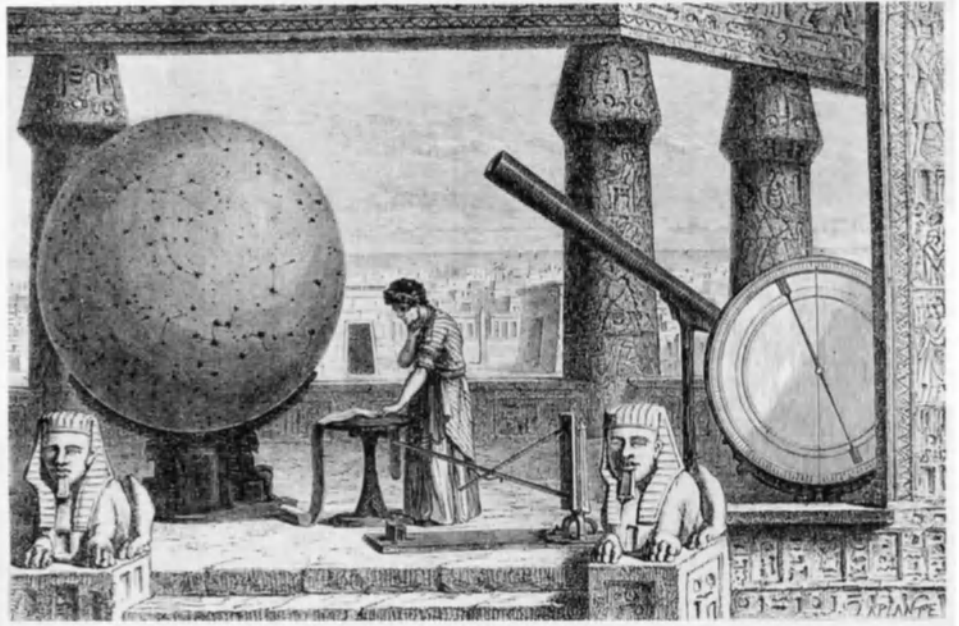
fication and inventory of its collection. The monumental catalogue was compiled by Callimachus, who perfected a method of retrieving each work, together with a synopsis or even a critical appraisal. These listings, known as the “Pinakes”, from the Greek word for “tablets”, have unfortunately been lost. Records of them from the ancient world are sufficiently abundant, however, to give an idea of the enormity of the task.

The Library of Alexandria formed part of a larger complex, the Mouseion (“Museum”, or temple of the Muses), a research institute which opened its doors to the arts and the sciences, with





Among the scholars attracted by the intellectual climate of Alexandria was Euclid, who founded a celebrated school of mathematics there in the 3rd century BC. In this engraving by the French artist Jean François Pierre Peyron (1744-1814), Euclid is shown giving a geometry lesson.



The astronomer and geographer Claudius Ptolemaeus (90-168 AD) is shown in the observatory at Alexandria in this engraving by the 19th-century French artist Charles Laplante.

an astronomical observatory, a zoological and botanical garden, and meeting rooms.

Thus some of the greatest scholars and creative artists lived in or visited Alexandria, delving into the Library's priceless treasures to help them in their work and their discoveries. An intellectual and cultural movement grew up around them, embracing all fields of knowledge and creativity.

Among these men were Herophilus (c. 340-300 BC), who established the rules of anatomy and physiology; Euclid (330-280 BC), the inventor of geometry; Eratosthenes (284-192 BC),

who calculated the circumference of the Earth; Aristarchus (215-143 BC) and Dionysius Thrax (170-90 BC), who systematized the grammar of classical Greek; Hero (fl. 62 AD), who wrote several books on geometry and mechanics and invented the dioptra, a surveying instrument; and Claudius Ptolemaeus (90-168 AD), founder of cartography and developer of astronomy. Thus the Library played a vital role in the development of Graeco-Roman culture.

Nothing remains today of this monument to human genius. It is thought that the main part of the collection was destroyed in a fire which ravaged the port when Julius Caesar took Alexandria in 48 BC. Mark Antony made amends for the damage to a certain extent when he gave Cleopatra the rich collection of the library at Pergamum (Asia Minor). This library, carefully built up by Eumenes II, the king of Pergamum, is thought to have possessed some 200,000 works written, for the first time, on parchment.

Other catastrophes were to follow, as if to emphasize the great fragility of works of the mind. The Library and the Museum of Alexandria may have been destroyed in the civil war which tore Egypt apart in the third century AD.

But Alexander's dream was not in vain. The Government of Egypt and the University of Alexandria, in collaboration with Unesco and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), have initiated a project to revive the famous Library. It is intended to endow the new Library with modern facilities which should enable it, at the dawn of the third millennium, again to fulfil its ancient role. But this time it will be linked by computer with archives and documentation centres all over the world. While recapturing the spirit of the original, the new Library of Alexandria will, at last, be indestructible. ■

LOTFALLAH SOLIMAN, Egyptian writer and journalist, is currently preparing a study on the history of Palestine.





Two cities on the Silk Roads, thousands of kilometres apart: Venice, Italy (above) and Xian, China (below).

FOR many centuries caravans of merchants passed beneath the western gate of the city of Xian, capital of China during the Tang Dynasty, their camels laden with luxury goods that would find ready buyers in the markets of Europe over 6,000 kilometres away. Most famous of the commodities they bore on their hazardous journey through the deserts, steppeland





# Rediscovering the Silk Roads

and mountain passes of Central Asia was silk, the precious fabric whose manufacturing secrets China guarded for thousands of years. It was this that caused the nineteenth-century German geographer and geologist Ferdinand von Richthofen to coin a new term to describe the caravan routes that thus linked East and West—the *Seidenstrassen*, the Silk Roads.

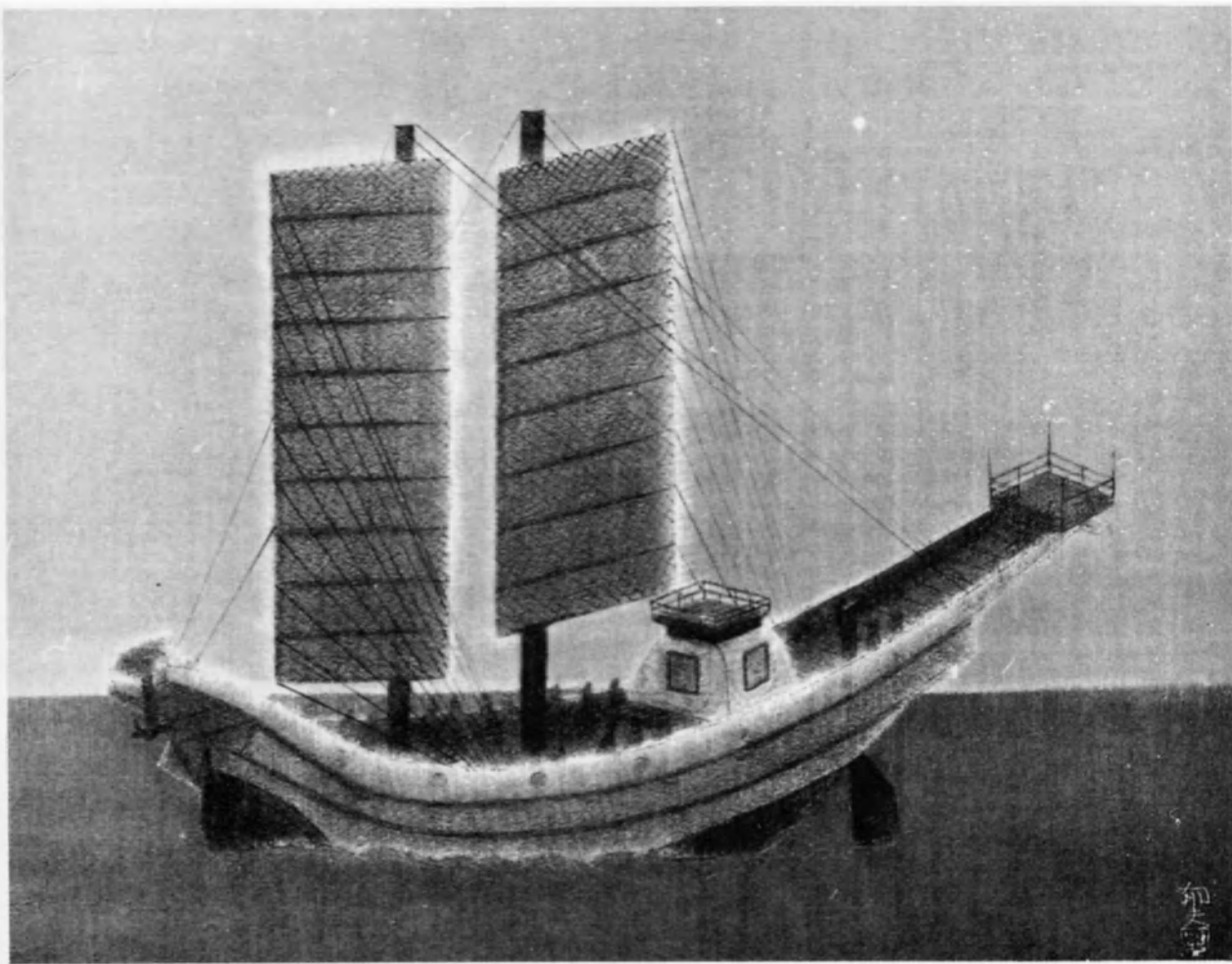


Silk was not the only cargo carried by the caravans, nor was the traffic only one-way. A host of natural and man-made products ranging from bronze and porcelain to wool and cobalt were transported over the centuries from East to West and West to East. Above all the Silk Roads, with their overland and maritime extensions westwards as far as Rome, Venice and Cadiz, and eastwards as far as Nara, were a channel for the spread of ideas, technologies, religious concepts and the arts, and contributed to the cross-fertilization between civilizations.

Many studies have been made of these great arteries of cultural and commercial exchange by scholars acting individually or with academic institutions. So far, however, no complete study of an interdisciplinary nature has been carried out by a truly international team. Now, as part of an important new Unesco project within the framework of the World Decade for Cultural Development, scholars and scientists from many different fields of study and many







Three poster designs created by the Japanese artist Ikuo Hirayama for Unesco's major project entitled "Integral Study of the Silk Roads: Roads of Dialogue"

countries are preparing to follow in the footsteps of the merchants of old.

The project, entitled "Integral Study of the Silk Roads: Roads of Dialogue", was approved by Unesco's General Conference in 1987. It is still in its early stages but has already been warmly welcomed by scientific circles, non-governmental organizations and the media. Over the next five years it will involve over a thousand specialists working in close co-operation with the more than thirty countries situated along the old Silk Roads.

It will provide an opportunity to rediscover the three major routes, which will be followed by a caravan consisting of an international team of scholars. Some fifteen international seminars will be held at the key sites and meetings will be organized at each place with scholars from the locality or country concerned.

Interdisciplinary co-operation on the widest possible scale is hoped for, with specialists in such fields as paleogeography and paleoethnography clarifying

such questions as the ecology of the Silk Roads.

Some thirty associated projects are planned. For one of them the Sultanate of Oman has agreed to put an Omani ship, the *Fulk Al-Salamah* ("Ship of Peace") at the disposal of Unesco for a maritime expedition to be known as the "Voyage of Dialogue". With some thirty scholars and scientists on board, the ship will set sail from Venice (Italy) late in 1990 and arrive in Osaka (Japan) a hundred days later after calling at over thirty ports in some twenty countries. The itinerary of the "Ship of Peace" will also include places in which Unesco is engaged in the field such as Alexandria (see page 8), and also the city of Sana'a in the Yemen Arab Republic and the historic site of Shibam in Democratic Yemen, both of which will be restored with the help of Unesco.

