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## Summer vibes



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**GARRY ASLANYAN**  
Editor-in-chief /  
Rédacteur en chef

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## Summer vibes

The headline of this issue is not a name of a Spotify playlist, although probably some of you do have a list like that. It is an attempt to grab your attention to find articles that will invite relaxation, tranquillity, reflection and opportunity to recharge.

For many of you, stress is a fact of professional life, but extreme and unrelenting pressures can lead to the debilitating state we call burnout. Resolving burnout often requires changes at the job, team, or organizational level. But you can also take steps toward recovery and prevention on your own by prioritizing your health, shift your perspective to determine which aspects of your situation are fixed and which can be changed, reduce exposure to the most stressful activities and relationships, and seek out helpful interpersonal connections.

As always, we have a wide range of articles from things happening in international Geneva and around it. We bring you a lot more, as usual.

Enjoy summer reading! ■

## Ambiance estivale

Le titre de ce numéro n'est pas le nom d'une playlist de Spotify, bien que certains d'entre vous aient probablement une liste comme celle-là. Il s'agit plutôt de vous inciter à la lecture d'articles qui inviteront à la détente, à la tranquillité, à la réflexion et à la possibilité de se ressourcer.

Pour beaucoup d'entre vous, le stress fait partie de la vie professionnelle, mais des pressions extrêmes et incessantes peuvent conduire à un état de faiblesse connu sous le nom d'épuisement professionnel. Sortir de l'épuisement professionnelle nécessite souvent des changements au niveau du travail, de l'équipe ou de l'Organisation. Mais vous pouvez également prendre vous-même des mesures de rétablissement et de prévention en donnant la priorité à votre santé, en modifiant votre point de vue pour déterminer quels aspects de votre situation sont fixes et lesquels peuvent être modifiés, réduire l'exposition aux activités et relations les plus stressantes et rechercher à créer des liens avec des personnes qui vous font du bien.

Comme toujours, nous vous proposons un large éventail d'articles sur ce qui se passe dans la Genève internationale et dans ses environs. Nous espérons que vous y découvrirez de nouvelles perspectives et des points de vue insolites.

Bonne lecture estivale ! ■

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The vitality of summer vacation:

# A respite for those tackling global challenges

Summer vacation has long been celebrated as a time for relaxation, rejuvenation, and exploration. While it holds significance for people from all walks of life, its importance becomes even more pronounced for those engaged in the challenging task of dealing with global issues.



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Landscape in northern Norway.

**GUILHERME SANCHES LIRA,  
NEWSPECIAL MAGAZINE AND  
UNIVERSITÉ DE NEUCHÂTEL.**

Whether they are involved in humanitarian work, diplomacy, or addressing complex societal problems, these individuals bear immense responsibility and face intense stress throughout the year. In this article, we will delve into the importance of summer vacation in the lives of

those who grapple with difficult global issues, highlighting its role in promoting physical and mental well-being, fostering creativity and innovation, strengthening personal relationships, and ultimately, rekindling the passion necessary to effect positive change.

Engaging with global issues requires individuals to confront

immense challenges, often witnessing human suffering and systemic injustices firsthand. The toll of this work can be overwhelming, emotionally draining, and mentally exhausting. Summer vacation offers a much-needed respite, allowing these individuals to step back, disconnect, and recharge their batteries. Taking time away from the intensity of their responsibilities provides an



Boa Vista, Cape Verde.



Troms, Norway.

opportunity for rest, relaxation, and self-care, allowing them to replenish their physical and mental reserves. This period of rejuvenation is crucial to maintaining their overall well-being and ensuring their ability to continue their work with resilience and dedication.

Dealing with complex global issues demands innovative thinking and creative problem-solving. However, constant exposure to high-stakes problems can limit one's ability to think outside the box. Summer vacation offers a break from the daily grind, providing individuals with the space and freedom to explore new interests, hobbies, and environments. Immersing oneself in different cultures, engaging in recreational activities, or pursuing personal passions can ignite fresh perspectives and ideas. This temporary departure from the familiar can spark innovation and creativity, enabling individuals to approach global issues from unconventional angles and develop innovative solutions.

Those working on global issues often face separation from loved ones due to travel requirements or extended periods away from home. The toll this takes on

personal relationships cannot be underestimated. Summer vacation provides an opportunity to reconnect with family, friends, and partners. It allows individuals to spend quality time together, fostering stronger bonds, and reminding them of the support network they have beyond their work. These precious moments of shared experiences, laughter, and intimacy not only bring joy but also serve as a source of emotional sustenance. Cultivating and nurturing these relationships during summer vacation can provide a vital foundation of love, understanding, and encouragement when they return to the challenges they face.

Working on difficult global issues often involves encountering setbacks, experiencing frustration, and confronting the magnitude of the problems at hand. The relentless nature of this work can diminish one's motivation and passion over time. Summer vacation acts as a catalyst for reigniting the flame of purpose. It allows individuals to detach from the day-to-day struggles and rediscover the core reasons behind their commitment to making a difference. Time spent in nature, exposure to new experiences, and reflection on personal values can

rekindle the sense of purpose that initially drew them to their work. Summer vacation serves as a reminder of the positive impact they can have and revitalizes their determination to continue striving for change.

Summer vacation holds a profound significance in the lives of those working on difficult global issues. It provides a much-needed opportunity for rest, rejuvenation, and self-reflection. By allowing individuals to step away from their responsibilities, summer vacation...and for those in Geneva, we should always explore the untapped benefits of short trips in our vicinity.

In our fast-paced lives, we often overlook the hidden treasures that lie just beyond our doorstep. While exotic destinations and long vacations have their appeal, there is a wealth of benefits to be discovered in taking short trips within the vicinity of where you live. These mini-adventures can provide a refreshing change of scenery, enhance your well-being, and offer a deeper appreciation for the local environment. In this article, we will explore some of the remarkable advantages of embarking on short trips close to home.

Embarking on short trips in your vicinity can unveil hidden gems that you may have never known existed. Whether it's a charming little café tucked away in a quiet neighborhood, a scenic trail weaving through a nearby park, or a historical site with intriguing stories to tell, there is often so much waiting to be explored just beyond your usual routine. These discoveries can help you develop a deeper connection with your local community and foster a sense of pride for your surroundings.

**Time and Cost-Efficiency:** Short trips eliminate the need for extensive planning and can be easily fit into your schedule. With less time spent on traveling and fewer logistical concerns, you can indulge in a spontaneous day trip or a weekend getaway without the stress associated with longer vacations. Moreover, shorter distances translate into reduced transportation costs, making these trips more budget-friendly.

Taking short trips within your vicinity allows you to temporarily escape the demands of daily life and experience a change of environment. Being immersed in nature, exploring new places, or engaging in recreational activities

can have a profoundly positive impact on your mental well-being. These trips offer an opportunity to unwind, recharge, and reduce stress levels, ultimately enhancing your overall quality of life.

Choosing local destinations for short trips reduces your carbon footprint. By minimizing the distance traveled, you contribute to sustainable tourism practices and help protect the environment. Supporting nearby businesses and attractions also boosts the local economy and encourages the preservation of cultural and natural heritage. Engaging in responsible travel within your vicinity allows you to become an advocate for sustainable tourism practices.

Short trips present an excellent opportunity to explore your passions and interests. Whether you have a penchant for art, history, nature, or culinary delights, your local area is likely to offer a range of activities and attractions related to your preferences. Visiting museums, attending cultural events, participating in outdoor adventures, or trying local cuisine can enrich your life and deepen your knowledge in areas that captivate your curiosity.

Short trips in your vicinity can be enjoyed with friends, family, or loved ones. Exploring nearby attractions together creates opportunities for bonding, shared experiences, and lasting memories. These excursions encourage

quality time, foster stronger relationships, and provide a chance to create traditions and rituals unique to your local area.

While long-distance vacations have their allure, we should not underestimate the multitude of benefits that short trips within our vicinity offer. From discovering hidden gems and strengthening community connections to reducing stress levels and supporting sustainable practices, these local adventures can significantly enhance our lives. So, why wait? Venture out and explore the wonders that lie just beyond your doorstep – you might be surprised by what you discover. ■

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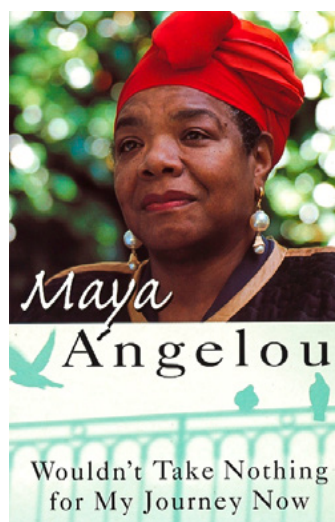
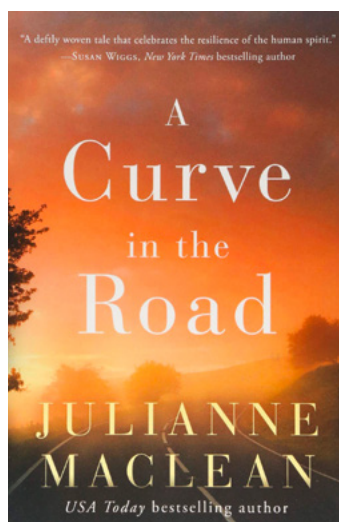
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# What makes a good summer read?

Summer is almost here and I don't know about you, but I already have my list of books I intend to get as soon as I go on holiday.



## INEZ RANDOLPH, GHANAIAN ASSOCIATION OF WRITERS

Two are recommendations from fellow writers, one I have wanted to read for quite a while now but cannot seem to make time to do so and the last one recommended by members of the book club I belong to. All completely different genres which include fiction and non-fiction. To add to the lot are my favourite magazines covering the house and gardens.

To read them, I just don't need time; I need the whole package: a state of well-being ('my mood'), time and the right setting. By setting, I refer to the peace and quiet that a big park can provide or else somewhere where I am surrounded by nature. There is something about big trees and the soft rustling of the wind against the leaves that add another dimension to the ideal place I need to read in the summer.

Honestly, I have tried to figure out why we tend to talk about summer reads. What is it about summer – three months from June to September (not the same everywhere in the world) that we link with reading? Is it the far niente, relaxing moments, the season itself, or the sun? Let's not forget that not all summers start in June and end in September and not all summers are systematically associated with the sun and good weather. What about the adjective 'good'. Why do we associate it with the summer read? Is it good as in immersive, captivating or thought-provoking? Or does it have to do with the contents of the book transporting us to other places, especially if the holiday is a staycation?

I believe what makes a good summer read is not the same for everybody since we have different tastes in magazines, books and genres. Most summer reads are associated with a chaise longue and

the beach. However, sometimes I wonder what cerebral people might qualify as a good summer read. Personally, a summer read for me does not only have to do with the book. The setting, where I read the book, my mood and the content of the book all come together to make a good read. The content must be captivating.

Ultimately, I think a good summer read can be applied to any book or magazine we like and choose that interests us and suits the mood we are in during the summer. In my case, it must be interesting and thought-provoking, leaving me with a sensation of having discovered something new that never crossed my mind. ■



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A man walks past smoke from a landfill in the Nigerian town of Port Harcourt.

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## Air pollution

# The invisible health threat

WHO trains health workers to battle air pollution and protect global health.

“In the realm of public health, the detrimental effects of air pollution have long been a cause for concern. A disconcerting reality persists: the issue of air pollution remains inadequately integrated into the educational curricula of health professionals. By equipping health professionals with comprehensive knowledge and practical skills to understand, assess, and mitigate the health risks associated with air pollution, we can empower them to take proactive measures that protect people’s health.”