Other associated projects include a sea voyage on board the *Cocachin*, an ancient Chinese junk, which will set sail next November to retrace Marco Polo's

homeward trip from Cathay, also making a technical and scientific reconnaissance for the 1990 expedition.

Two other expeditions planned for next year include one from the Chinese capital Beijing across the Gobi desert to Ulan Bator in Mongolia, possibly continuing as far as Minussinsk in Siberia. Another, in autumn 1989, will travel from Odessa to Baku on the Caspian Sea.

An *Historical Atlas of the Silk Roads* is also planned. The latest technology such as remote sensing techniques and computer animation will be used in its preparation, and, in the spirit of the project as a whole, the *Atlas* is intended to be of value to the general public as well as the scholarly community.

The Silk Roads project will culminate in two events of international importance which will take place in Paris in 1992: a conference to review the studies which have been carried out and a major exhibition bringing together important collections for the first time. ■

# The International Fund for the Promotion of Culture

THE International Fund for the Promotion of Culture is unique in the sense that it is Unesco's *only* organ created by inter-governmental decision that operates on the basis of *direct* contact with private and public institutions, groups and individuals active in a myriad of cultural fields. This makes the Fund a flexible and fast-moving mechanism.

While it is staffed by members of Unesco's Secretariat, the Fund's policy- and decision-making are entrusted to an autonomous fifteen-member Administrative Council. Men and women of distinguished achievement in the arts, cultural administration and finance, the members of the Council are chosen in their personal capacities by the Director-General. Thus they speak not on behalf of governments but for themselves, and in the name of innovation, creativity and cultural values.

Giving a concrete boost to the notion of the cultural dimension of development was a basic motivating factor in the Fund's creation. The original idea of an international "cultural bank" was launched in 1970 by Mr. Edward Seaga, now Prime Minister of Jamaica and then Minister of Finance and Planning, who crystallized the thinking of a small band of pioneers struggling to release culture from the vicious circles of inadequate funding. Their efforts to nurture an international financial institution to provide and promote direct support for cultural activities gradually gained momentum. By the end of the 1970s, generous donations from governments (principally Venezuela, Saudi Arabia and the Islamic Republic of Iran), supplemented by contributions from bodies such as the Gulbenkian Foundation, the Agnelli Foundation, the Lee Foundation (Singapore), the Association of Hellenic Banks, the Tata Trust (India), the A.G. Leventis Foundation, the Hamdard Foundation (Pakistan), the Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Science and Technology, and the International Cultural Society of the Republic of Korea, made for a handsome endowment.

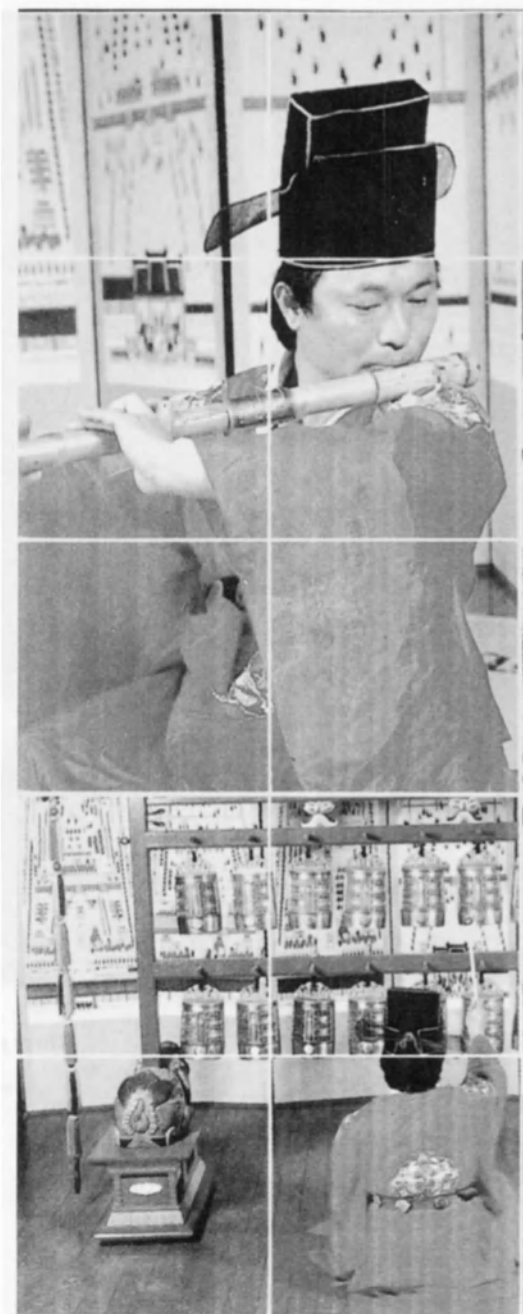
The total of Fund contributions and earnings now approaches the \$9 million mark. Since it began its operations the Fund has lent its sup-

port to some 273 projects in 85 different countries. While funding has been generally limited to "seed money", the Fund's support has taken a multitude of other practical forms, calling upon the human and institutional resources and networks at Unesco's command. The Fund's investments in cultural creativity and infrastructure development have covered fields too numerous to be listed here, but the examples cited in these pages should reflect some of that polyvalence.

The Fund is clearly an ideal instrument to help achieve tangible and exemplary results during the World Decade for Cultural Development, for the goals it has pursued since 1977 anticipate the ambitious worldwide purposes now defined. The challenge of the Decade in turn highlights the challenges now facing the Fund.

First and foremost is the challenge of *fund-raising*, so as to make the Fund itself a more powerful and influential instrument. A linked challenge is that of *focusing* the Fund's activities, after over ten years of very broad-based operations. Concentration on the areas of emphasis identified for the World Decade is bound to yield effective synergisms resulting in more significant projects. This in turn implies a more "pro-active" role for the Fund as a broker of innovative ideas, in identifying means of implementing them, in using its own resources to build partnerships and networks and in securing complementary financing for them. In so doing the Fund will also fulfil one of its statutory purposes, that of serving as a clearing-house for information on the financing of cultural development.

While the Decade seeks above all to achieve a new state of mind, this truer awareness of the cultural dimension of development must lead to tangible results: increased investment in cultural activities the world over. Meeting that goal will not be easy, as the Fund's own experience has shown. But even small sums can go a long way, provided they initiate really well-designed projects that are able to catalyze resources and mobilize support at all levels, achieving in cultural terms that elusive "multiplier effect". ■



In 1981 the Government of Jamaica, with assistance from the Fund, set up a "memory bank" to record the Jamaican people's heritage enshrined in oral traditions, music, poetry, customs and beliefs. Right, a farmer explains to a memory bank interviewer how cassava is grown, while three other farmers listen intently. The use of cassava has been inherited from the Arawak Indians who inhabited Jamaica when Christopher Columbus arrived there in 1494.





In 1987 the first part of a new five-volume history of Korean music was published by the National Commission for Unesco of the Republic of Korea, with the assistance of Unesco's International Fund for the Promotion of Culture. The fully illustrated books will cover ritual Buddhist chants, courtly music, musical notations and musical instruments. With their accompanying cassettes they will constitute an anthology of the different currents forming the Korean musical tradition. Left, cover illustration of the first volume.

The National Museum of Mali, established in 1982, has become a focal point in Mali's cultural life through its spread of activities (below) ranging from the preservation of the cultural heritage and the training of specialists to art and environmental education. With the Fund's financial assistance, the Museum has purchased audio-visual equipment enabling it to extend its activities to the country as a whole.

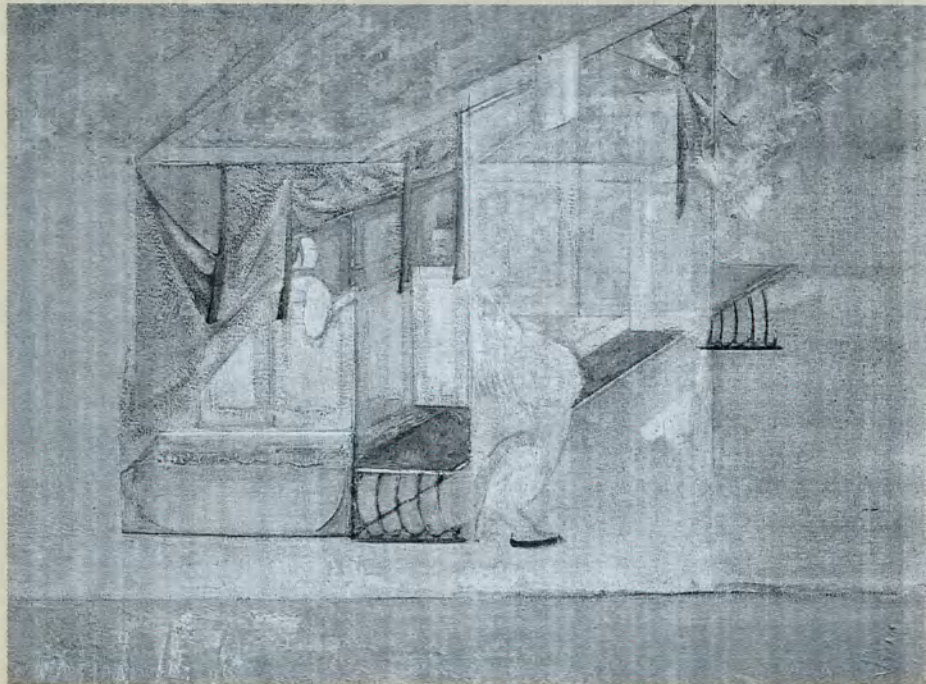




# UNESCO 40

The five works reproduced on this double page are among those shown at an exhibition held in October 1986 to mark Unesco's fortieth anniversary. The exhibition, which was organized by the International Association of Art and held at Unesco's Paris Headquarters, featured works created for the occasion by forty artists from forty countries. The catalogue has now been published in the Unesco Collection of Representative Works under the title *Unesco: 40 ans, 40 artistes, 40 pays* ("Unesco: 40 years, 40 artists, 40 countries"; La Bibliothèque des Arts, Paris/Unesco, 1988). Each work is an expression of a distinctive cultural identity. As an introductory text to the catalogue points out, "The murmuring of cultural waves and winds is crossing the Americas, and rippling from Asia to Africa, carrying echoes from Europe and the wide Pacific. In the late twentieth century nothing lies outside the bounds of the artist's curiosity, but at the same time nothing can make the artist reject what is dearest to him in his past and present."

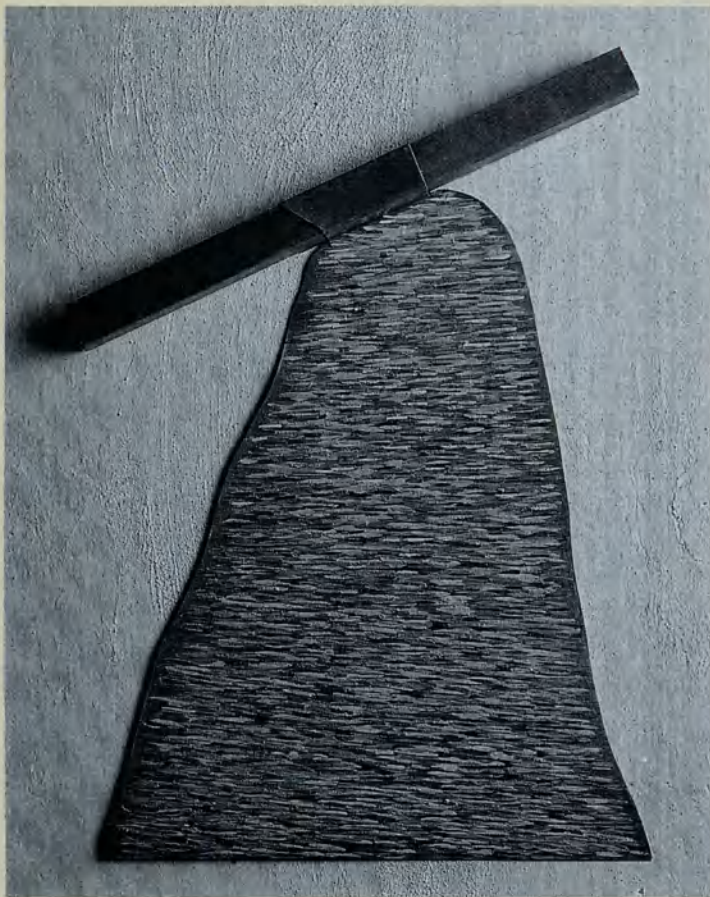
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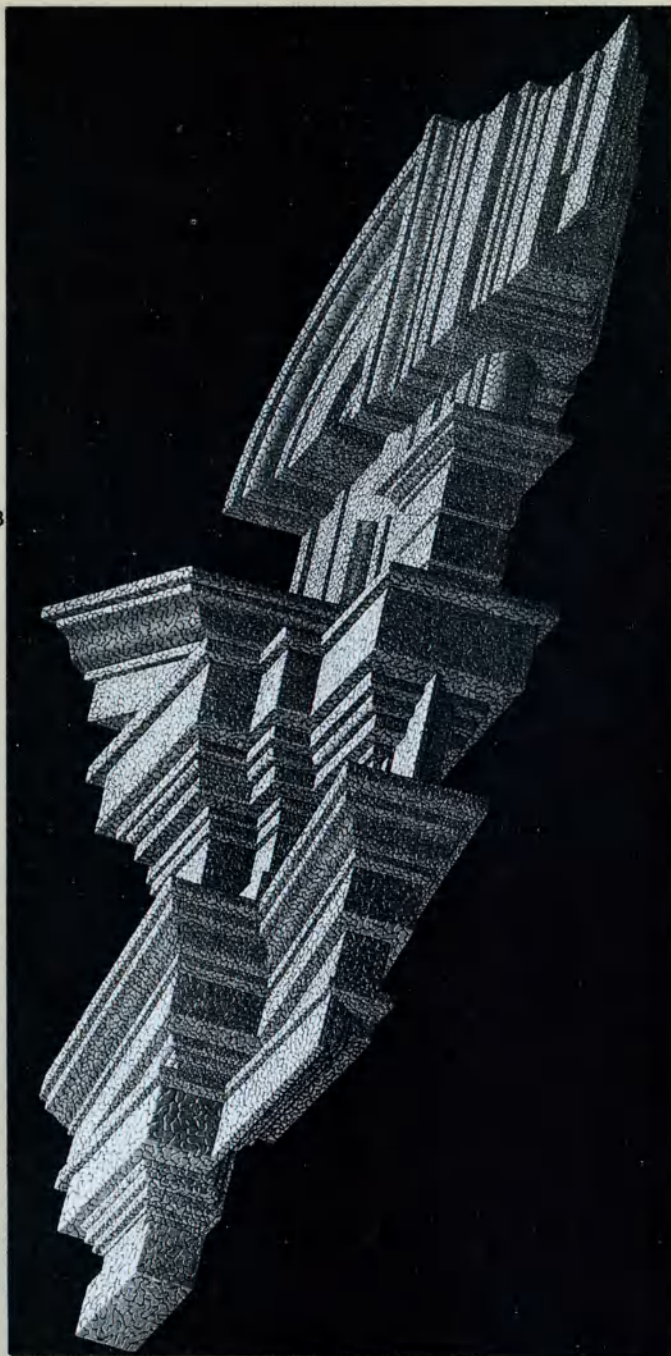
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# years artists countries



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1. Oil on canvas by Hoiyung Tai (China), inspired by a 4th-century Chinese silk scroll painting entitled *The Monitor's Instruction to the Ladies of the Court*.

2. "Sugar Loaf Mountain", copper and wood composition using earth and rock pigments mixed with acrylic resin, by Manfredo de Souza Netto (Brazil), echoes the famous rock formation in Rio de Janeiro bay.

3. "Fragment of Relief", oil on canvas by András Felvidéki (Hungary), is influenced by Graeco-Roman art and classical architecture.

4. "The Inconsolable Space or Love as a Memory", traditional ink on clay panel by Mahmoud Rachid Koraïchi (Algeria). Here the artist has used the Tassili n'Ajjer rock paintings as his inspiration.

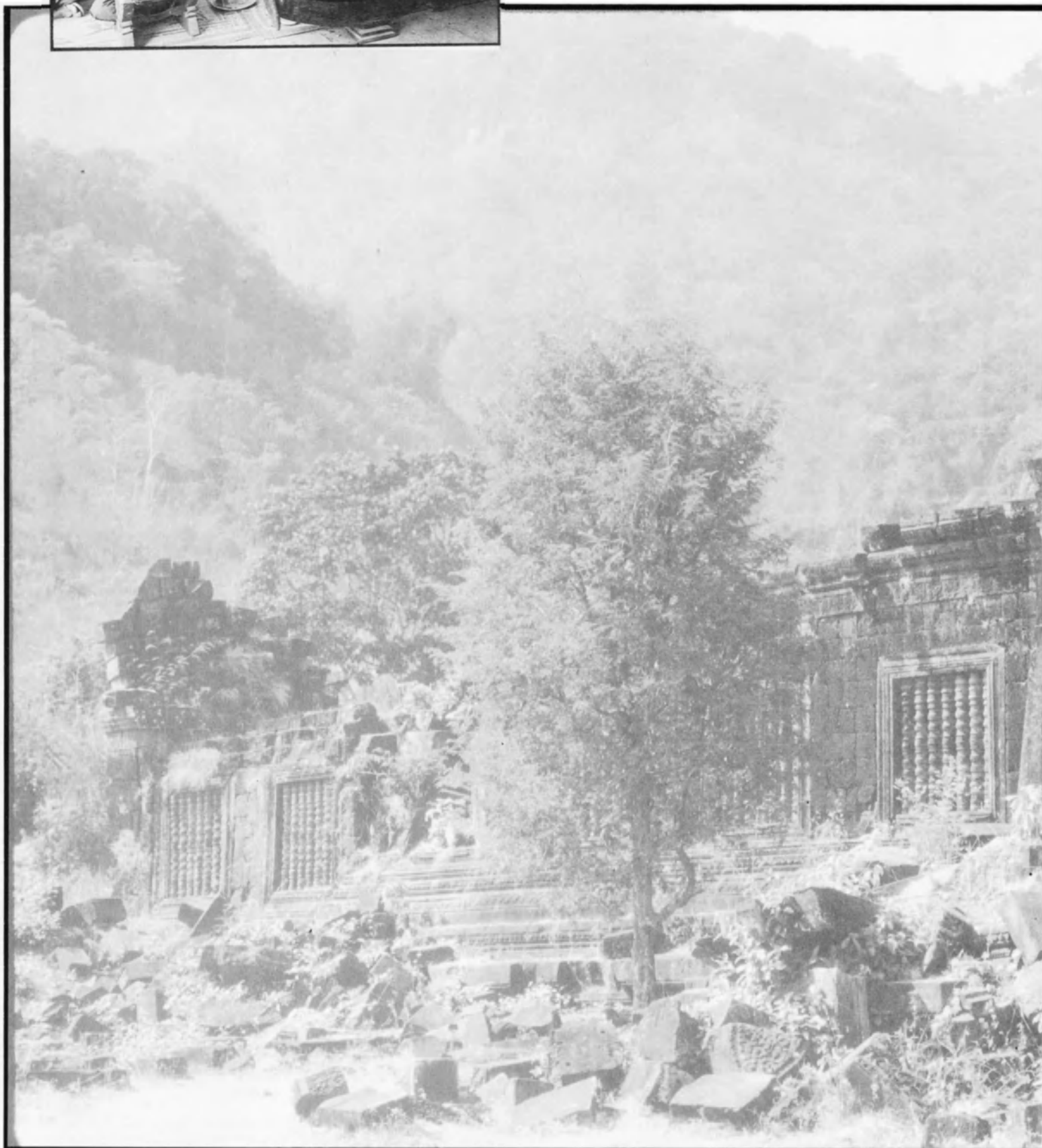
5. "Festival", oil on canvas by Nadejda Kouteva (Bulgaria), whose work draws on her country's folk traditions.





Lao musicians playing traditional instruments at the *baci* welcome ceremony

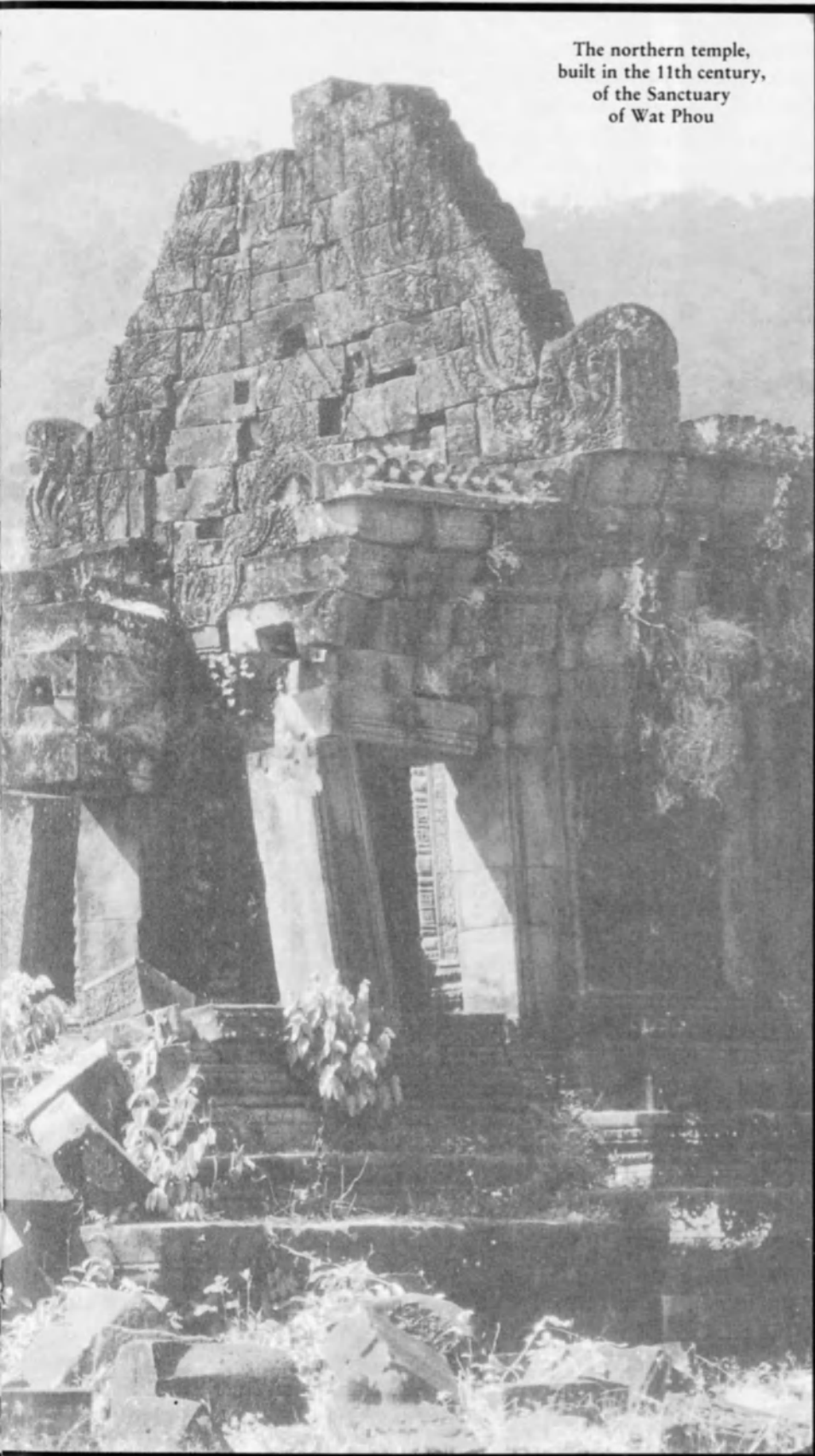
# WAT PHOU





# Saving a treasure of Khmer civilization

BY RUTH MASSEY



The northern temple,  
built in the 11th century,  
of the Sanctuary  
of Wat Phou

CHAMPASSAK was animated despite the sweltering heat of mid-morning. Women dressed in sarong-like skirts and white blouses converged on the community hall that overlooks the palm-shaded river meandering through the village.