**Maria Neira, Director Department Environment, Climate Change and Health, WHO**

**SAMANTHA PEGORARO,  
JOSSELYN MOTHE, PAUL SAFAR,  
NADA OSSEIRAN, SOPHIE GUMY, WHO**

### **Air pollution is a public health emergency**

Each day, as we take a breath, an invisible storm of particles and molecules infiltrates our bodies, posing a threat not only to our lungs. Yet, have you ever

truly pondered the significance of clean air as an important determinant of your health and well-being? Yet, it is a question that warrants your consideration, for you likely find yourself among the vast majority – 99% of people exposed to air pollution levels that exceed those recommended by the World Health Organization

(WHO) in their latest guidelines published in 2021.<sup>1</sup>

Air pollution is a major environmental threat and one of the main causes of death among all risk factors, ranking just below hypertension, tobacco smoking and high glucose.<sup>2</sup> WHO estimates that, globally, air pollution



Field visit to metal smelting site.



Training workshop on air pollution.

is responsible for about 7 million premature deaths per year from ischemic heart disease, stroke, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and lung cancer, but also from acute respiratory infections such as pneumonia which mainly affects children in low- and middle-income countries.<sup>3</sup> Being recognized as one of the main risk factors for Non-Communicable Diseases,<sup>4</sup> a growing and consistent body of evidence shows that air pollution health effects also include preterm and low-birthweight, asthma as well as cognitive and neurological impairment basically having the potential to impact our whole body, way beyond our lungs.

Air pollution is a threat also for public health economy as it imposes enormous global health

costs representing 6.1% of the global gross domestic product (more than US\$ 8 trillion in 2019).<sup>5</sup>

#### **Breathing for tomorrow: training the next generation of health workers**

Put yourself in the shoes of a family doctor, faced with a young girl who frequently suffers from asthma attacks. As you embark on the journey of gathering her medical history, you realize that there might be more to the story than meets the eye. Could air pollution be an underlying risk factor worth considering in your patient's assessment? What additional questions would you pose? How would you advise her to reduce her risk?

At present, health workers are often not aware of the health

impacts of air pollution. This risk factor is not sufficiently addressed in the curricula of health professionals, with only 12% of medical schools worldwide including it as part of formal education, a study from the International Association of Medical Students' Associations reports.<sup>6</sup> As research is showing that a strong incorporation of air pollution and health as part of clinical disease guidelines is missing,<sup>7</sup> the results from a World Heart Federation members survey indicates that while air pollution is recognized as one of the major risk factors for cardiovascular diseases, less than 50% of the responders felt that they have access to any tools and resources they need to better educate themselves and others.<sup>8</sup>

Yet, the international community recently recognized that the health workforce should play a more prominent role in the battle for clean air. The World Health Assembly resolutions WHA68.8,<sup>9</sup> "Health and the environment: addressing the health impact of air pollution", and A69/18,<sup>10</sup> "Road map for an enhanced global response to the adverse health effects of air pollution" request WHO to strengthen the capacity of the health sector to address the adverse health effects of air pollution.

In a landmark collaboration with more than 30 international experts, the World Health Organization has developed the first WHO Air Pollution and Health Training toolkit targeting health workers (APHT)<sup>11</sup> set to be

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Interactive train the trainer session.



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Mapping air pollution sources exercise.



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Participants of the WHO pilot workshop in Kumasi (Ghana).



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Child playing with industrial building in the background.

unveiled at the end of 2023. The toolkit will be made of downloadable and interactive resources to train health care workers, and beyond. In preparation for the toolkit launch, a freely accessible OpenWHO online training will be released on the occasion of the UN International Day for Clean Air and Blue Sky on 7 September 2023.

### Training the trainers: a pilot workshop in Ghana

“If health workers are aware, they can train their peers and advise people in their neighborhoods and communities on how to reduce their risk”, said Edward Owusu, District Control Officer at the Regional Health Directorate, Central Ghana. Edward is one of the almost fifty health professionals that gathered in

Kumasi, Ghana, in June 2022 during a one-week pilot workshop of the APHT toolkit led by WHO in collaboration with Ghana Health Service.<sup>12</sup> WHO also invited experts from the Global Family Doctors (WONCA) and University of Ghana. Participants were exposed to a set of training modules and multiple interactive sessions, tackling introductory modules about air pollution and health as well as specific modules for clinicians and care-givers addressing cardiovascular and respiratory diseases as well as the health effects of air pollution on newborns, children and pregnant women. Using a train-the-trainer approach, the pilot workshop allowed health professionals to gain appropriate skills and knowledge to act as trainers with peer colleagues in the health

sector and in the communities they serve. The development of a clinical approach to air pollution was enhanced using clinical case scenarios specifically designed to improve the clinical reasoning of health professionals, taking environmental risk factors into proper consideration when assessing the health status of a patient, and providing guidance for exposure reduction. A field visit to hot spot air pollution sites was also organized. Piloting directly with the target audience ensure relevance and provide invaluable feedback for future adaptation and implementation on the ground.

### Clean air interventions as a win-win opportunity

A reduction in air pollution emissions is a “win-win” opportunity

to simultaneously protect human health and the environment and to address climate change mitigation, as the combustion of fossil fuels contributes to increasing the levels of some air pollutants.

In addition to interventions that can take place in sectors like household energy, transportation, power generation and industry, agriculture, and housing,<sup>13</sup> building the capacity of the health sector on air pollution and health is essential to reduce the burden of disease. Health workers have a central role to play in this effort while engaging in multi-sectoral action and advocate for clean air interventions that aim at lowering emissions of pollutants – and promote the collaboration between all civil

society relevant actors, political parties, and institutions for policy implementation.

Their action is an unprecedented opportunity to protect and promote both people's health and wellbeing as well as the planet.

While health care workers cannot reduce the emissions of air pollution alone, the constant trust being given to them and being at the front line of prevention and care, is a strong basis for providing guidance to individuals, patients and communities.<sup>14</sup> Primary prevention and addressing root causes of ill-health remains crucial and needs to be strengthened, as it is cost-effective but often under-funded and overlooked. The health argument needs to be central to policy making in various sectors for a healthy planet with healthy people. WHO leadership is now needed more than ever. ■

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Skills for SCYL:

# The Alps show new horizons to young leaders

Perched at 2600 meters atop the small village of Davos, the summit of Jacobshorn is known for its smooth ski slopes, tender edelweiss, rugged rocks and mighty forests. This March, however, the mountain reached new and unexplored heights.

## YULIA LEMENEZ, UNDP<sup>1</sup>

It became the birthplace of the Survival Camp for Young Leaders (SCYL), a project spearheaded by two associations, United for U (U4U) and Wisdom Acceleration for Youth (WAY). As a SCYL participant Bogdan recalls, *“I was studying and getting good grades, but life felt so monotonous. It was as if everything stood still. Then the war came to my country, and with it, fleeing my home, frustration and an uncertain future. But one day, my mom sent me a U4U invitation to register for the camp. This small step has changed my life.”*

In the wake of the COVID pandemic, the invasion of Ukraine and the devastating earthquakes in Turkey and Syria, U4U and WAY saw the urgent need to show new horizons and offer new hope to the young people whose lives have been deeply affected by the world-changing events. Thus was born the idea of breaking the barriers of trauma, isolation and displacement through ‘survival therapy,’ a series of physical and intellectual challenges that place participants far outside the comfort zone of four walls, mental and actual. *“Theory + practice has*

always been the strongest combination for learning something new. SCYL is more than that. It brings together theory, practice, survival techniques and wonderful speakers with profound experience in different domains,” says Marcelo Garcia, the founder of WAY. “I had a feeling that part of me slept all this year and finally woke up,” adds Anastasiia, another SCYL participant. “I was surprised that someone like me could enjoy this lifestyle so much; doing something every second of every day and constantly challenging myself,” echoes Bogdan.

From its inception, SCYL has been designed to facilitate the integration, empowerment and education of vulnerable adolescents and young adults, as well as their families. Among other things, it has sought to answer the question asked by Anatoliy, a former Ukrainian politician and entrepreneur: “At times, we encounter novel situations that may cause us to feel uncomfortable or out of place, such as being a new employee, encountering new obstacles or facing unexpected delays. However, we often have a support network of friends, family and colleagues who we can turn to in these situations for help and support. But what if we were suddenly without this network to rely on? What if we were in the position of a refugee with no one to guide us?” For SCYL organizers, part of the answer lies in offering a different perspective on life in all its beauty and hardship, unlocking inner strength and resilience, teaching and exchanging survival skills that appeal to our core instincts and intelligence, and most importantly, (re)building the confidence not only in oneself but also in the community.

Sharing what SCYL involved in practice, a Ukrainian badminton champion Ivan recalls that “the week in Davos was full of events and new experiences. There was not a second when we were not doing something exciting. Being

in the breathtaking Alps is in itself amazing. However, it is the people that were around that made SCYL so special. The community spirit that developed over just one week was exceptionally strong, compassionate and fun. I felt true friendship there, with everyone willing to help. In stressful situations and under pressure, we did not split up but instead united to face the challenge together. It was wonderful, and I really hope to be involved in events like this more.”

Agreeing with Ivan, Anastasiia adds that “it was fascinating to see how a group of strangers started to function, supporting each other and emerging as a community. Everything was so well organized. With effort and team work, we had time for so much! Hiking, building an igloo, diving into freezing water, learning from top speakers and mountaineering guides, skiing, snowboarding and even practicing art therapy and self-healing.”

The winter gear provided by Patagonia was key to undertaking physical exercises, which were the principal component of SCYL. Without the equipment, the participants would not have been able to do the activities at high altitude and in freezing temperatures, including trekking, building shelter, and climbing in deep snow. For Anastasiia, “the most unusual experience was diving into an ice hole. I never did that before and did not expect I could do something like this. But with coaches, correct breathing and support from the organizers I did it! Twice!”

In addition to survival challenges and unconventional exercises against the spectacular Alpine backdrop, U4U and WAY put together a tailored programme of lectures, conversations and intellectual challenges, which were developed and guided by thought leaders and ‘survivors’, who themselves went through life-changing experiences (wars,

natural disasters, health crises and emergencies) and who had valuable lessons to offer. Over the week, seven speakers covered topics such as recovery from deep trauma, homelessness, survival skills in tough environments such as deep woods, high altitudes and marshes, ‘van living’ with children, healing through arts, and many others.

“I was greatly inspired by the speakers,” says Anastasiia. “I cannot be to describe how fascinating it was to listen to their perspectives. For example, Markus Blum travelled through the whole of Canada and Australia with his family, training a camel for six months along the way. Andrew Funk introduced us to his concept of ‘homeless entrepreneurs,’ which helps the vulnerable integrate into new society. Dr. Igor Tomic from EPFL talked to us about surviving earthquakes and other disasters from the engineering perspective.”

The participants were also the first audience of Marcel Kuhn’s wonderful book “Unthinkable: Life Teachings from a Soul Surfer.”

The results of the first Davos SCYL were astounding. The participants – all victims of the war in Ukraine – were not only energized and inspired by the experience itself, but they were determined to take a leadership role in the project, laying the foundation for a community of young leaders who are themselves survivors.