The women of Champassak had been cooking for several days. Enough rice, fish, pork and poultry had been prepared to feed the whole village and its guests. Many of the men were inside the community hall awaiting the arrival of a group of visitors from Vientiane, the capital of their country, the Lao People's Democratic Republic. They had seen the orange dust cloud in the wake of the vehicle bearing the visitors long before it came to a halt in front of the hall. The group of men and women who emerged—Lao, American, Indian, Bulgarian and British—had all been waiting for this moment: their first glimpse of Wat Phou, the legendary temple that had been built in this remote corner of Laos in the days of the Khmer empire.

While the elders led the visitors into the community hall, the village orchestra struck up an undulating rhythmic song played on traditional instruments: flutes, clarinets, xylophones with bamboo crosspieces, drums, cymbals, and the *khen*, a hand-held pipe organ that is the national instrument. In a large room, about seventy men sat around a centrepiece in the form of a tree made from banana leaves and flowers and surrounded by symbolic foods. The *baci* ceremony, marking the importance of the occasion, was about to start. While a lay priest intoned benedictions and prayers, the villagers tied cotton strips around the wrists of their guests, symbolizing good health, prosperity and happiness.

At the banquet that followed the *baci*, women served steaming dishes of fish, pork and chicken and the staple of all Lao meals—sticky rice. There were toasts in *lau lao*, the potent locally-brewed rice liquor, followed by speeches dedicated to the purpose of the gathering: the restoration of Wat Phou.

Built by the Khmer kings on the slopes of the mountain that emerges from the forest surrounding the village, Wat Phou is in ruins. Champassak was

celebrating the fact that the temple was about to be saved from the tidal wave of vegetation in which the heavenly dancers of its bas-reliefs were drowning. The visitors represented years of effort by the Government of Laos and the international community to save this national treasure, efforts that had culminated in the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and Unesco agreeing to finance and assist in the renovation work, and in the establishment of a museum in Champassak to house some of Wat Phou's more vulnerable artefacts.

Two hundred years older than Angkor Wat in Democratic Kampuchea, Wat Phou was built in the second half of the fifth century. At that time it was a centre of kingly power on the lower Mekong River, one of a collection of principalities stretching along the coast but extending inland to encompass what is now southern Laos. The temple was the site of a cult closely associated with the Indianized monarchies of ancient Indochina, part of the vast Khmer empire that, some 200 years later, made Angkor its capital.

The speeches over, the group from Vientiane, accompanied by village elders, drove the short distance through the forest to the temple. A long causeway led them into the centre of an architectural composition whose ancient stones were bathed in the golden light of the late afternoon.

Rising above the Mekong River, Wat Phou is a majestic ruin covered with a mantle of vegetation, a symbol of what the Lao themselves had suffered and withstood—invasions, colonialism and wars. Nowadays, Wat Phou's battle is against the vegetation that relentlessly attacks its ancient stones. The conflict is between the ruins and the jungle which has overrun them.

At the end of the causeway, two exquisite rectangular pavilions made of sandstone stand near a large artificial lake, believed by the Khmers to have possessed extraordinary purificatory powers. For the god-kings of the Khmer empire Wat Phou was a favourite royal

bathing place, with its grand approach, its majestic flight of steps flanked by statues of lions and mythical animals. Today the lions are faceless and the statues have lost their heads. Buffaloes stand motionless in the once virtuous waters of the lake, only their heads showing.

The rectangular pavilions used to be temples for segregated worship—one for women and the other for men. Roots follow the outlines of the masonry along the temple walls, mimicking the architectural motifs which they cover. A whole section of wall is cracked and prevented from disintegration by the roots' embrace. Ferns and underbrush have attached themselves to walls, screening the idealized representations of the Khmer aristocracy, while beneath the onslaught of vegetation, the powerful Brahman gods of the Khmer empire—Krishna, Vishnu and Indra riding the elephant Airavata—are slowly suffocating.

A wide avenue leads from the temples to a majestic stairway carved into the side of the mountain. At the top is the sanctuary which had once housed the idol of the cult. Here time has wrought wonders with the sandstone, and the sun and rain have softened the decorative instincts of the Khmers. Local legend has it that the Emerald Buddha, which now sits in Bangkok, is a fake and that the authentic one is hidden here.

Behind the sanctuary the side of the mountain rises perpendicularly to the skies. From here it is easy to imagine the beauty of this site in its prime. The view spreads out harmoniously from mountain to plain. First the sanctuary, then the immense staircase interspersed by large terraces, the esplanade with the two rectangular temples, the artificial lake, the park, the forest and, beyond it, the course of the majestic Mekong flowing towards the horizon.

By the time the visitors had climbed down the stairway and reached the forecourt, the day was waning. A group of boys strolled through the ruins. They had come to this once exclusive place to burn incense-sticks at a small Buddhist



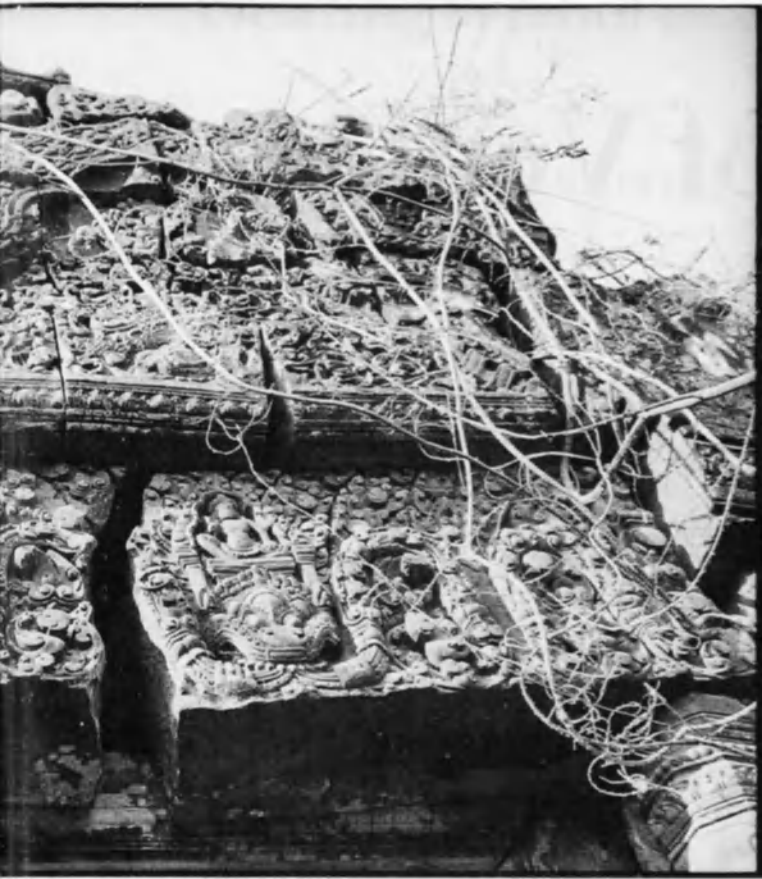
Detail of a carved portal from Wat Phou ("mountain temple"), before restoration. This immense temple complex, the oldest part of which dates from the 5th century AD, is located in the south of the Lao People's Democratic Republic.

shrine made of sticks and paper. It was all that was left from a festival that had been held in the previous month. For four days Wat Phou had basked in some of its ancient splendour, with processions and fireworks and hundreds of people from the surrounding regions chanting and praying to the rhythm of the *khen* and the deep sounds of gongs.

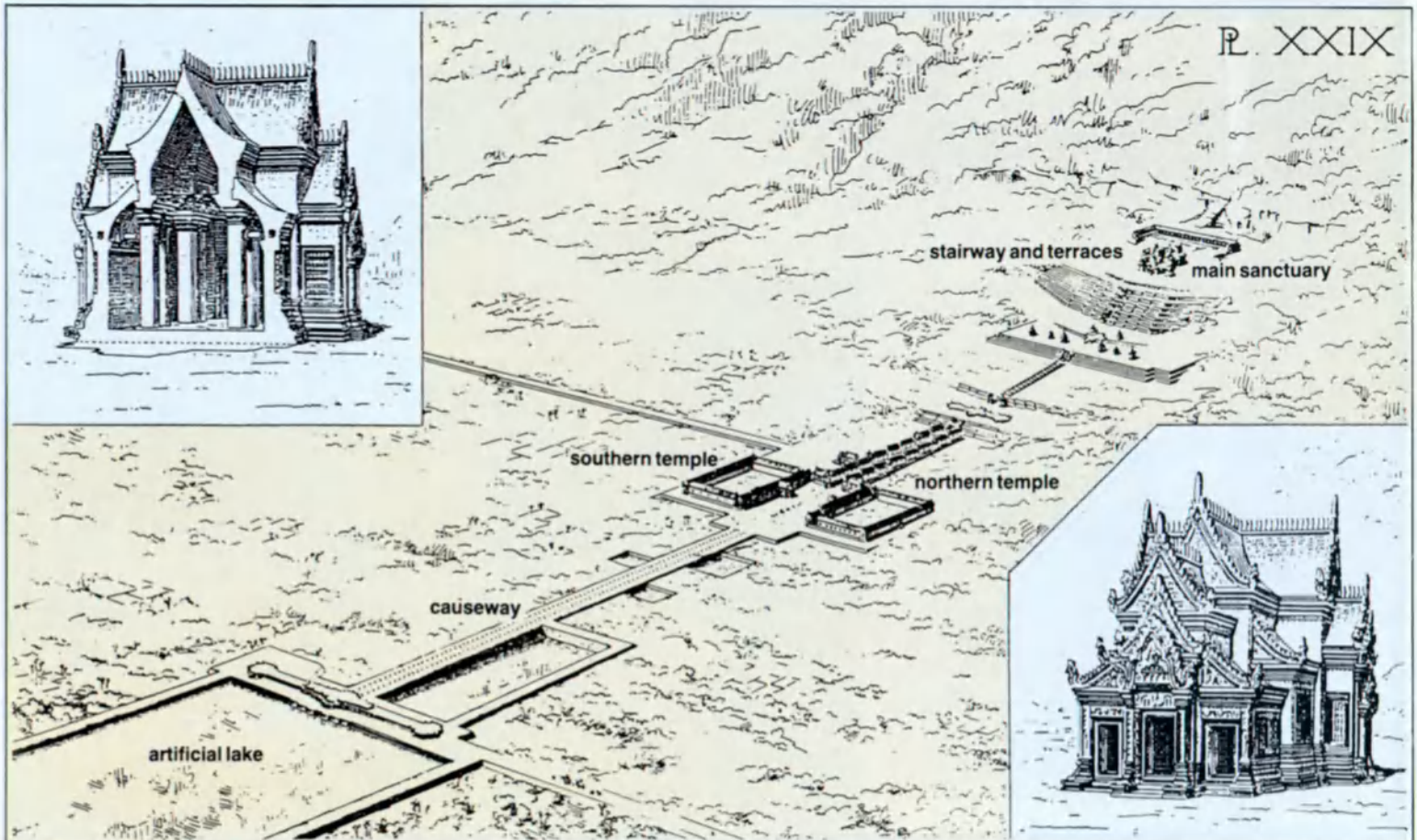
In just over an hour night would descend over the mountain sanctuary. The last rays of the sun lit up the growth of tropical vegetation, highlighting the deterioration of the buildings. The task of restoration is immense and greatly exceeds the resources of the Government of Laos. In associating itself with the efforts of the Lao people, the world community will help to conserve a monumental site which is not only the work of a particular people, but also belongs to the common heritage of mankind. ■

RUTH MASSEY is an Information Officer with the United Nations Development Programme in New York.





These and other ancient statues from Wat Phou are now conserved in the site museum, in the neighbouring village of Champassak.





# The gondola of Venice



Gondolas moored on a Venetian canal, sterns riding high out of the water



# Floating symbol of a city

BY ARTHUR GILLETTE



LIKE the Yankee clipperships and Arab dhows, the Venetian gondola is both a specific craft and part of a myth.

Strangely, the boat that has come to symbolize Venice, and that exists nowhere else in the world, may well not be Venetian in origin. There is a semantic wrangle about the word itself. Some etymologists think it is a corruption of the Greek *konkula* ("hard little peel"). Others trace it to *kbontilas* (Greek for "short boat"). A further explanation points to the similarity between the shapes of the gondola and a Roman boat of the fourth century AD with the hypothetical name *fundula*.

The first hard evidence of the gondola's existence in Venice goes back to 1094, when Doge (Duke) Vito Falier issued a charter granting certain Lagoon villagers the right to build a *gondola*.

Over the centuries, the craft has evolved continually. Today's gondola is the product of unceasing changes and improvements made in response to the socio-economic development of Venice itself. Its history is a kind of maritime application of Darwin's theory of evolution, a dialectical relationship between a boat and its geographical and human surroundings.

Venice grew into a city from a loose federation of scattered villages. As its population increased, a network of canals was dug. The network spread and became increasingly dense until it formed the watery maze we know today, which the twentieth-century town planner and architect Le Corbusier called "a perfect cardiac system". This very specific kind of urban development, which could never depend to a very great extent on animal transport, required a craft able to carry more and more people over lengthening distances through narrow, hard-to-negotiate canals at ever-swifter speeds. The gondola evolved in response to those changing needs.

The gondola is renowned for its svelte line, and the hull exudes the excitement of a racer. Odd as it may seem in such a feline craft, the boat is flat-bottomed and has been since its inception, the adjective "flat" being used by Doge Falier in the eleventh-century manuscript mentioned above. This minimal draught was perfectly adapted to the Venetians' amphibious existence, first among the marshes of the Lagoon,

then along the city's canals. The canals are shallow—and the gondola flat-bottomed—to this day.

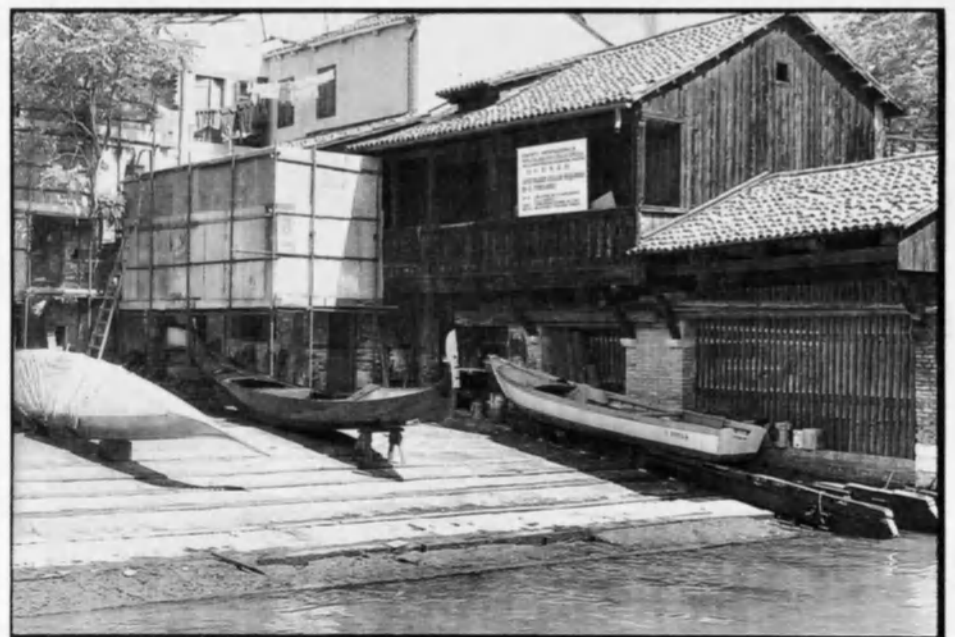
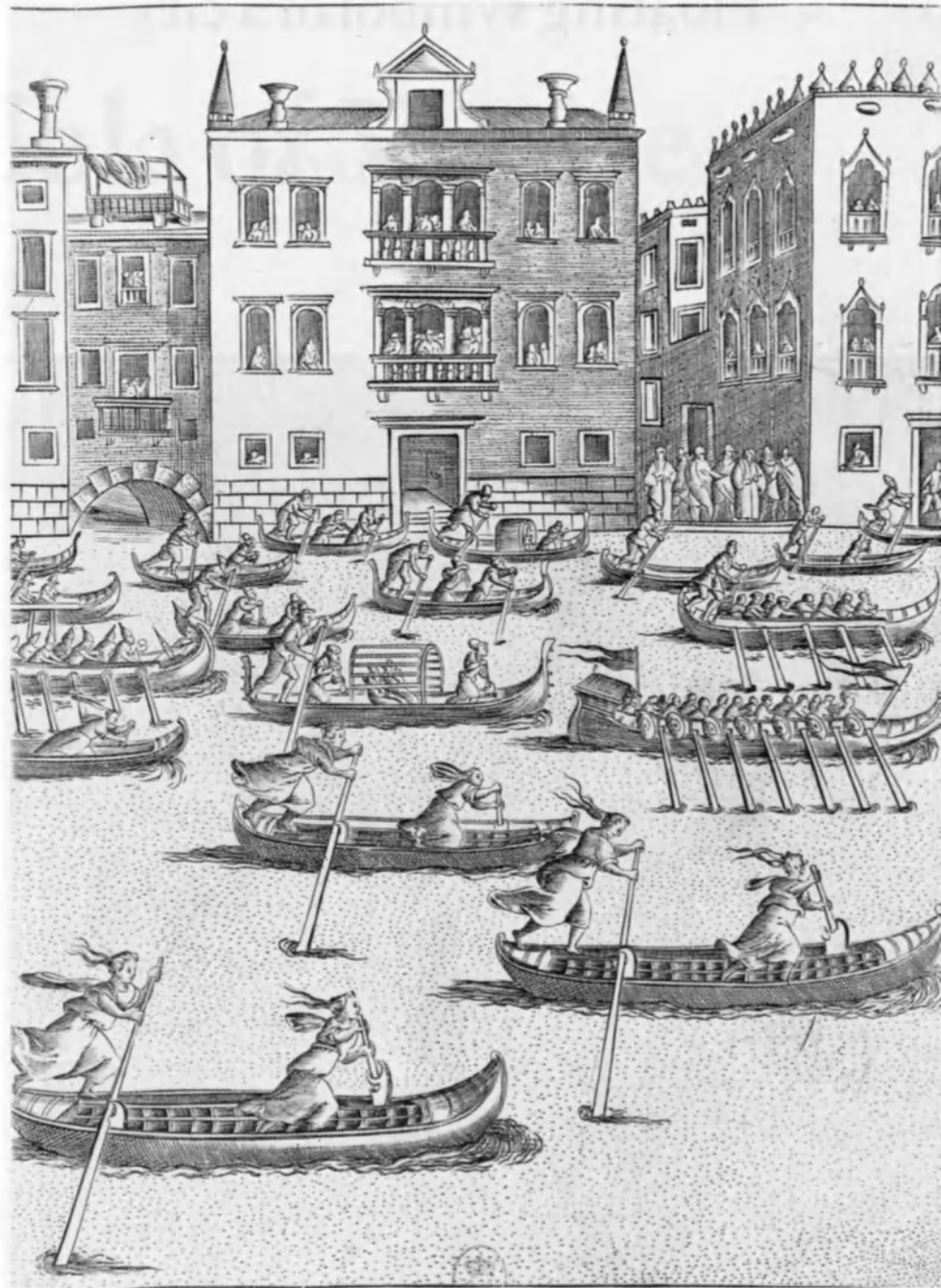
The first known blueprint of a gondola, drawn up in 1555 at the *Arsenale* shipyard, shows that after at least 500 years' evolution, the boat already had a diminutive beam. During the next four centuries, it narrowed even further. Now, the generally practised overall length is 10.87 metres, for a beam measuring a mere 1.42 metres, a ratio of 7.7:1.

A narrowed beam coupled with the need to ferry more passengers made it impossible for the gondolier to stand, as he previously had done, inside his craft. As a consequence, a perch was built for him in the shape of a poop deck flush with the gunwhales as far astern as possible. The rower's upright position gave rise, in turn, to two further innovations that are peculiar to gondola navigation.

The first is a long heavy sweep oar. Fashioned from a single length of beech, this oar is 4.2 metres in length and weighs a daunting 4.3 kilos. These exceptional characteristics require a strong rower, but also give him extraordinary leverage. They also call for considerable dexterity.

The second improvement required by the gondolier's standing position was a sturdy, high and curiously shaped oar lock. Called the *forcola* ("fork"), and looking like a gnarled little tree trunk, it is hewn from a block of walnut. In addition to being a striking piece of sculpture, it serves as an ingenious multipurpose fulcrum. Pivoting his oar from one or other of the lip-like indentations in the stern side of the fork, the gondolier can choose between a faster and a slower forward speed.

Displaced to the extreme stern of the boat, the gondolier's 50 to 70 kilos made it imperative to provide a counterweight at the bows. So came into exist-







Races of gondolas and other typically Venetian craft had become popular by the late 15th century. Both men and women competed, as can be seen in the engraving (left) by the Italian artist Giacomo Franco (1556-1620). The Regata Storica (above), one of Venice's traditional festivals, has taken place along the Grand Canal in September for seven centuries. It opens with a magnificent procession of gondolas and other Venetian craft with persons in historical costume on board.

The construction of gondolas is a dying industry. One of the last Venetian gondola yards, at San Trovaso, is being restored with the aid of an International Committee for the Defence of the Gondola which was set up with Unesco backing.

ence *il ferro* ("the steel"), a heavy steel blade from which protrude six horizontal "teeth". These are said to symbolize the six historical quarters of Venice, while the cornucopia-like metal plume atop the *ferro* is thought to represent the shape of the Doge's ritual hat.

The above innovations seem to have been more or less fully integrated into the gondola by the end of the sixteenth century. But the craft's gradually extended length and increased weight enhanced friction. To overcome this problem, the stem and stern of the gondola were progressively lifted out of the water, to reduce wetted surface and consequent drag. Today, only the central three-fifths of the hull are submerged, leading a Venetian author to compare the gondola to "a half moon posed on the Lagoon".

The gondola continued to evolve into the twentieth century, when the last two characteristics that make the craft truly unique were refined to perfection. To grasp them, look at an empty gondola moored between two piles. It is impossible not to notice that the gondola is unbalanced (it lists sharply to starboard) and twisted (the hull is markedly asymmetrical). What purpose is served by these bizarre features?