Reflecting on the past year and the change he felt after SCYL, Bogdan says that he has started rethinking life and its priorities. “I became more conscious about what I am doing with my time and my life. SCYL made me believe that true happiness can be found in simple things: friendship and nature. “It pushed me to turn my

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*dreams into plans,” adds Ivan. “I am now viewing the world from a different perspective, finding new passion for action and challenges.”*

SCYL has also had a profound impact on Anastasiia. *“For sure, my life will change after this week. Now, I believe more in myself and accept my self-worth. I am sure that I will use all skills that I developed during this week and will impress myself in the future. I have a lot of gratitude to the organizers, speakers and participants. After the first SCYL, I definitely have one more goal – not only to participate but to organize activities and camps like this”.*

For Anatoliy, community-building in the tough circumstances was a key survival takeaway. *“Rather than merely engaging in recreational activities such as building an igloo or hiking in the mountains, we collaborated to create a sense of solidarity and cooperation within our group. Thanks to the thoughtful planning and execution by the organizers, we were able to cultivate new friendships and establish valuable contacts.”*

For the organizers, SCYL has offered valuable empirical evidence that the SCYL concept can increase self-confidence, teach

working in a team, build valuable professional skills such as communication, time management and discipline, encourage empathy and understanding, and create a sense of community among vulnerable young people. *“We really hope that initiatives like this, however small, can little by little change the world,”* says Marcelo Garcia. *“We plan to grow and organize programmes internationally, where everyone will be able to find their purpose in life and will be determined to fight for their dreams and moral principles. There will be collaborations with universities and world-leading schools, which can take education and research to another level. The science behind surviving is simple and interesting.”* But there is more. Taking the SCYL model to the next practical level, Snizhana is showcasing her cooking skills at the Refugee Food Festival in Geneva and Anastasiia is organizing mountain trips for refugees in Switzerland.

Putting the SCYL ambition into action is the next step. With the help of the first SCYL ‘graduates,’ U4U is determined to reach more young adults struggling with mental trauma, improve the SCYL formula and its results, create a support network of young leaders, as well as make a lasting

impact on the life and future of the next generation. There is little doubt that SCYL has everything to inspire similar initiatives, providing a powerful solution to the mental health pandemic, which has become a real and tangible threat in today’s world. The Alps are waiting. So are the Andes! ■

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With valuable contributions from the first SCYL participants: Bogdan Valeshynskyi, Anastasiia Lenyk and Anatoliy Kamarali



EQA

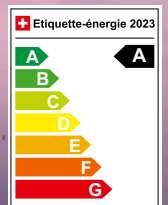
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# Launch of reasonable accommodation SOP for persons with disabilities

Persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairments or health conditions which in interaction with various environmental and societal barriers (e.g., physical, attitudinal, communication, etc.) may limit their participation on an equal basis with others.



© Sebastian L. Ste  
Graffiti with the portrait of Stephen Hawking in Peshawar.

## AYNA KHAIDOVA, WHO

Persons with disabilities About 15% of the world's population lives with some form of disability, or approximately 1 billion people, of whom 2-4% experience significant difficulties in functioning.

The WHO is committed to providing equity of access to employment, advancement and retention in WHO, recognizing that it is in the interest of WHO to recruit and maintain a diverse and skilled workforce that is representative of the diverse nature of society, which includes persons with disabilities.

This policy is in line with the WHO Director-General's commitment to diversity and inclusion and with WHO core values which proclaim that "WHO, as the directing and coordinating authority on international health within the United Nations system, adheres to the UN values of integrity, professionalism and respect for diversity." The Director-General launched the WHO policy on disability on 3 December 2020, further signaling WHO's commitment to being an organization that is inclusive

of people with disabilities and to systematically integrating disability in all programme areas.

While all workers should enjoy equal access to employment, some workers encounter barriers that may put them at a disadvantage. Such barriers can prevent them from accessing or remaining in employment. For example: experiencing morning sickness; joint pains and stiffness is worse first thing in the morning; person can lip read but can't answer calls, however, is able to perform essential functions of the job with accommodation. WHO is committed to identifying and addressing barriers which hinder the full and effective participation of persons with disabilities in the WHO work.

WHO will not tolerate discrimination on the basis of disability in any form. In the context of disability inclusion, reasonable accommodation (RA) is an anti-discrimination measure that enables persons with disabilities to exercise their rights on an equal basis with others. Reasonable accommodation is a modification or adjustment to a job, the work

environment, or the way things are usually done during the hiring and employment. These modifications “productivity enhancers” enable an individual with a disability to substantially perform the job after removing possible workplace barriers.

Reasonable accommodation may include provision of assistive software or support persons (sign language interpreter, personal attendant) required by staff members to effectively undertake their work tasks. Reasonable accommodation does not include removing essential job functions, creating new jobs, or providing for personal needs also used outside the workplace, such as eyeglasses and mobility aids.

RA SOP (standard operating procedure) was published by HRT in December 2022. It is applicable

to members of the workforce of WHO, regardless of the type or duration of appointment, including staff members who have dependents with disabilities and individuals working with WHO on non-staff contracts (e.g., consultants, special service agreements or APWs), interns and UN volunteers. The SOP aims to explain the concept of reasonable adjustments and provide practical step-by-step guidance on how and when these should be provided.

WHO career website and vacancy notices made it clear that WHO welcomes applications from qualified candidates with disabilities. Applicants should be eligible to request reasonable accommodation measures. And have a way to flag any specific requirements by sending request to email: [reasonableaccommodaiton@who.int](mailto:reasonableaccommodaiton@who.int) during

recruitment phases, for example support to fill out online application, sign language interpretation during interviews, extra time on tests, written exam instead of interview (in case of speech impairment).

While WHO remains firmly committed to the principle of equitable access to employment opportunities for persons with disabilities, it may not be able to immediately remove all barriers to fully implement this policy in each individual case. Nevertheless, WHO undertakes to continue to move forward to implement progressively all provisions of this policy. The purpose of a reasonable accommodation at work is not to unduly burden an employer, nor is it to grant one employee an unfair benefit or advantage over another.

Adequate funding was allocated to HRT to establish a centralized funding mechanism that all units of the WHO can access using a simple process. We also aim to measure the degree to which those who request reasonable accommodation are satisfied by the reasonable accommodation provided through organization-wide survey.

HRT DEI focal point is responsible to provide technical support, advice and oversee implementation of the reasonable accommodation service in line with the new SOP. We aim to offer the tools to build inclusive, productive and sustainable workplaces that work with individual differences, contributing both to better working environments and, ultimately, to better WHO. ■



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FONDATION DES PARKINGS



Some of the exhibitors of the art exhibition on 10 May.

## UNWG's latest art exhibition Earth/Mother

The collective art exhibitions of the United Nations Women's Guild (UNWG) have had a long tradition. UNWG is now 53 years old, and throughout this already significant period of existence, cultural events and interest in the arts have always accompanied its existence.

The COVID-19 period created a lot of difficulties, but the "opening" after that was more than fruitful. Encouraged by the success of their exhibition at the beginning of March 2023, the women artists created a new art event from 10-16 May at the Palace of Nations. The exhibition entitled Earth/Mother was opened on 10 May by Francesco Pisano, Director, United Nations Library, who congratulated the participants for organizing this event and for the successful presentation of the artistic talents of the UNWG members. Ajkuna Thanati, President of the UNWG, thanked the Director-General

of the United Nations Office at Geneva for her continued support to the Guild charity activities and for supporting the Guild's traditional art exhibitions. Radiona Nikova, Vice-President for Activities, highlighted at the opening of this exhibition, that the theme is related to various mythological ideas, held at WIPO concerning the relationship between the earth and the female, the multicultural messages of the exhibited works and the desire of the authors to present and explore the power of the Earth, nature and women. The exhibitors emphasized the positive perceptions of nature and the

Earth as the home of Humanity. Humanity that has been existing so far thanks to mothers, and to motherhood. The Woman, the Mother, is a primary deity in many mythologies and religions. She is the patroness of fertility and recreation. In ancient mythological thinking we find interpretations of the Universe (macro and microcosm) as offspring of the feminine principle, which as a rule is identified with the Earth-Mother, the Earth-Nature. The point of departure for artistic interpretations eventually not only generated a variety of images and messages during the art exhibition, through the

individual works exposed, but also resulted in the affirmation of the creative feminine principle. The 23 participants in the exhibition were representatives of different cultures and nationalities, and this undoubtedly contributed to the diversity of the visual messages.

The exhibition was also visited by the Director-General of the United Nations, Tatiana Valovaya, who spoke with the participants and congratulated them on their work.

### Who were the participants in the exhibition?

What unites the female exhibitors



The opening day of the exhibition with speeches from Mr Francesco Pisano, Director, UNOG Library, with the President UNWG, Ajkuna Thanati and Radiona Nikova, UNWG Vice-President Activities.



Planning the layout of the art exhibition with Mr Thomas Kryger, Librarian Associate, UNOG Library & Archives, with some of the art exhibition Organising Committee, Theophilia Adjanooun, Caroline Scudamore and Radiona Nikova.

is their membership of the UNWG and their love of art. For some of them, doing art is a profession, for others it is a matter of interest that they have followed over the years. Mojdeh Aazam-Zanganeh-Taleghani started her journey from the Faculty of Fine Arts of Tehran, Marie Luise von Muralt started her artistic journey in Thailand, and continued through Namibia to Geneva. Zoubida Franzoni-Lhassani, despite her legal education, followed her passion for painting in both New York and Geneva. Concepcion Manrique de Verastegui studied techniques with different materials in Colombia and in France. Helen Lom combines an interest in literature, painting and theatre, creates illustrations and pursues her varied artistic interests. Photography is a passion for Katarina van Rhoon, Guadaloupe Romero Silva and Nataly Ursu-Moraru. Venus Sharifi, painting on silk, creates the image of a tree and seeks a symbolic connection with the feminine essence. Caroline Scudamore in her acrylic

canvases recreates the image of the tree woman, plastic, bringing nature and the female body together, bright and life-giving. For Rodica Grigorita, feminine nature is associated with flowers in bright and rich colours. Mehri Hosseini, Maryuneri Herrera, Elisabeth Lucica Tschyrkow seek inspiration in nature, but their oil and acrylic canvases are abstract interpretations of the life-giving power of women. Lore Hyatt and Nivie van Ginneken's ceramic miniatures are exquisite evidence of the plasticity and fragility of the female pyrroda. Carmen Campo Real provokes our perceptions and imagination with the installation "Mare nostrum". Other female authors/artists chose traditional techniques and figurative painting – such as Mohadeseh Lashgari, Sara Oeuvray Llaxacondor and Carmen Falaise.

**Caroline Scudamore, supervisor Arts and Creations Workshops, the Photo Club and exhibitor** Caroline has been holding the Arts and Creations Workshops

with the United Nations Women's Guild (UNWG) during the past six years on a weekly basis. In our workshops we explore all types of subjects and she gives a different theme each week. The theme can be plant life or nature, trees, leaves, everyday objects, still life and much more! We use many types of materials such as paints, pastels, crayons, felt tips, pencils etc., and also use many types of materials to apply the paint such as sponges, knives, brushes and even forks to give different textures.

Since September 2022 the UNWG Photo Club meets every month online and we have great tips from our professional photographer Monika Zdziebkowska who is based in Portugal. We have so far explored taking selfies, getting to know the settings for our camera, how to use the best lighting, winter scenes, macro photography, reflections and recently the subject matter was new leaves. We are using the camera on the mobile phone and

now have discovered how to use them even more efficiently and effectively to produce fabulous photographs.

For both classes we have been able to exhibit our works in different exhibitions organized by the UNWG and some of my class have even sold their artworks or photos. It is very inspiring and rewarding on a personal level to see how they progress and develop their own creative style and how stimulating to know that their creative and artistic skills are being kept alive!

**Radiona Nikova, Vice-President UNWG Activities and exhibitor** For me, the collective exhibitions of the Guild are a great opportunity for dialogue not only with the audience, but also with other participating artists. I am happy that through the Women's Guild I can continue my artistic performances. As for many of the other participants, painting and photography are not my main occupation, but a long-term hobby. As

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Some exhibits of the art exhibition of Earth/Mother held at the Palais de Nations 10-16 May 2023.



Tatiana Valovaya, Director-General of the United Nations Office at Geneva, with some of the exhibitors.



Tatiana Valovaya, Director-General of the United Nations Office at Geneva, with Radiona Nikova, Vice-President Activities UNWG.



Artworks by Mehri Hosseini and Caroline Scudamore.

a diplomat's wife, I also know the advantages and disadvantages of this somewhat "nomadic" way of life with the regular change of countries and cultures. Art, painting in particular, helps me maintain my personal unity and identity, and adapt more easily to the new environments in which I find myself at different stages of my life.

As Vice-President of the Guild's activities, I had additional responsibilities for the organization of the Exhibition, so I am especially grateful for the professionalism and advice of Myriam Bongard-Stadler, as well as to the Exhibition Organizing Committee, which included: Caroline Scudamore, Mehri Hosseini, Zohreh Stenbolt, Adjanahoun and Rodica Grigorita. Thanks to the support we received from all UN directorates we managed to

create a suitable environment for the artistic expression of our members.

**Marie Luise von Muralt, exhibitor**

My artistic life began with oil and batik painting in the early 1970s in Southeast Asia. Back in Geneva I exhibited my works at the International Centre. As soon as the UNWG organized art exhibitions at the beautiful facilities of the United Nations in 1980 I participated with oil and acrylic paintings. I particularly appreciated the opportunity to show my rather large paintings in ideal surroundings.

As a member of the ILO Arts Club, I took part in its annual exhibitions as from 1978 and at WIPO exhibitions from 2006. These examples show how much the international organizations

contribute to the artistic life in Geneva and provide excellent possibilities for their members to present their works.

**Amira Soliman Mohammed, exhibitor**

I embraced the world of non-fungible tokens (NFTs) to express my visions and explore the theme of nature and our relationship with the Earth. NFTs have allowed me as an artist to digitize and authenticate my artworks, providing a unique and secure way to show, sell, and trade digital creations.

The exhibition features a diverse range of artists who have adopted many techniques as a means of artistic expression. I have employed my techniques and styles to evoke the beauty and importance of our natural environment, symbolizing it in women and sunflowers.

**Ajkuna Thanati, President, UNWG**

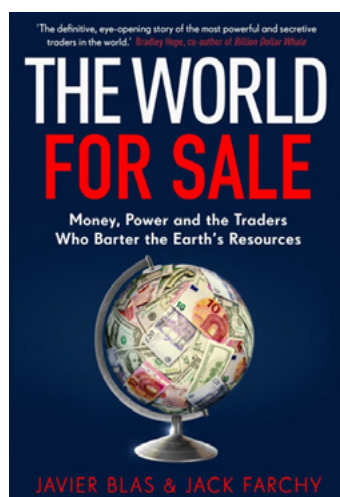
The UNWG-Geneva was founded in 1970 inspired by its sister organization in New York. Since its founding, the UNWG-Geneva has continuously innovated, expanded, developed and diversified its activities. It has always honored its commitments to the cause of helping disadvantaged women and children around the world through the sponsorship of different projects. What I wish for above all, is for us to engage for positive change and never to forget that our strength resides in our diversity. Together, we will continue to strive to create an environment in which our members feel respected, accepted, supported and valued. ■

This article was prepared by the UN Women's Guild Exhibition Organising Committee.

Javier Blas &amp; Jack Farchy

# The world for sale

Meticulously researched, well-resourced, carefully crafted, this well-written book comes close to describing the real story of globalization in the explosion of trade, the development of international supply chains and truly global commerce from the 1960s onwards.



## BOOK REVIEW BY PIPPA BIGGS, ITU

The authors set out to recount the untold story behind the development of global trade in commodities and natural resources. Conventional economics describes Bretton Woods institutions operating in well-ordered markets according to clearly understood price signals, supply and demand, with – at least some – government oversight and regulation. This is the theory of economics we all learn from books and courses,

according to international actors acknowledging international borders, trade rules, clear market prices and laws.

However, this book tells a murkier story of profits and losses, networks, connections, fixers, contacts and deals (sometimes not even involving contracts, which may not in fact even have much meaning in civil wars). This is the Wild West frontier of trade in commodities, governed by opportunity, risk-taking and profit incentives. This book describes how a relatively small group of men might pull invisible strings to help operate the global economy.

And yet, the book also makes clear the vital role of commodity markets in hedging risk, smoothing out supply gluts and glitches, pre-anticipating and planning for how markets will move, to great gain, as well as great loss, in some instances.

And sometimes, the authors observe that the temptation might develop not just to ride out

the waves of the markets, but to create waves. Market players can very easily cross over from speculating and responding to market events to setting up and creating events and ‘cornering’ markets. Canny commodity traders thrive on market instability and big swings in market prices, up as well as down. Market volatility creates opportunities, as well as risks. Do commodity traders help hedge or create market volatility? Both.

Are all markets equal? Most traders specialize in one specific commodity or at most, several. Risk factors clearly differ, across different commodities and different regions (e.g. the impact of climate change, drought, crop pests, war). Agricultural commodities, food and crops will become even more important in future, given the growing global population and the impact of climate change. The book notes rather blandly that ‘hungry people create political chaos’, with reference to the Arab Spring of 2011. Not all markets have the carbon consequences of hydrocarbons. Water will become ever more precious a resource.

According to some environmental activists, oil executives are the ‘carbon criminals’ of our time. And yet, for the time being, according to conventional economics, they perform an invaluable function in keeping the global economy functioning, helped by traders shipping and distributing oil cargoes.

The World Bank and IMF seem almost irrelevant in the pages of this book – in fact, they are barely mentioned. Instead, over the years, commodity brokers have performed last resort financing and found a way around international sanctions in Iran, South Africa and Russia (among other examples). The authors suggest that the role of the US dollar in international trade is partly responsible for the role of the United States as a ‘de facto’ policeman in the global international order. This was a really interesting book, that read a little like a thriller in some sections about economics as it is actually practiced, rather than how it is supposed to operate in theory. ■



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# Exploring the endangered cultural heritage of an ethnic minority in China

Did you know that out of the 7,000 languages spoken and signed worldwide, nearly 40% are endangered? On average, one language disappears every two weeks, leading to the loss of entire cultures and their invaluable knowledge.



Naxi manuscript during the ceremony. Zhang Xu Tayulam, 1990.

## GABRIEL REAL DE AZUA, UNIGE

Digital technologies are sometimes accused of homogenising languages and cultures, with fewer than a hundred languages being used online. But such technologies can also be allies for safeguarding and revitalising this linguistic and cultural diversity, which is part of the heritage of humanity.

Together with the National Institute for Oriental Languages and Civilizations (Inalco, France), and the Beijing Language and

Culture University (BLCU, China), the University of Geneva has launched a Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) as an introduction to Dongba script, the script of the Naxi ethnic minority in Yunnan, China. This collaborative effort also received support from UNESCO.

We had the pleasure to sit down with [Dr. Jue Wang-Szilas](#), Senior Advisor in Technology-Enhanced Learning at the Centre for Continuing and Distance Education

(CCDE) of the University of Geneva, to give us some insights into this fascinating project.

**Thank you for taking the time to speak with us. Let's start with some background information. What is the Dongba script and how does it relate to the Naxi culture?**

The Dongba script is a hieroglyphic-like writing system used by the Naxi ethnic group, residing primarily in southwestern China, with a population of





### About Dr. Jue Wang Szilas\*

I enjoy learning languages and writing, and I am curious about different scripts. I love exploring the meaning behind them. I have visited Lijiang (China) several times, and each time I go there, I am fascinated by the uniqueness of the Dongba script. I never thought I would have the opportunity to create a MOOC about it.

The idea for this project originated in 2019. My role as Executive Manager of the project was to establish partnerships, coordinate teams, oversee course digitisation, supervise video production, and manage translations.

The production of the MOOC took place during the COVID-19 pandemic, which presented a huge challenge. For instance, we couldn't go to Lijiang for filming on-site and interviews with Dongba scholars. Plans had to be

revised multiple times. Also, I fell ill and was obliged to take medical leave. In spite of these challenges, I am proud that we ultimately managed to complete the course successfully. Throughout the project, I deeply felt the Naxi people's love for their culture and script, as well as their strong desire to preserve it and pass it on. Many Naxi volunteers participated in the production and beta testing of this MOOC, providing constructive comments and suggestions. In this respect, I firmly believe that we have genuinely achieved the "living" preservation we were striving for.

\* Senior Advisor in Technology-Enhanced Learning at the University of Geneva's Centre for Continuing and Distance Education, and Research Associate at the ELCF of the University of Geneva and the PLIDAM of INALCO, France.

approximately 300,000 people. It is considered the world's only living pictographic script as it is still actively used by Dongba shamans to conduct rituals, interpret sacred texts, and preserve historical records.

Believed to have originated around the 12th century, the Dongba script consists of nearly 1,400 characters. It serves as a vital tool for safeguarding and transmitting the religious, cultural, and historical knowledge of the Naxi people. The significance of the script is internationally recognised, with its inscription on the UNESCO Memory of the World Register in 2003.

The Dongba script embodies cultural significance in two distinct ways. Firstly, it acts as a living fossil of pictographic writing, retaining exceptional vitality that necessitates dedicated efforts for its preservation. Secondly, the script reflects the profound beliefs of the Naxi people, particularly their shamanistic practices deeply rooted in nature worship, influenced by Tibetan traditions.

### What is the difference between a picture and a script?

The Dongba script possesses unique features. Its characters are primarily pictographic, representing objects and concepts through visual symbols. The texts

often emphasise key words, while nonessential words are omitted, and there may be instances where words lack corresponding symbols. The script's organisation is non-linear, with characters arranged figuratively based on the position of objects. The relationships between words and characters are complex, and there is often uncertainty regarding the sound and meaning of certain characters.

The Dongba script consists of characters resembling pictures, but with distinct differences. These drawings primarily serve artistic beauty and lack communicative purposes. By contrast, in Dongba manuscripts, the drawings take on a communicative role, serving as phraseographic writing that corresponds to textual content. It's worth noting that the entirety of the Dongba script cannot be simply categorised as phraseographic writing since it does not constitute a mainstream part of the Dongba literature.

While some consider Dongba writing pictographic like Egyptian hieroglyphs, the Dongba script includes phonetic symbols and extends beyond pure pictography. Notably, the Dongba script has not only pictograms, deictograms, and ideograms but also more ideophonograms and a large number of borrowings, which is beyond the scope

of a purely pictographic script. Therefore, strictly speaking, the Dongba script cannot be classified solely as a hieroglyphic script. Instead, it is best classified as an ideographic or mixed type of script, transitioning from a phraseographic script to an ideophonographic script.

### Why is the Dongba script considered to be the last living pictographic writing system in the world? And why is it endangered today?

There are several significant reasons. First, most characters in the Dongba script represent objects and ideas directly, creating a visual link between the symbols and their meanings. Second, Dongba shamans actively use the script for religious practices, interpreting sacred texts and historical documents, making it more than a mere relic of the past. Finally, the Dongba script continues to be used and passed down from generation to generation, maintaining its status as a living script. These unique qualities have led to the Dongba script being considered the only remaining example of a pictographic writing system today.

However, this writing system has traditionally remained in the hands of shamans and has not been widely disseminated. As a result, the use of the Dongba script among the Naxi people is

very limited. Due to historical reasons, the number of Dongba shamans who possess the knowledge and skills to read and write the Dongba script is decreasing. The transmission of this expertise is at risk as younger generations are showing less interest in becoming shamans. Additionally, the advent of modernisation and digital communication has led to a decline in the practical use of the script in everyday life. Opportunities to learn, practice, and preserve the Dongba script are diminishing, putting its future at risk. Greater efforts should be made to document, revitalise, and raise awareness of the Dongba script in order to preserve its existence and cultural significance.