Already four centuries ago, but particularly after the fall of the Venetian Republic when many a noble house was ruined, single gondoliers became popular, more and more frequently replacing the expensive pair of rowers used earlier. When he rows, the single gondolier does not stand in the middle of the small poop deck, but to port, so as to transmit maximum propulsive force to the sweep oar, pivoted around the *forcola* fitted to starboard. To compensate for the weight of the gondolier standing off-centre to port, the hull was made to lean to starboard as early as the fifteenth century. When empty, the boat lists to starboard; the gondolier steps aboard and takes up his position, and the craft rights herself.

The intentional list did not, however, solve all the problems caused by the use of a single gondolier. His oar is manoeuvred off the starboard side only. Without a corrective J-stroke, the gondola would always veer to port. But such a J-stroke reduces speed. A most improbable solution to this dilemma was found toward the end of the last century, by twisting the gondola's hull.

Today, the craft is markedly asymmetrical. At her point of maximum beam, she is 24 centimetres wider to



Many gondolas have metal supports in the shape of sea-horses (above) next to the passenger seat, to which a rope is attached as a handhold.



port than to starboard. Compared with a theoretically straight keel line, her bows show a clear deviation to starboard.

The gondola is unbalanced and twisted, and—it may be added in passing—graceful to the point of beauty. None of these features precludes profitability, however. Quite the contrary, the gondola is also extremely efficient. One man can propel a gondola, loaded and displacing up to 1,200 kilos, at a sustained speed of nearly three knots. No wonder that the Director of Venice's Naval History Museum, G. Rubin de Cervin, analysing speed output yielded by energy input, judged the gondola to be "the most profitable craft afloat in the world".

Marvellous as she is as a technical feat, the gondola would not have such undeniable fascination were it not for the men (and occasional women) who have rowed her throughout the last ten centuries.

According to a chronicler of 1493, early gondoliers were often black slaves, a contention borne out by a contemporary painting by Carpaccio. The *de cascada* gondoliers (attached to the households of wealthy families) had, moreover, many other non-maritime tasks, and were little different from other menial servants.

As time passed, the gondoliers became a distinct group with its own characteristics. One of these is their professional pride, the more openly displayed since in numerical terms they were far from a marginal category. At the end of the fifteenth century there were between 15,000 and 30,000 gondoliers in Venice, and at certain periods in the city's history they and their families seem to have accounted for a quarter of the population. Today their number has shrunk to about 400.

Gondoliers also use a very special language, an offshoot of the Venetian dialect which itself is a unique mixture of Italian, Spanish and Arabic. Many of the terms designating the gondola's dimensions and 280 different wooden parts, as well as the tools and techniques used in gondola building, have remained unchanged for centuries while being largely incomprehensible to people (including boat builders) from other parts of Italy. A gondolier of the 1980s has little problem in understanding the technical annotations appended to the 1555 blueprint mentioned above.

In Venice, the borderline between celebration and work is not always clear. Numerous civil and religious festivals gave gondoliers the opportunity to bridge the gap between these two vital aspects of Venetian life.

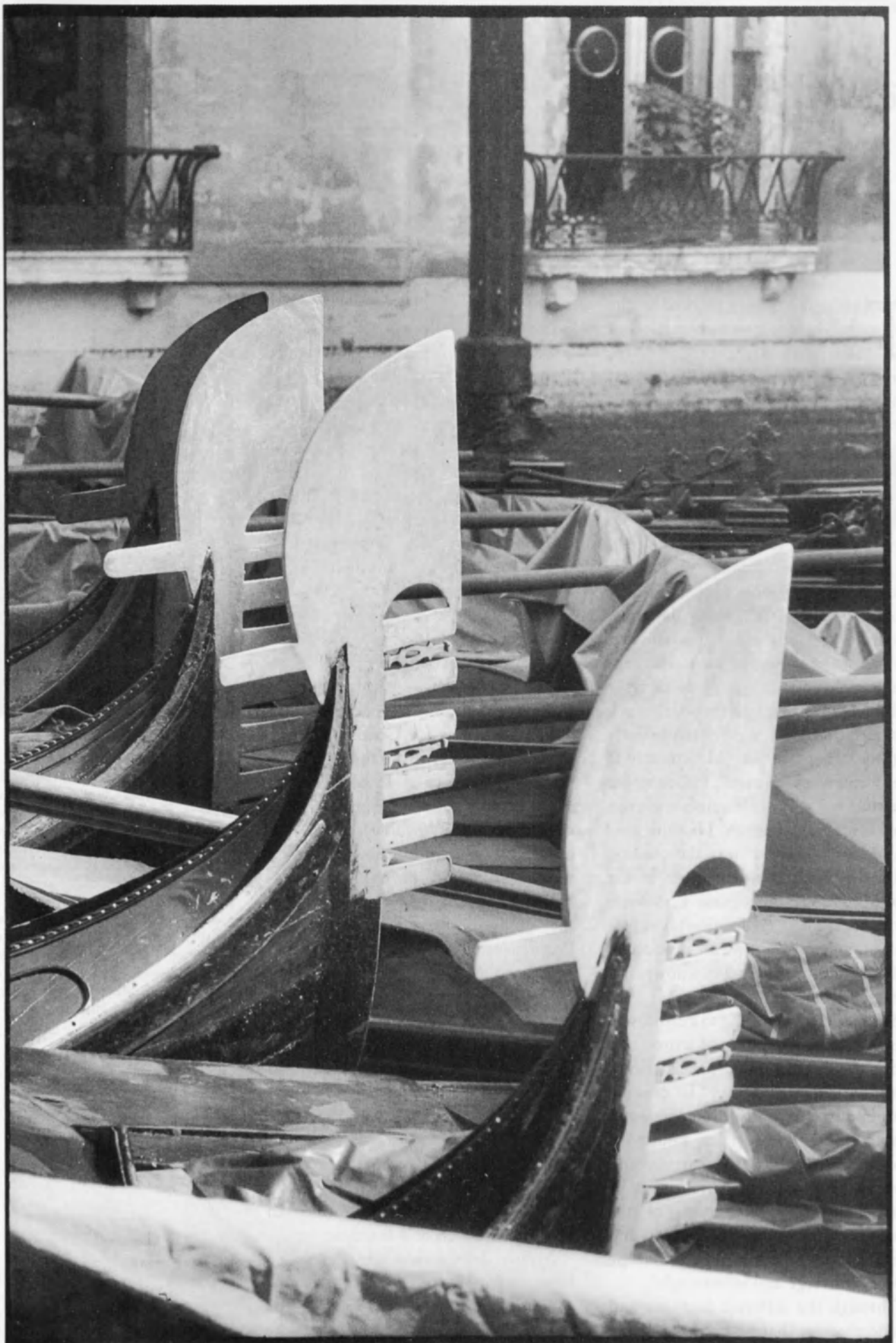
The arrival of illustrious foreign dignitaries often led to veritable competitions among gondola designers for the most elaborate decorations. In 1682, a French ambassador, Monsieur Amelot, made his entry into Venice on a baroque craft described by a contemporary chronicler as follows: "The entire gondola is covered with gilt carvings.... At the four corners of the hull are four seated statues representing the virtues of the ambassador, each designated by its own symbol. Vigilance [is symbolized] by a lamp and rooster, Fidelity by a dog, Discretion by a key across lips, and Eloquence by Mercury's wand and a hive of honey bees".

Particularly popular among the gondoliers are the regattas that enable them to show off their physical abilities and technical skill amidst public rejoicing. Truly mass events, the regattas of gondolas and other typically Venetian craft were already popular at the end of the 1400s. Dropped many years ago, the annual Regatta was resumed in 1976, which is only fair when one considers that the word "regatta" is Venetian in etymology. Now each year hundreds of professionals and amateurs enthusiastically participate in a gruelling 32-kilometre water marathon.

The number of gondolas and gondoliers has declined sharply in this century. The trade has so little appeal that its transmission has been made no longer hereditary. On the other hand, there are some encouraging signs. The games and above all the Regatta have been resumed. A Unesco-backed International Committee for the Defence of the Gondola has been set up and is helping restore one of the last remaining gondola yards at San Trovaso. On balance, however, the gondola's fate seems sealed. It now has only a decorative function as a tourist attraction. Venetians themselves limit their use of gondolas almost exclusively to ceremonial occasions such as weddings and funerals. The gondola's central purpose as Venice's main means of passenger transport was pre-empted just a century ago when motor vessels were introduced. ■

ARTHUR GILLETTE is editor of Unesco's international quarterly *Museum*. The author of several articles on sailing and shipping, he has worked as a deck-hand on sail-powered fishing boats in the Bahamas and in 1969 crossed the Atlantic on a 7.6-metre cutter.





At the bows of a gondola, as a counterweight to the gondolier who stands near the stern, is a heavy steel blade with six "teeth" which are said to symbolize the six historical quarters of Venice. The metal plume above is thought to represent the Doge's ritual hat.

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# Fernando Pessoa

BY JOSÉ AUGUSTO SEABRA

**T**HIS year has been marked by the worldwide commemoration of the centenary of the birth of Fernando Pessoa, Portugal's greatest modern poet and one of the great universal poets of our time. The crowning event of the celebrations was a tribute paid to Pessoa at Unesco Headquarters last June.

Pessoa may already be said to number among the great tutelary poets adopted by the whole of humanity: Homer, Virgil, Dante, Camões, Shakespeare, Goethe, Pushkin, Whitman, Mallarmé, Machado ... In any event, it is true that the Pessoaan galaxy is constantly expanding through the growing number of languages into which the poet's work has been translated. And notwithstanding his statement that "My country is the Portuguese language", Pessoa wrote a part of his work in English and even tried his hand at French. Like the generation of which he was the guiding spirit, his horizons were those of the world: "We are Portuguese who write for Europe, for all civilization; as yet we are nothing, but what we are now doing will one day be universally known and recognized".

Such indeed, according to Pessoa, was the goal of the generation of writers and artists associated, under his leadership, with the review *Orpheu*: "To create a cosmopolitan art, transcending time and space", in other words, "an all-arts-in-one art", "in which the languor and mysticism of Asia, the primitivism of Africa, the cosmopolitanism of the Americas, the exoticism of Oceania and the decadent machinism of Europe merge, converge and intermingle".

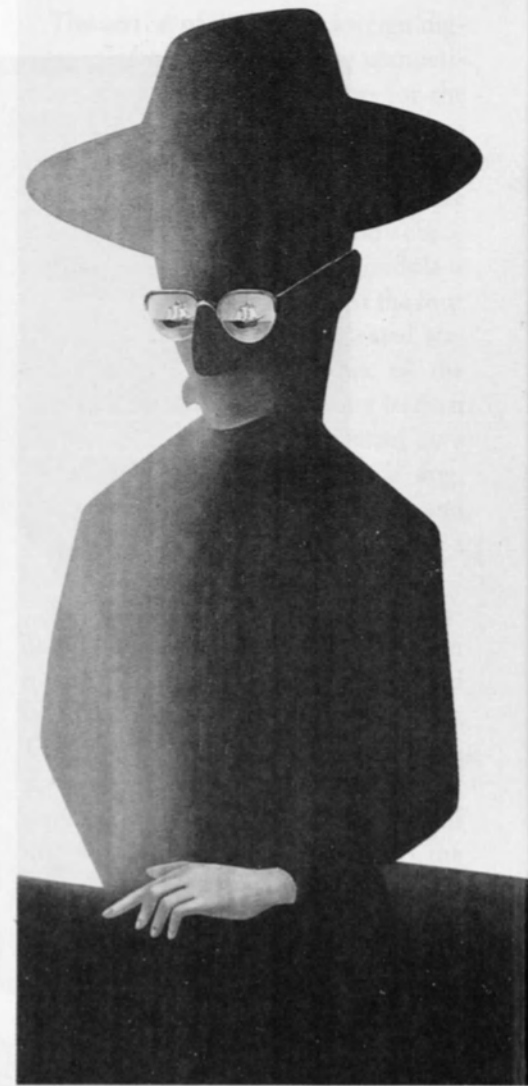
Through the different aesthetic and poetic theories that he upheld and the different identities or "heteronyms" that he created for himself to embody those theories—each heteronym having

a name, a life and a certain conception of poetry—Pessoa presented himself in a wide variety of guises and revealed Portugal in its multiplicity as a mirror of the entire universe. Just as every nation is "a world in its own right", so every "good Portuguese is several persons at once", bearing such names as those of the poet's chief heteronyms, Alberto Caeiro, Ricardo Reis, Alvaro de Campos or Fernando Pessoa "himself", not to mention the "semi-heteronym" Bernardo Soares for whom "the universe is also the Rua dos Douradores", the street of the gilders in the commercial heart of Lisbon, his "home" where he wrote the *Livro do Desassossego* ("Book of Unrest").