### How can a MOOC help preserve the Dongba script?

This MOOC serves as a valuable tool in preserving the Dongba script in three ways. First, it provides a free and accessible platform that allows individuals to acquire knowledge about the script's origins, the rich Naxi culture, and the cultural significance of the Dongba script itself. It also raises public awareness about the importance of its preservation and transmission.

Second, it pioneers the exploration of how MOOCs can contribute to the "living" preservation of endangered languages and



The old town of Lijiang, Yunan, China.

© Photo courtesy of Mr. HE Zhao for the MOOC "Initiation to the Dongba script"

scripts, ensuring their revitalisation in the digital age. This approach could be a way to make it a vernacular writing system with practical applications in Naxi people's everyday life.

Lastly, the MOOC's expansive learning platform has the potential to foster a community of learners and researchers, facilitating collaboration and discussions among diverse audiences. Such discussions and exchanges can be both popular and very academic. Ultimately, the MOOC plays a crucial role in facilitating learning, actively preserving the script, and establishing a vibrant learning community.

**Among the multiple universities and partners involved in this project, what was the precise role of the University of Geneva, and why?**

In addition to the three partner universities, this project has received support from various research institutions and experts, including LACITO (Languages and Cultures of Oral Tradition), BULAC (*Bibliothèque universitaire*

*des langues et civilisations*), the Lijiang Institute of Dongba Culture, Southwest University, Beijing Association of Dongba Culture and Arts, Tsinghua University, [FacLab](#) of the University of Geneva, and others.

The University of Geneva, represented by its *École de langue et de civilisation françaises* (ELCF) and the *Maison des Langues*, has played a significant role in the project. With a strong commitment to promoting language diversity, the MOOC has been translated into Chinese, French, English, and German, enabling a wider audience to engage with the content. Multilingual subtitling is utilised to enhance knowledge transmission and create an inclusive learning environment for learners from different linguistic backgrounds. These efforts ensure that the exploration of the Dongba writing system and culture is accessible to all, fostering a deeper appreciation of its significance. ■

For more information visit [www.fun-mooc.fr/en/courses/initiation-to-the-dongba-script](http://www.fun-mooc.fr/en/courses/initiation-to-the-dongba-script). The MOOC is intended for anyone (students, researchers, general public). There are no prerequisites for the course. A free badge of successful completion is available (conditions apply).



# The mental health crisis and the promise of psychedelic therapy

The call for worldwide mental health prioritization has reached an all-time high, with the combined burdens of COVID-19, climate change anxieties, and ongoing conflicts putting enormous stress on our societies, both directly and indirectly. The answer to the global mental health crisis could lie within a realm we have neglected for decades – the use of psychedelic-assisted therapy.

## SHERRY RAIS, CEO & CO-FOUNDER, ENTHEA

Prior to the pandemic, almost 1 billion individuals worldwide were suffering from diagnosable mental health conditions, with a staggering 82% of those people living in low- to middle-income countries<sup>1</sup>. Depression alone is the leading cause of disability worldwide, affecting over 300 million people<sup>2</sup>. Suicide, often a devastating consequence

of untreated or inadequately treated mental health conditions, is responsible for approximately 800,000 deaths annually. COVID-19 has further escalated these concerns, increasing the mental health toll and widening systemic service shortfalls and socioeconomic inequalities. Consequently, the global prevalence of depression and anxiety is estimated to have increased by 25 to 27% since the pandemic.

The pervasive issues of stigma, discrimination, and human rights abuses targeted at individuals with mental health conditions are sadly commonplace across communities worldwide. Incredibly, attempted suicide remains a criminal act in 20 countries<sup>3</sup>. It is also noteworthy that the poorest and most marginalized individuals in societies, who are at the highest risk for mental health issues, are often the least likely

to access adequate services. To illustrate, in high-income countries, about 70%<sup>4</sup> of people with psychosis receive treatment, but this figure plummets to a mere 12% in low-income countries. The provision of minimally adequate treatment for depression shows a similarly striking disparity, with just 23% receiving such care in high-income countries, and this figure dwindling to an alarming 3% in low- and lower-middle-income countries.

In areas recovering from the aftermath of war and conflict, the mental health situation is more dire. The harrowing experiences of violence, displacement, and loss endured during such times can trigger substantial increases in depressive symptoms. For instance, in South Sudan, a shocking 50% of the population display symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), a rate that is five times the global average<sup>5</sup>. Similarly, in Rwanda, research following the genocide indicated that up to 29% of the population suffered from PTSD or depression<sup>6</sup>. Post-conflict nations almost always lack the resources and infrastructure necessary to provide adequate mental health services, causing an aggravation of the overall situation. These countries are a stark reminder of the intricate connection between mental health, societal stability, peace and that the ravages of war inflict not only physical wounds but also profound psychological ones.

Current mental health treatments, predominantly antidepressants, are falling short in addressing this crisis. Antidepressants are known to have several side effects, including weight gain, insomnia, and agitation, which can significantly reduce the quality of life of those seeking help. Furthermore, a troubling finding has emerged suggesting that the effectiveness of antidepressants might

be only marginally better than a placebo<sup>7</sup>. These alarming revelations underscore the need for a fundamental shift in our approach to mental health care.

Enter psychedelic therapy, an emergent field with roots dating back to the 1950s. It offers a new promise for treating trauma and mental health disorders. Following a wave of initial interest and research in the mid-20th century, governmental regulation and cultural stigma led to a near-complete halt of psychedelic research. However, the past two decades have shown a resurgence of interest, backed by solid scientific evidence.

Psychedelic therapy involves the administration of psychedelic substances such as psilocybin, MDMA, and LSD in a controlled and therapeutic environment. The goal of this innovative therapy is not to merely manage symptoms, as is the case with traditional antidepressants, but to catalyze a deep, introspective, transformative experience. This approach allows patients to confront the root cause of their psychological distress, leading to more profound and lasting relief.

The unique way in which psychedelic therapy works in the brain underpins its potential. Psychedelics act primarily by stimulating the 5-HT<sub>2A</sub> serotonin receptor in the brain. This leads to an increase in neural plasticity and promotes enhanced connectivity between different brain regions. The result is a profound shift in consciousness and perception that facilitates introspection, personal insight, and ultimately, psychological healing.

Scientific studies are increasingly confirming the remarkable potential of psychedelic therapy, which is why the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has granted breakthrough therapy designation to both psilocybin and MDMA. This status is awarded to facilitate the

development and expedite the review of drugs that are intended to treat a serious condition where preliminary clinical evidence indicates the drug may demonstrate substantial improvement over available therapies. For psilocybin, this designation was given in response to promising results in treating treatment-resistant depression, while for MDMA, the primary focus was on its potential to address PTSD.

A ground-breaking study published in the *Journal of Psychopharmacology* found that two sessions of psilocybin-assisted therapy led to significant reductions in symptoms in two-thirds of participants with treatment-resistant depression, even at 12-month follow-up<sup>8</sup>. These results demonstrate that compared to traditional antidepressants, which require prolonged use, psilocybin holds the potential to provide long-lasting relief from depression symptoms with just a single or a couple of treatments. Meanwhile, a study published in the journal *Nature*, reported that MDMA-assisted therapy could bring about substantial improvements in individuals with severe PTSD<sup>9</sup>. The Phase 3 clinical trials demonstrated that at 6-month follow up, an impressive 88% of participants experienced a clinically noteworthy reduction in their PTSD symptoms and remarkably, for 67% of these individuals, their symptoms alleviated to such an extent that they no longer met the criteria for PTSD diagnosis. The data suggests that the therapeutic effects were retained in those who underwent follow-ups within a year and even in those who were evaluated more than a year after the treatment. The wealth of evidence amassed from hundreds of studies presents a compelling case for the potential of psychedelic therapy. This emerging modality offers hope as an effective solution for individuals grappling with

mental health disorders, especially those that have remained stubbornly unresponsive to traditional treatments.

The impact of psychedelic therapy extends beyond immediate symptom relief. Many of those who undergo psychedelic therapy report profound experiences of self-discovery, empathy, spiritual enlightenment, meaning and connectedness that contribute to long-term improvements in mental well-being<sup>10</sup>. In fact, most individuals who have undergone psychedelic therapy often rate it as one of the most significant and transformative experiences of their lives. These experiential and emotional aspects of psychedelic therapy represent a stark departure from the symptom-focused approach of traditional mental health treatments and underline the truly transformative potential of this approach.

Psychedelic therapy has shown potential in treating a variety of conditions, including:

- Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)
- Depression, including treatment-resistant depression
- Anxiety, particularly end-of-life anxiety in patients with terminal illnesses
- Substance use disorders, including alcohol and tobacco addiction
- Obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD)
- Eating disorders, such as anorexia nervosa
- Chronic pain conditions

Recognizing the promise of psychedelic therapy, major research institutions such as Johns Hopkins University and Imperial College London are now at the forefront of psychedelic research. The [Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies](#), a key player in the field, has been instrumental in funding clinical trials and advocating for wider acceptance of psychedelic therapies since 1986. Centers of



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Excellence have formed and research on psychedelic therapy is taking place at over 300 universities across the world, including Yale, Stanford, Berkeley, and Cairo University. This growing interest has not gone unnoticed by investors. In 2021, over \$730 million was invested in the psychedelic therapy space, indicating both its potential and the confidence of investors in this novel therapeutic approach<sup>11</sup>.

In parallel with these developments, there has been a softening of regulatory attitudes towards psychedelics. Countries like Jamaica and the Netherlands, and Portugal, have moved to decriminalize or legalize these substances. In Australia, Canada, and Israel – governments have approved the use of psychedelics for the treatment of psychiatric disorders. These changes reflect a significant shift in societal and governmental attitudes and provide further validation of the potential of psychedelic therapies. In the United States, companies like [Enthea](#) are providing employers with options to offer psychedelic-therapy to their employees through workplace health insurance plans, thereby paving the way for access to safe and affordable treatment.

The mounting evidence supporting psychedelic therapy's effectiveness should prompt international organizations,

governments, and donors to consider its broader adoption. Several convincing reasons underpin this. Firstly, the glaring treatment inadequacies and alarming prevalence of mental health disorders, particularly in low-income countries and war-stricken areas, necessitate innovative strategies, and psychedelic therapy could be a potential solution. Secondly, the strong economic case for mental health investment is underlined by WHO's research, suggesting a four-fold return on each dollar spent on treatment for depression and anxiety<sup>12</sup> – a similar or higher return could be expected from effective psychedelic therapies. Thirdly, endorsing psychedelic therapy offers the chance to enhance societal health and resilience.

Psychedelic therapy is a promising answer to the escalating mental health crisis, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Its transformative potential is substantiated by strong scientific validation, rising societal endorsement, and exceptional investment. This novel treatment provides hope and a healing path to those suffering from untreated or poorly managed mental health conditions, especially in conflict-ridden areas. This could also be a strategic move for countries and organizations aiming to lead in health innovations and build resilient societies capable of managing the mental health

challenges of the 21st century. While there is a pressing need for extensive research and strong frameworks for safe and effective therapeutic use, the benefits are too vast to be ignored. Now is the time to delve deeper into understanding these therapies and incorporating them into mainstream mental health care. With careful policy-making, rigorous research, and thoughtful implementation, we could be on the brink of a mental health revolution. ■

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Outside view of the Hagia Sophia.

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## When spirituality, beauty and history unite: Hagia Sophia

Turkey has always been one of my favorite destinations (reason I felt so deeply for the Turkish people during the recent earthquake that shook the country).

### DEBORAH RANDOLPH TALON, WHO

For me it is a country that has all the right ingredients: it is easily accessible with direct flights from Geneva to various seaside destinations, as well as the capital Istanbul; it is blessed with delicious food; I consider it relatively safe for tourists; and above all I find the Turkish people warm-hearted, open-minded and welcoming.

However, although I had visited many seaside destinations in Turkey, I had never visited Istanbul and when I decided to do so, the first site I visited was the famous Hagia Sophia. Also known as Ayasofya, this is a historic landmark located in Istanbul, Turkey which was originally built as a cathedral in the 6th century during the Byzantine Empire, then converted into a mosque after the Ottoman conquest in the 15th century.

Although we paid for a professional guide at the entry of the Hagia Sophia who claimed to speak English we had difficulty understanding him and in the end googled most of the information.

Before you decide to visit this summer here are a few things to remember:

- Dress conservatively (head wraps for women are also provided at the entrance but best to bring your own). Also, make sure your clothes cover the arms and legs i.e. below the knees (no shorts for men or women.).
- This is a major site so best to visit outside peak hours and it is advisable to check the official website for up-to-date information. You may also want to inquire about any additional requirements, such as online ticket reservations or timed entry slots.

- Be ready to remove your shoes upon entry and follow the instructions from the officers at the entry of the mosque.

Once inside Hagia Sophia, you can explore the magnificent architecture, intricate mosaics, and historical artifacts. The building showcases a blend of Byzantine and Ottoman architectural styles.

A few examples are:

- **Byzantine Mosaics** The interior of Hagia Sophia is adorned with stunning Byzantine mosaics that date back to the 9th century. These mosaics depict religious figures, such as the Virgin Mary, Jesus Christ, and various saints. Many of these mosaics were covered or damaged when the building was converted into a mosque but have been now restored.



Outside view of the Hagia Sophia.

© Deborah Randeligh Taton

- **Imperial Gate Mosaic** Located above the Imperial Gate entrance, this mosaic depicts Emperor Leo VI the Wise (reigned 886-912) presenting a model of the church to Jesus Christ. It is one of the largest and most well-preserved mosaics in Hagia Sophia.
- **Deësis Mosaic** Positioned in the upper gallery of the building, the Deësis Mosaic is a prominent mosaic composition that features a central Christ Pantocrator flanked by the Virgin Mary and John the Baptist. This mosaic dates back to the 13th century and is considered one of the finest examples of Byzantine art.
- **Calligraphic Panels** When Hagia Sophia was converted into a mosque, several calligraphic panels were added to the interior

walls. These panels contain inscriptions of verses from the Qur'an and the names of the Prophet Muhammad and his companions. The calligraphy is beautifully executed and adds an Islamic touch to the interior.

- **Ottoman Minbar** A minbar, or pulpit, was installed in Hagia Sophia during the Ottoman period. The current minbar dates back to the 19th century and is made of finely carved wood. It is an example of Ottoman craftsmanship and adds to the historical significance of the building.
- **Walled-Up Byzantine Door** In the south gallery of Hagia Sophia, there is a walled-up door that was originally part of the Byzantine structure. This door is believed to have

been used by the emperors during the religious processions. It serves as a reminder of the building's Byzantine past.

For me however the most impressive moment was when we set on the worn-out carpet of the mosque and closed our eyes to take in the energy of the place: a quiet, strong, yet spiritual moment. ■



## CLEARING THE AIR FOR A HEALTHY FUTURE

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# The optical telegraph – the mechanical World Wide Web

Long before the advent of the internet there was the electrical telegraph, connecting countries and allowing human thought to speed around the globe at a blazing 15 words per minute for a highly experienced Morse operator. Predating electronic technology by a half century however, was a lesser-known system. The first practical telecommunication networks were not electrical but optical and used a system of visual semaphore in the 18th century. Their development would lay the foundation of network protocols still in use today.

## KEVIN CRAMPTON, WHO

We live in an almost completely interconnected world, where emails, video calls, web pages connect us at near light speed anywhere on the globe where there is an internet connection, mobile phone tower or satellite reception.

Our telecommunication systems are vast and complex and rely on communication protocols that have evolved over time from earlier technologies. In the 19th century, the electrical telegraph revolutionised how we exchanged information and brought a new science of signal processing into being.

Predating the telegraph by half a century however was a novel but effective system of optical semaphore, developed in France by the inventor Claude Chappe who demonstrated its practical effectiveness in 1792. The French Army immediately saw the benefits of the system and by the close of the 18th century, the *télégraphe Chappe* was being extensively used and extended to connect Paris with all corners of *L'Hexagone* (mainland France) through a network of relay towers.



Chappe's Telegraph (left) and Claude Chappe (right).

Chappe's system relied on a mast on the top of these towers that comprised two movable arms on pivots. The arms could be placed at a variety of angles and a watcher equipped with a telescope in another tower along the relay line, could read and note the positions and then re-transmit the message. The towers were built between 12 and 25km apart with two telescopes, one pointing "up" and one pointing "down" the line and manned during daylight hours by signalmen.

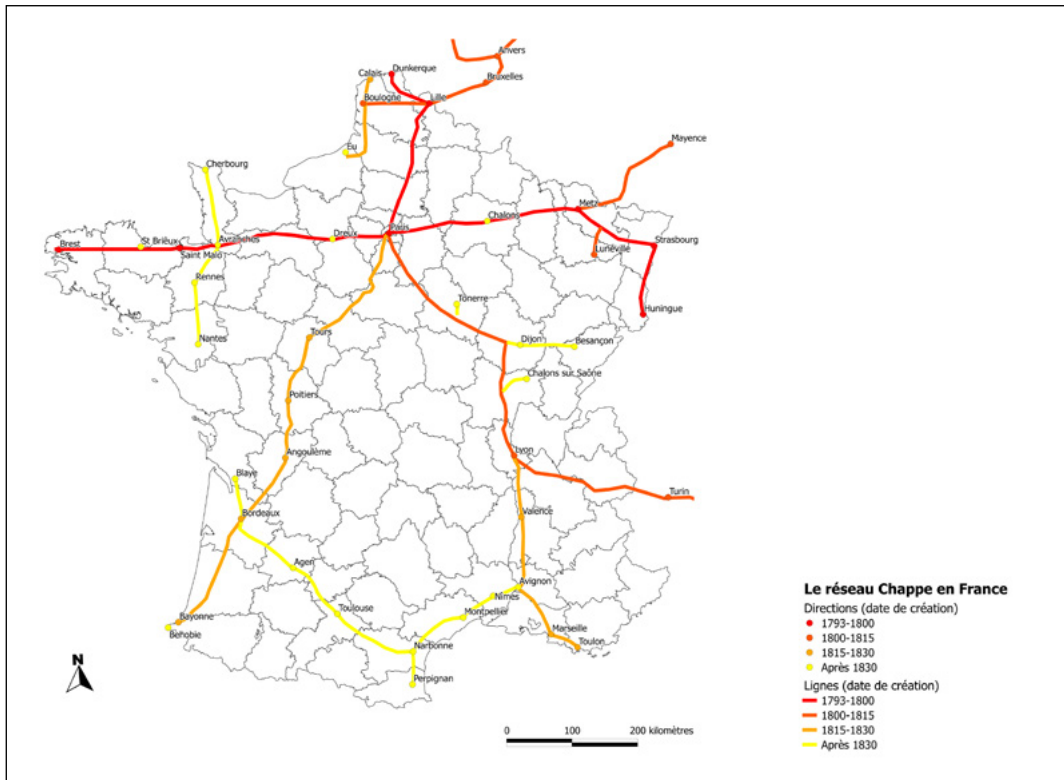
The first optical semaphore "line" was built between Paris and Lille and consisted of 15 towers that could pass a symbol from one end to the other in just nine minutes (a complete message took about a half hour)! This represented a transit of roughly 500 km/hour for a full message, the speed of a modern jet airliner!

In 1794 the Chappe telegraph relayed the message of the successful French capture of Condé-sur-l'Escaut from the Austrians in

less than an hour after the victory had occurred and the congratulation message travelled from Paris back to the army the same evening! New lines soon followed with the one connecting Paris to Lyon using 50 towers and the eventual system comprising over 500 relay towers radiating out from the capital.

Napoleon was quick to exploit the military benefits of the system, particularly at a time when enemies surrounded France. He





The Chappe Network.

had an extra-large tower built on the French coast in 1801 ready to extend the network across the English Channel after a planned invasion which never took place. He also had portable sets constructed which were used for battlefield communication during the Crimean War.

Chappe had tested various systems before settling on his pivoting arms and created a configuration that could display up to 196 different patterns (symbols) and be controlled from inside the tower with a system of levers and counterweights. A clear line of sight was obviously needed, so the system was limited by bad weather and experiments with lanterns for night-time communication were also unsuccessful. One (probably apocryphal) story relates how Chappe had invented systems in his schooldays to communicate with his brothers at a neighbouring school by sending signals from his dormitory window.

In creating the system, Chappe had to confront the challenges of basic signal processing. How

best to encrypt potentially sensitive information? How do you resend a misread symbol? How could the system be designed for maximum throughput – that is maximum information exchange at the highest speed?

Chappe's system sent symbols in a series of 3 steps – a sending tower would place its arms into a “setup”, then a “transmission”, then a “completion” configuration and the receiving tower would replay the symbol received with their own arms so the sender could confirm that the “data” had been correctly transmitted. The approach therefore built-in elements of signal acknowledgement and flow control.

With trained operators, two or three symbols could be sent per minute and Chappe devised a code book for greater encryption that could significantly increase that rate. Chappe also created an incentive-based salary with a signalman's pay reduced for every minute that a signal went unanswered by his tower to encourage watchfulness and quick reactions.

Non-military applications followed – a primary one was to transmit the results of the state-run lottery. The system had been plagued for years by fraudsters who knew the results selling tickets in provincial towns before the official announcement was received.

The beginning of the end for the optical network came in 1837 with the patent of an electrical telegraph. France was however slow to embrace the new technology since it had invested so heavily in the Chappe system, and it was also argued that an electrical system was much more prone to sabotage with kilometres of unguarded cable. The advantages of the new technology won out eventually however and France began decommissioning the signal towers from 1846 onwards with one of the last messages sent being the Fall of Sevastopol in the Crimean War in 1855.

Chappe didn't live to see the full success of his invention. Plagued by depression, financial concerns, and allegations that he had plagiarised the idea drove

him to take his own life in 1805 aged only 41.

Many towers survive today throughout France and have been converted for other purposes or preserved as museums. 2.5 hours from Geneva, a working tower at Etoile-sur-Rhône just south of Valence is a great reconstructed example.

Although his optical network was dismantled, Chappe's legacy lives on in the network-management principles it established for efficient and error-free data transfer. The use of control characters, routing instructions, error handling, flow control, message priority and symbol rate control – all essential to today's high-speed internet, have their origins in the optical systems of the 18th century. The groundwork for our connected world were essentially figured out in Napoleonic France with their mechanical world wide web! ■

An introvert's guide to staying afloat

# Navigating micro-aggressions

Do your friends always have to coax you out like you're some sort of adorable yet shy woodland creature?



## PALOMA WRITES

Are you someone who prefers the cozy embrace of your own thoughts over the clamor of the outside world? Does it seem like society is constantly poking at you as if your quiet nature makes you an exotic species?

If you enjoy introspection, reflection, and tranquil contemplation, you're probably an introvert. Welcome to our not-so-little circle!