For Pessoa, as for Goethe, the particular and the universal are the same. A wharf in the port of Lisbon, whence ships would set out on the great voyages of discovery, was for him "the world in a nutshell". Similarly, the heteronyms were emblematic of the people of Portugal, and in their imaginary lives they relived the adventure of the Portuguese in the world.

Ricardo Reis, for example, the eldest of Pessoa's heteronyms, born, claimed Pessoa, in Oporto in 1887—one year before his creator—had received a classical education and been trained as a doctor, expressed himself in Latin and Portuguese, was imbued with a Hellenic sense of beauty and exiled himself to Brazil for political reasons, travelling from north to south and from east to west, and going back from the present to the past in search of a *traditio*.

Alvaro de Campos, on the other hand, supposedly born in Tavira (Algarve) in 1890—two years after Pessoa—had received a modern education and been awarded a degree in naval engineering in Glasgow, Scotland, was attracted to futurism, journeyed to the



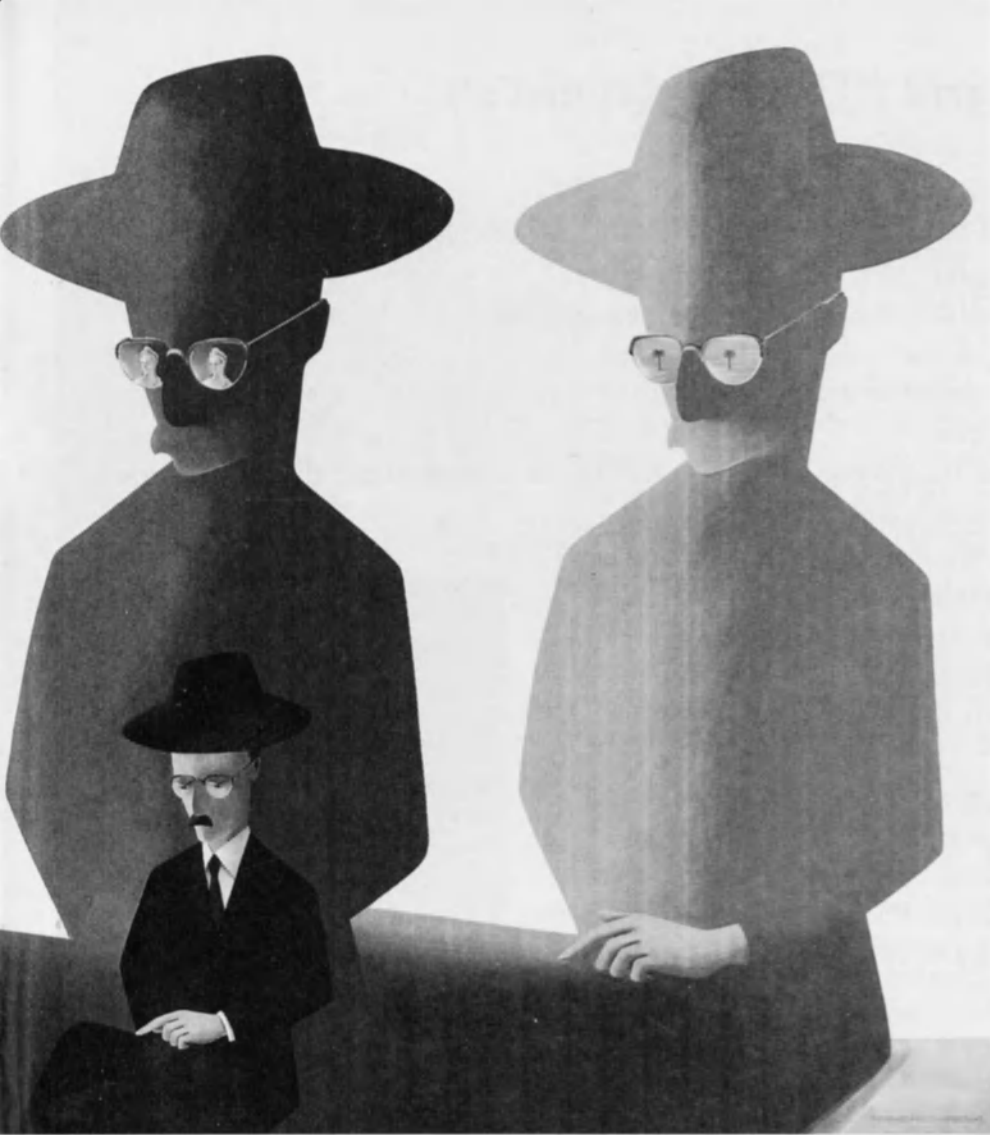
"The Poet Fernando Pessoa and his Heteronyms" (1978), a painting by the Portuguese artist Costa Pinheiro, illustrates one of the most original aspects of Pessoa's life and work—his creation of alter egos ("heteronyms") whose poetry he wrote as well as his own. Pessoa invented names such as Alberto Caeiro, Ricardo Reis and Alvaro de Campos for these imaginary poets, but they were more than just pseudonyms. Pessoa endowed them with their own life-stories, and an individual outlook, style and conception of poetry so that their works differed from his own—although taken together they expressed different personalities which he felt to exist within himself.

Pessoa's three major poetic heteronyms, Alberto Caeiro, Ricardo Reis and Alvaro de Campos, as visualized by José de Almada Negreiros. Pessoa created other heteronyms, including the writer Bernardo Soares, "author" of the "Book of Unrest", and Alexander Search, to whom Pessoa attributed some of his poetry in English.

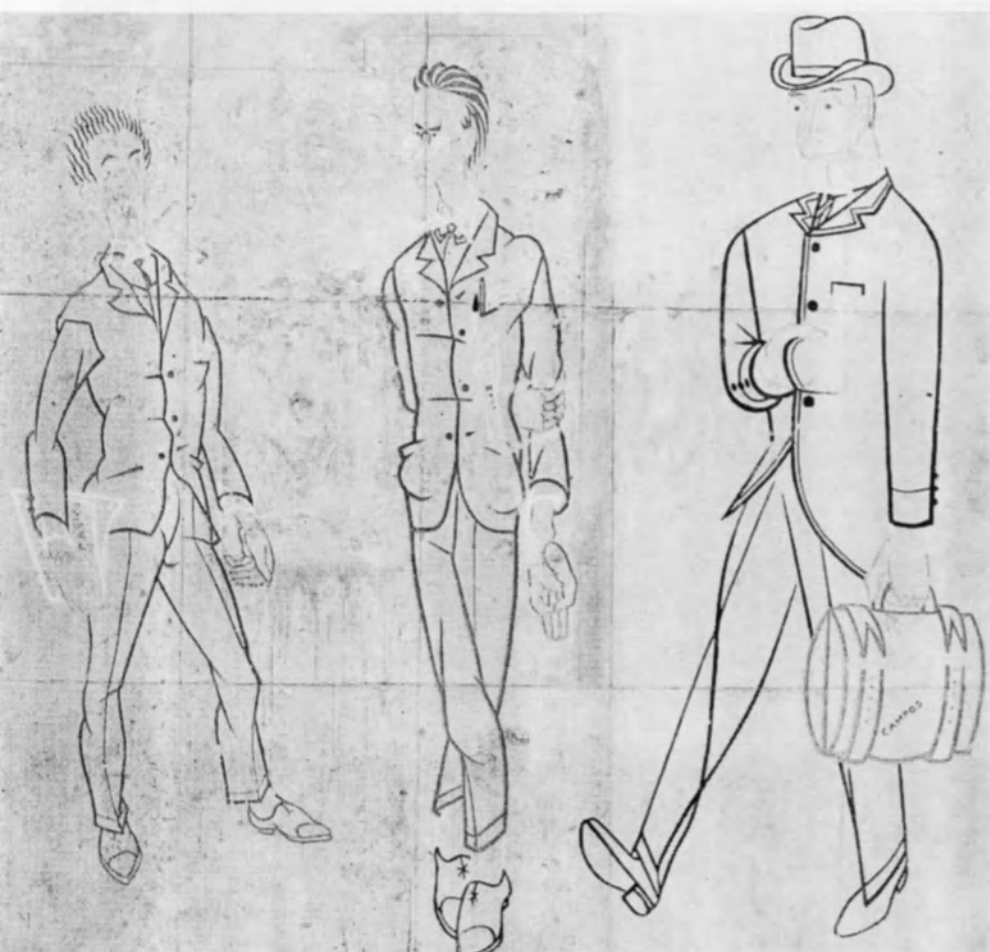
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many poets  
in one



Fernando Pessoa  
photographed in the Baixa  
(lower town),  
the historic centre of Lisbon.



Extract from  
*Tabacaria* ('The Tobacconist's')