Introverts are often misunderstood. When I was in school, my quietness was mistaken for unfriendliness. At university, it was mistaken for arrogance. At work, it was mistaken for aloofness. In my personal life, it was mistaken for shyness. It left me feeling excluded and isolated. Having done a tremendous amount of inner work to heal my sense of self-worth, I'm now in **radical acceptance** of my introversion. In this article, I explain how I navigate micro-aggressions.

## What are micro-aggressions?

Think of micro-aggressions as the emotional equivalent of stepping on a LEGO brick in the dark. It's a small, seemingly insignificant thing, but unexpectedly painful when you least expect it. Much like LEGO bricks, they can be scattered everywhere, turning an innocent walk across the room into a treacherous journey. You can tune out individual micro-aggressions but if you are receiving them relentlessly, they can add up and erode your self-esteem.

## What's the difference between introversion and extroversion?

Susan Cain, author of the best-selling book "Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World That Can't Stop Talking," said "Introverts are drawn to the inner world of thought and feeling, extroverts to the external life of people and activities. Introverts focus on the meaning they make of the events swirling around them; extroverts plunge into the events themselves."

Drawing from my lived experience, I've compiled ten comments I frequently hear and how to respond to them.

### 1) "You're too quiet"

I would never tell an extrovert they're too loud, would you? Being quiet doesn't mean we're passive or uninterested; it's just our natural state. Most introverts I know are fantastic listeners, and we're great at noticing subtle details and picking up on patterns. Active listening is an essential skill for emotional intelligence.

Being comfortable with silence is underrated.

*How I respond:* "I'm just listening and observing at the moment, but I'll gladly join the conversation when I have something meaningful to share."

## 2) “Why are you so shy?”

Shyness and introversion are different things. Shyness is a feeling of apprehension or discomfort in social situations. It stems from a fear of negative judgment by others. It is a social anxiety that may cause someone to avoid interactions, even when they may want to engage with others.

On the other hand, introversion represents a natural preference for solitude or engaging in activities with a small number of people, driven by the way introverts recharge their energy. Unlike shyness, introversion is not fueled by anxiety or fear. It is an inherent aspect of one’s personality that dictates how one responds to social stimuli.

Acknowledging the differences between shyness and introversion allows for a more nuanced understanding of individual preferences, ensuring that each person’s unique needs are respected and met. I’ve largely healed my shyness, however, I’m still and always will be introverted.

*How I respond:* “I appreciate your concern. As an introvert, I feel more comfortable and energized in smaller, more intimate settings. I’m not necessarily afraid of social interactions, but I prefer to engage with people in a more personal and meaningful way.”

## 3) “Why don’t you ever want to go out?”

Over the years, I’ve become more social as I’ve worked through social anxiety. Going out often depends on our energy levels rather than willingness. Socializing takes a lot of energy, and introverts can get drained in social settings. We might prefer low-key activities or time alone, but that doesn’t mean we’re antisocial.

*How I respond:* “I enjoy spending time with friends, but I also need time to recharge on my own. It’s just part of who I am.”

## 4) “You need to come out of your shell/comfort zone”

This statement implies there’s something wrong with being introverted and that we need to be fixed. I moved countries thrice, completely by myself with no support system. I’ve spoken on stages, big and small. I’ve organized and participated in numerous events. I’ve been a guest on panels and podcasts discussing controversial topics. I run workshops that dig deep. I jumped

into unlikely and challenging hobbies and projects. I volunteer with organizations that champion causes I care about where I’ve needed to have tough conversations. It’s fair to say, I never stay in a comfort zone for long.

*How I respond:* “I’m not in a shell; I’m just being myself. I’m comfortable with who I am and don’t feel the need to change.”

## 5) “You’re being selfish”

We might turn down social invitations or avoid large gatherings because they’re draining, but that doesn’t mean we’re selfish. It’s about self-care.

*How I respond:* “I need to take care of myself and respect my own boundaries. I’ll catch up with you at a later date.”

## 6) “You’re not assertive enough”

A manager once told me this when he noticed I was being interrupted and talked over. Those who talked over me, however, were not admonished for being rude. While introverts can be great listeners and collaborators, we might not be as comfortable with being forceful or interrupting others.

*How I respond:* “I prefer to work collaboratively and listen to others’ perspectives. I’m also capable of expressing myself when necessary.”

## 7) “You’re not a team player”

This can be a concern in group settings where everyone is expected to participate in the same way.

*How I respond:* “I’m happy to contribute in my own way and support the team, but I also need to take breaks and recharge on my own. I can also support and be a mentor to the team in smaller group settings.”

## 8) “You’re too sensitive”

I hear this so often it could be an article of its own. Introverts might be more in tune with their own feelings and the feelings of others. As a highly sensitive person (HSP), I reframe it as empathy rather than over-sensitivity.

*How I respond:* “I value emotional intelligence and empathy, and I think it’s important to be aware of our own feelings and those of others.”

## 9) “You’re not living life to the fullest”

Some people equate introversion with missing out. Introverts can have rich inner lives and meaningful connections with others. Some of my friends love going to loud, crowded music festivals. While I understand the appeal of that kind of event, I politely decline to join them. I tell them, I’d love to catch up over a coconut at the beach or for juice at the small quiet neighborhood café (I’m privileged enough to live in Bali).

*How I respond:* “I support you in seeking experiences that resonate with you. I have my own idea of what a fulfilling experience is.”

## 10) “No one will take you seriously if you don’t speak out more”

While it’s true that I’ve needed to push myself to speak up and participate more, that was more about healing my self-worth than introversion. As Susan Cain (who literally wrote the book on introversion) said, “There’s zero correlation between being the best talker and having the best ideas.”

*How I respond:* “I am outspoken when I want to be. My ideas are valid and important. Those who don’t take me seriously are not meant to be part of my journey.”

## 11) “You’re so boring”

This hurtful stereotype assumes introverts don’t have interesting lives or personalities. But hey, not to brag, I’m quite an interesting person with a variety of interests and hobbies.

*How I respond:* “I may not be the life of the party, but I have my own interests and passions that are important to me.”

So fellow quiet folks, we’ve explored the treacherous waters of micro-aggressions. I hope these savvy responses can help you stay afloat, in a world that sometimes struggles to appreciate our quiet charm. I love my extroverted friends. They dazzle me with their seemingly endless supply of energy. Introverts bring introspection, listening skills, and deep connections to the table.

The world needs both introverts and extroverts to thrive, so let’s celebrate our unique qualities and uplift each other. ■

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# Geneva celebrated the 90th anniversary of the *Conservatoire populaire*

The *Conservatoire populaire de musique, danse et théâtre de Genève* celebrated its 90th anniversary from May 5th to May 7th, 2023, with an artistic weekend dedicated to the dialogue between the arts that gathered about 3 000 people.

## JULIE CABROL

On this special occasion, the people of Geneva were invited to immerse themselves in the world of performing arts at two iconic venues in the city: the *Bâtiment des forces motrices* (BFM) and *Les 6 toits*, a new laboratory for the performing arts located in the Charmilles district.

The program featured three grand interdisciplinary evenings involving 500 pupils and more than 50 teachers that brought together music, dance, and theater, showcasing the rich talents of the conservatory. Additionally, there was a percussion concert, providing a rhythmic feast for the senses. A roundtable discussion was also held, focusing on the behind-the-scenes secrets

of theater production, with the participation of Jean Liermier, the director of the *Théâtre de Carouge*. This engaging conversation shed light on the intricate process of bringing a theatrical piece to life.

In addition to the performances and discussions, the anniversary celebration also included cultural mediation activities for families. These activities aimed to engage people of all ages and foster a deeper appreciation for the arts. It was an opportunity for families to explore various art forms and interact with professionals in a creative and educational environment.

Throughout its 90-year history, the *Conservatoire populaire* has been a pillar of artistic education

in Geneva. It has nurtured countless talents and contributed significantly to the cultural landscape of the city. The anniversary weekend not only celebrated the institution's rich legacy but also highlighted its commitment to innovation and interdisciplinary collaboration.

The *Conservatoire populaire de musique, danse et théâtre's* 90th anniversary event was a testament to the enduring power of the arts and their ability to inspire, entertain, and unite communities. It served as a reminder of the importance of supporting and promoting artistic education, ensuring that future generations can continue to explore and create within the realms of music, dance, and theater. ■

For more information, visit [www.conservatoirepopulaire.ch](http://www.conservatoirepopulaire.ch)

Show at the *Bâtiment des forces motrices* for the 90's anniversary of the *Conservatoire populaire*, May 2023.

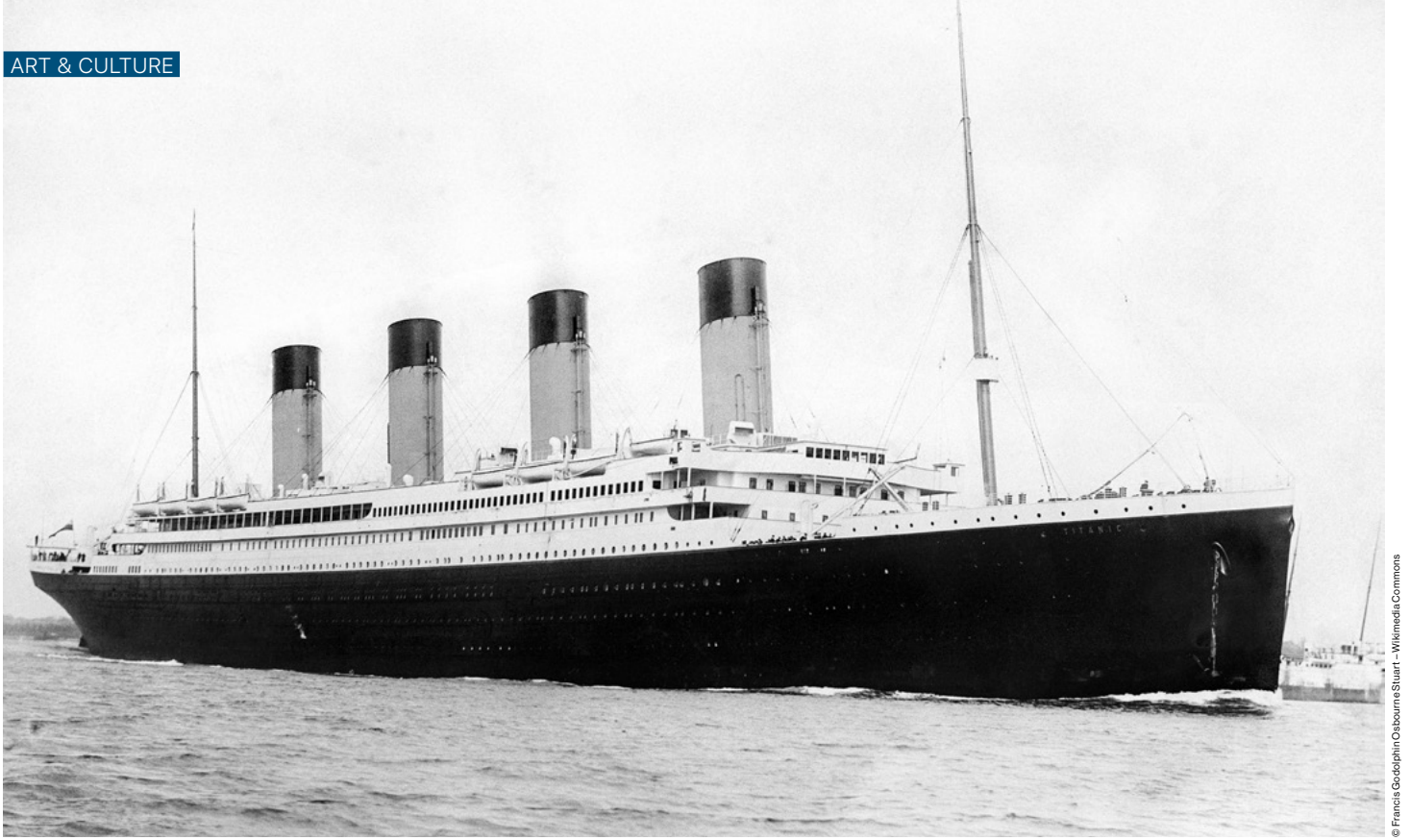


© Louis Chesky



© Louis Chesky

© Louis Chesky



The ill-fated liner *RMS Titanic* was built primarily for luxury, not speed.