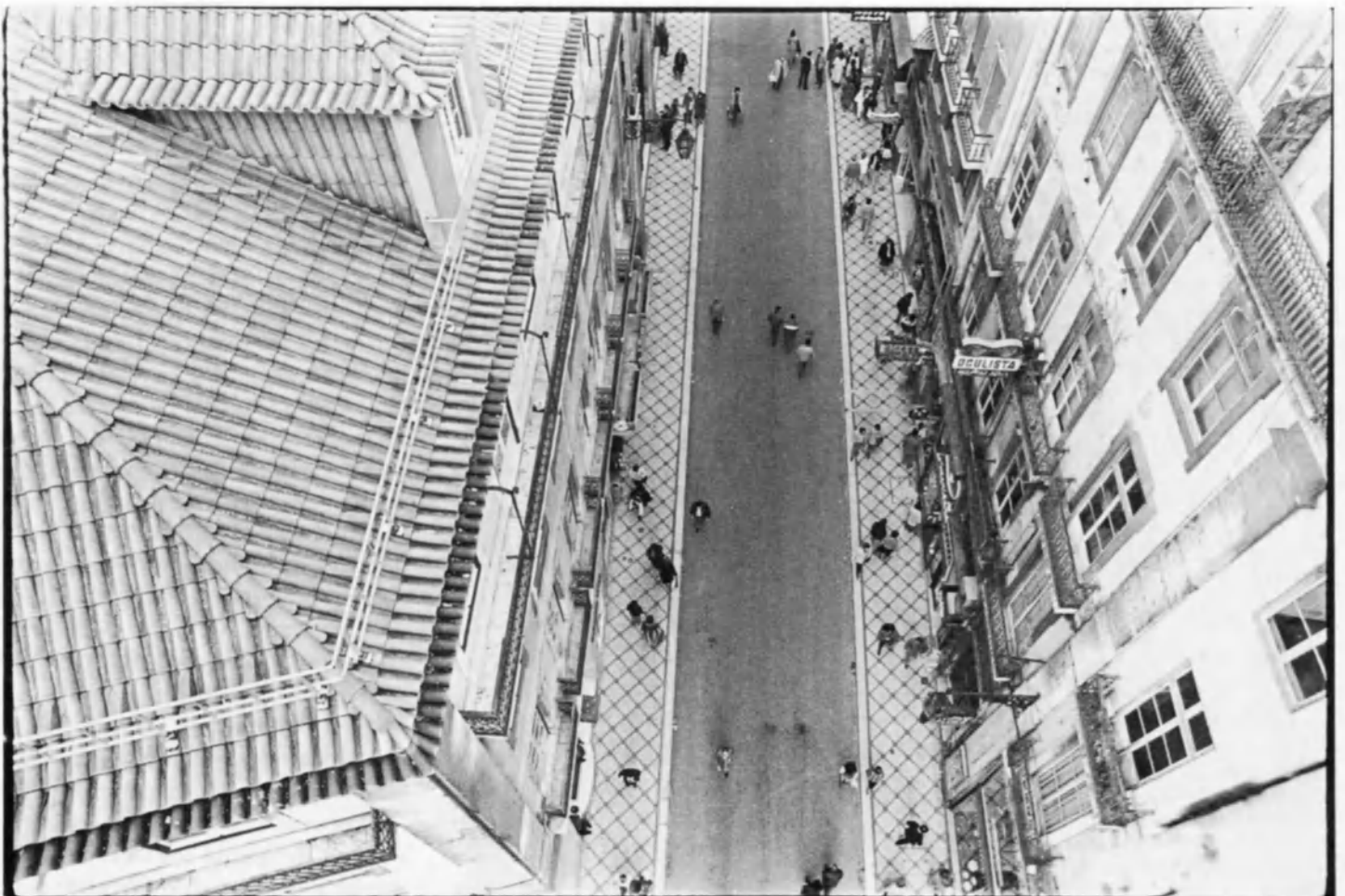
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I have dreamt more than Napoleon achieved.  
I have clasped to my hypothetical heart more humanities than Christ,  
I have in secret fashioned philosophies that no Kant ever wrote.  
But I am, and perhaps for ever will be, the one who belongs in a garret,  
Even though I live elsewhere;  
I'll always be *the one who wasn't born for that*;  
I'll always be *the one who was gifted*;  
I'll always be the one who waited for someone to open the door in a wall where there is no door,  
And who sang the song of infinity in a chicken coop,  
And heard the voice of God in a blocked-up well.  
Believe in myself? No, nor in anything else ...  
Let Nature pour over my burning head  
Her sun, her rain, the wind that tugs at my hair,  
And as for the rest, let it come if it has to come, or let it stay put.  
Cardiac slaves of the stars,  
We conquered the whole world before we rose from our beds;  
But when we awaken everything is opaque,  
When we get up everything is alien;  
We go out and the world is all the earth  
Plus the solar system and the Milky Way and the unnamed boundlessness.

Alvaro de Campos

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Translated by Michael Fineberg





Orient via the Suez Canal and then went from south to north and from west to east, in order to move on from the present into the future, with his avant-garde aesthetics, his poetry of machines and his inclination towards *revolutio*.

Fully in keeping with the underlying pattern of the poetic drama enacted by the heteronyms, Alberto Caeiro, the Master, born in Lisbon in 1889, received "almost no education" apart from "learning to unlearn", and remained in a village in the province of Ribatejo as a "herdsman", plunged in the contemplation of things "outside time and space", in the innocence of *infans*, characteristic of the quintessential poet.

Fernando Pessoa "himself" was born in Lisbon in 1888. After the death of his father, he spent his childhood and adolescence with his mother and step-father in South Africa, before returning with his English education to Lisbon which he would virtually never leave again and where he would exercise the profession of commercial translator.

Thus we see in Pessoa's life and work, which in fact are one, a dual tendency to put down roots and to strike off into the unknown, the simultaneous appeal of *traditio* and *revolutio* characteristic of the Portuguese in general, of their attitude to life at home and abroad and of the way in which they reconcile the particular and the universal.

"I do not evolve, I TRAVEL," Pessoa once wrote. But he travelled only "in the grip of the imagination", even when remembering real journeys, in particular the sea voyages of the Portuguese and his own, between Lisbon and the Cape of Good Hope. Through the workings of the imagination, the journey gradually assumes a symbolic dimension, becomes a spiritual, initiatory quest, as is revealed in his esoteric poems. For as he journeys, the poet sheds each of his assumed identities:

*Travelling! Losing country after  
country!*

*For ever being someone else...*

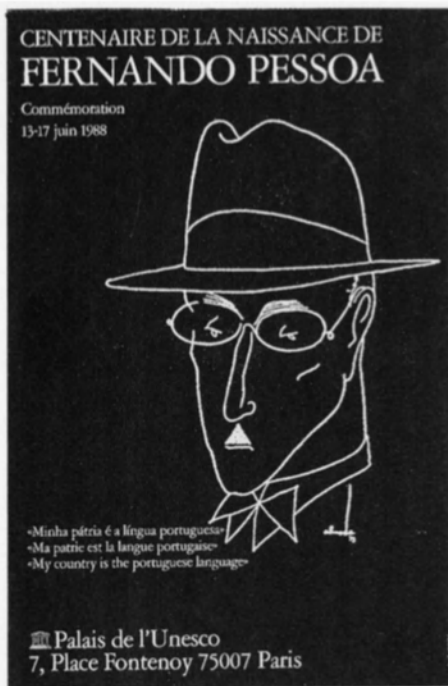
Thus he travels, from *pessoa* to *pessoa*, from nobody to nobody ("pessoa" means "nobody" in Portuguese), from mask to mask. For the poet, the personality is no more than a "terminus" to which one returns, where the point of departure and the point of arrival coincide in the infinite circularity of a journey for ever beginning anew, like

that of the "clockwork train" in the poem "Autopsychography" in which the poet describes himself as a "fake" even when he "experiences things for real".

In fact, Pessoa's entire work is an endless, imaginary poetic journey—a journey through languages, literatures, aesthetics, philosophies, religions and world views which the heteronyms adopt in turn, and in opposition to one another. Here again the keynote is universality. Echoes of myriad civilizations and cultures resound throughout the poetry and prose of Pessoa. Attracted by all forms of knowledge and spirituality, irrespective of their origin, he devoted endless commentaries to them. Suffice it to recall here his ecumenical pan-religiosity, embracing paganism and Christianity, Judaism and Sufism, Taoism and Buddhism. This was marked by an esotericism which drew its inspiration from the Rosicrucians and the Templars and was given supreme expression in the messianism of a "Fifth Empire" of universal peace and fellowship in its Portuguese form, known as "Sebastianism". Centred on the myth of the return of King Sebastian of Portugal, who died in the late sixteenth century at the Battle of Alcazarquivir in Morocco, this messianism is seen mainly in *Mensagem* ("Message"), the only book in Portuguese published in the author's lifetime (he also published poems in English, but most of his extensive work remained buried in a trunk whose inexhaustible contents were gradually revealed only after Pessoa's death).

The title of that book, now available in a bilingual Portuguese-French edition in the Unesco Collection of Representative Works, clearly demonstrates Pessoa's concern with universality—it was chosen at the last moment to replace the original title "Portugal". May this *Message* be, in accordance with the poet's wishes, a message of hope for all peoples, for all human beings. ■

JOSE AUGUSTO SEABRA, Portuguese poet and essayist, is professor of literary theory and of Portuguese literature at the University of Oporto and a specialist on Fernando Pessoa. A former member of parliament and Minister of Education, he is currently serving as his country's Ambassador to Unesco. Among his recent publications on Pessoa are an introduction to the bilingual (Portuguese/French) edition of *Mensagem* (published by Librairie Corti, Paris, 1988) which features in the Unesco Collection of Representative Works.



Poster published to mark the centenary of Pessoa's birth, which was commemorated at Unesco Headquarters in Paris from 13 to 17 June 1988. Accompanying the reproduction of a pen and ink portrait by Almada Negreiros is the poet's statement "My country is the Portuguese language".

Pessoa spent most of his life in the old quarters of Lisbon, such as this street in the Bairro Chiado.

## Fernando Pessoa: a biographical sketch

1888: Fernando Pessoa born in Lisbon, son of Joaquim de Seabra Pessoa, music critic, and Maria Madalena Nogueira.

1893: His father dies of tuberculosis.

1895: His mother marries the Portuguese consul in Durban (South Africa), and the following year she and her son join him there. In 1899 Pessoa begins secondary education at Durban High School.

1903-1904: Passes the entrance examination of Cape Town University, winning the Queen Victoria Prize for English style. Writes poetry in English under the names ("heteronyms") Alexander Search and Robert Anon.

1905: Returns to Lisbon and settles there permanently. Enrols at the Curso Superior de Letras but ceases to follow the courses there after 2 years.

1908: Finds work as a commercial translator, and exercises this profession until the end of his life. Starts to write poems in Portuguese and composes fragments of his great poem *Fausto*. In 1910 Portugal is proclaimed a republic, which Pessoa welcomes.

1912: Contributes articles on new Portuguese poetry to *A Águia* ("The Eagle"), organ of the literary movement *Renascença Portuguesa* ("Portuguese Renaissance"), in which he prophesies the coming of another great national poet, a "Super-Camões".

1913-1914: Writes *O Marinheiro* ("The Mariner") and, in a single day, composes the 36 poems in the collection *O guardador de rebanhos* ("The Herdsman"), which he attributes to his heteronym and "Master", Alberto Caeiro. This, he would record 20 years later, was his "triumphal day". His other major poetic personalities, Ricardo Reis and Alvaro de Campos, would derive from different facets of Caeiro. Pessoa initiates two movements, *Paulismo* and *Interseccionismo*.

1915: The first issue of the avant-garde review *Orpheu*, launched by Pessoa in collaboration with Mário de Sá-Carneiro, José de Almada Negreiros and other Modernist poets and artists, causes an outcry.

1917: Using the heteronym Alvaro de Campos, Pessoa contributes a manifesto entitled *Ultimatum* to the first issue of the review *Portugal Futurista*.

1918: Publishes two booklets of poems in English, *Antinous* and *35 Sonnets*. Together



Pessoa (right) with his friend Costa Brochado in the Martinho da Arcada café, Lisbon, one of the literary meeting places that he frequented.

with *Inscriptions* (1920), they are issued in one volume as *English Poems* in 1921.

1920: Meets Ophélia Queiroz and writes love letters to her until their break-up a short time afterwards. This is Pessoa's only known affair of the heart.

1921-1922: Contributes a story, *O banqueiro anarquista* ("The Anarchist Banker"), and some poems which would later be included in his book *Mensagem*, to the review *Contemporânea*.

1924: Launches the review *Athena*, which publishes his "Odes", attributed to Ricardo Reis, and an essay on a "non-Aristotelian aesthetic", signed by Alvaro de Campos.

1928-1931: On the establishment of the military dictatorship in Portugal in 1926, Pessoa publishes a political manifesto which gets him into trouble with the censor. Renews his relationship with Ophélia, then breaks it off for good two years later. Publishes the first part of a major prose work, *Livro do Desassossego* ("Book of Unrest"), which would only appear in its entirety 50 years later. Writes occult verse and the poem *Autopsicografia* ("Autopsychography").

1932: Further parts of *Livro do Desassossego* published. Salazar becomes Prime Minister and Pessoa writes satirical verses repudiating the dictatorship.

1934: Publishes *Mensagem* and enters it in a national competition. A minor poet wins the award, Pessoa receiving only a "special prize".

1935: In a letter to the critic Adolfo Casais Monteiro, Pessoa explains the "genesis of the heteronyms". His later poems are written in

French or English. His last written words are in English: "I know not what tomorrow will bring". Pessoa dies on 30 November in the Hospital of São Luís dos Franceses, Lisbon, where he is buried. In 1985, the fiftieth anniversary of his death, his body is removed to the Jerónimos Monastery.

1942: Publication begins of Pessoa's extensive work. Many of his manuscripts, which he kept in a trunk now preserved in Lisbon National Library, are still unpublished. ■

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