© Francis Godolphin Osborne-Stuart - Wikimedia Commons

# Blue Riband

## The race for New York

The prestige of being the ocean liner that could achieve the fastest average speed on a trans-Atlantic crossing was no small matter in the 19th and 20th centuries. The engineering of all aspects of ship design was pushing ahead at a rate never seen before. Companies competed to create ships of immense size, unprecedented speed, and unrivalled luxury, often with half an eye on wartime usage. Trans-Atlantic travel was the Space Race of its day.

### KEVIN CRAMPTON, WHO

The fate of the White Star liner *RMS Titanic* is well known, including the anecdote that the desire to impress the world with the ship's speed may have contributed to the disastrous encounter with the iceberg in April 1912. In the 1997 film, "Titanic" there is a scene in which the White Star owner Bruce Ismay asks Captain

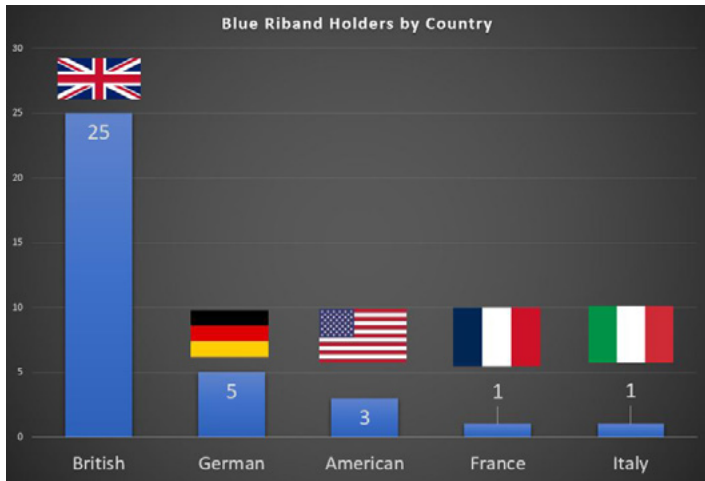
Smith to light the last four of the ship's twenty-nine boilers, and this is based on an actual conversation that was overheard in the first-class dining room on D Deck by a female passenger the day before the sinking.

Ismay's obsession with speed was no surprise; in the 1890s the concept of the "Blue Riband

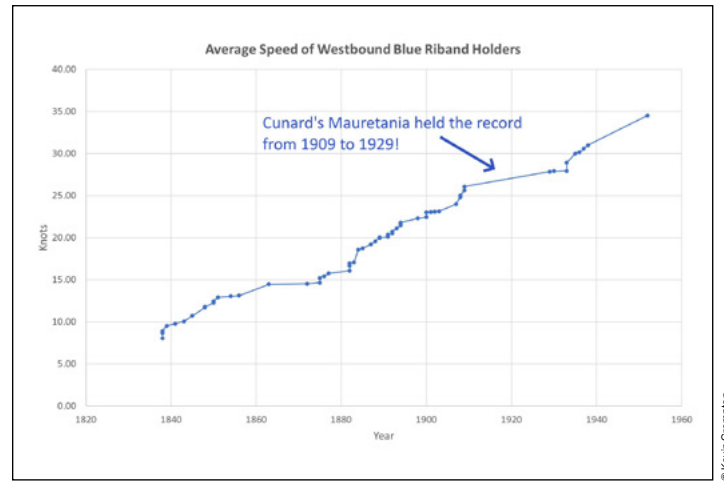
of the Atlantic" had arisen – an unofficial accolade belonging to the passenger liner, on a regular service, that could cross the ocean with the highest average speed. Average speed rather than the time of the journey was important given that ships might follow different routes and there was a separate "riband" for west to east as opposed to east to west

crossings, the latter being more difficult due to the need to travel against the Gulf Stream winds.

The term Blue Riband was borrowed from horse racing and didn't come into regular use until after 1910. The recognition of being a holder of the coveted prize was a huge marketing benefit to the company whose liner achieved



Holding the Blue Riband was a matter of national pride.



Speeds of Blue Riband holders for the westbound voyage over time.

the feat, and so the ship building companies and their armies of engineers were constantly challenged to build bigger, faster and more efficient vessels.

Almost all aspects of ships design evolved dramatically from circa 1840 to 1960 when air travel spelled the demise of these large ocean-going passenger liners. Improvements in the shape of the ship's hull and bow, the propulsion systems and the powerplants needed to drive them leapfrogged ahead as each company sought to gain a competitive advantage over its rivals.

The technology of these machines was considered so important that often the work was heavily subsidised by interested Governments on the understanding that they would requisition the ships in wartime and press them into military service as troop carriers. British leader Winston Churchill estimated that the existence of the two Cunard super liners helped shorten World War II by a year! Holding the Blue Riband became a matter of national pride.

At the start of the period, the age of sail was giving way to the age of steam and ships were driven

at first by paddle wheels, the same design as the elegant white passenger ships we see on Lac Léman today. One of the early Blue Riband holders was the paddle steamship *Great Western*, designed by the British engineer Isambard Kingdom Brunel. In 1843 the ship made the crossing with an average speed of 10 knots (18.5 km/h), but paddle wheels were inefficient in high seas in which the rocking of the vessel would cause the wheels to dig in deeper on one side than the other and tend to turn the ship unexpectedly.

The move to single, double and triple screw ships in which propellers mounted on the rear of the vessel drove it forward, pushed speeds higher and higher through the remainder of the 19th and into the mid-20th century. The design of the propeller blades was a major challenge as at high speeds cavitation could occur in which tiny bubbles would form and collapse creating shock waves that would damage the blades and cause vibration. New shapes were tried and *Titanic* and its sister ship *Olympic* had three propellers cast from bronze and capable of achieving 21.5 knots (40 km/h) by 1912.

As propulsion systems improved and higher speeds were achieved, engineers looked at the shape of ship's hulls. Higher speeds caused a corresponding shock wave of water leading to increased drag and so the shape of the ship's bow (the front part) changed in line with improved understanding of hydrodynamics. *Titanic* and *Olympic* had straight (or plumb) bows, heading vertically down to the keel, but later ships angled their design to create a raked bow. Adding a bulbous bow, a protruding "bulb" at the front of the ship just below the waterline also reduced drag by causing water to flow up and around in a way that cancelled out the bow wave.

These engineering advances found their zenith, arguably, in the design of the SS *United States*, built in 1950 and making extensive use of aluminium to reduce the vessel's weight. Between July 3rd and 7th 1952 she crossed the Atlantic from west to east with an average speed of 35.6 knots (66 km/h). This set a Blue Riband record that stands to this day, because although there have been faster crossings since (notably in 1986 by Richard Branson's *Virgin Atlantic Challenger*), these craft were not passenger liners.

No attempt was made to challenge *United States'* record since by the 1950s it was clear that passenger travel was moving to the air. There was a regular airship route across the Atlantic by the 1930s and flying boat services were also established. When *United States* made her crossing in 1952, it also coincided with the year that the de Havilland Comet jetliner entered service and the age of the great steamships came to an end.

In just over one hundred years, technology had advanced from wooden craft propelled by sails at 8 knots (15 km/h) in 1838, to the steel and aluminium vessels whose steam turbines achieved 34.5 knots (64 km/h) by 1952. The engineering for bigger, faster steamships paved the way for the age of flight, the success of the Blue Riband holders ultimately condemning them to obsolescence. ■



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## Cols routiers de Suisse (6)

# Le col de la Forclaz

Au 18<sup>e</sup> et 19<sup>e</sup> siècle, la traversée du col de la Forclaz était populaire chez les voyageurs qui l'empruntaient pour passer en Valais depuis Chamonix. Des Genevois renommés comme Bénédict de Saussure au 18<sup>e</sup> siècle et Rodolphe Töpffer au 19<sup>e</sup> siècle écrivent sur leur passage du col et contribuent ainsi à sa célébrité.

**CARLA EDELENBOS,**  
UN SOCIETY OF WRITERS

Le col de la Forclaz est un col de basse altitude, il se trouve à 1527 mètres entre Martigny et le village de Trient en Valais. Néanmoins, la route de 13 kilomètres qui monte depuis la plaine en lacets raides donne quelques vertiges, et présente parfois une pente de 12%. À l'autre côté du col, la route descend en deux grands virages vers le village de Trient, pour continuer en pente douce jusqu'à Châtelard et la frontière avec la France où elle poursuit vers Vallorcine, Argentière et enfin Chamonix.

L'existence d'une auberge à Trient est déjà attestée en 1772.

Entre 1810 et 1813, le territoire du Valais était annexé par Napoléon et constituait le département du Simplon. C'est par le col de la Forclaz que [Claude-Philibert Barthelot de Rambuteau](#), le dernier préfet du département a fui vers la France le 26 décembre 1813 après l'entrée d'un régiment autrichien à St. Maurice qui signalait la fin de l'occupation française.

Au début du 19<sup>e</sup> siècle, le sentier muletier ne suffisait plus pour répondre aux besoins

des voyageurs nombreux et la construction d'une nouvelle route fut commencée en 1827 par le percement d'un tunnel à l'endroit de la Tête Noire, un rocher entre Trient et Châtelard. Le tunnel fut terminé en 1836, mais par manque d'argent les travaux ne reprennent pas avant 1860 et la route ne devient carrossable sur la partie suisse qu'en 1875, et sur le tronçon français qu'en 1887.

La route Martigny - Trient fut ouverte à la circulation automobile en 1912. Entre Martigny et le col de la Forclaz, l'ancien tracé existe toujours, en parallèle avec la route





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moderne qu'on prend maintenant et qui fut construite en 1957.

Après le percement du tunnel, une auberge ouvre ses portes à Tête Noire et devient un important relais entre Chamonix et Martigny. Malheureusement, cet hôtel fut détruit par un incendie en 1974 et il ne reste aujourd'hui aucune trace du bâtiment. À sa place se trouve actuellement l'entrée des gorges de Tête Noire, dites les gorges mystérieuses. Les gorges furent aménagées peu après l'ouverture de l'auberge, et un sentier, des échelles et des escaliers permettent aux touristes d'admirer la vue sur le Trient qui se faufile entre rochers et descend en cascades.

Au col même se trouve l'hôtel du col de la Forclaz, avec son camping et son kiosque. Les aïeux des propriétaires actuels ouvrirent un hôtel au col vers 1830. Des voyageurs célèbres sont passés par ici,

comme Thomas Cook, Victor Hugo et Alexandre Dumas. Depuis, l'auberge s'est agrandie et modernisée, mais elle est restée dans les mains de la même famille: c'est maintenant la sixième génération qui gère l'hospitalité au col. J'ai passé la nuit à l'hôtel une seule fois, il y a une quinzaine d'années, et j'ai beaucoup aimé cet endroit, où les chambres émettent le parfum de l'histoire. Nous y avons très bien mangé aussi, des plats de gibier, chassé par le chef lui-même. Cette nuit-là, il y avait une pleine lune, et les champs autour étaient illuminés d'une lumière de rêve. Nostalgique, j'aurais bien aimé y séjourner encore une fois, mais quand nous passons cette fois, nous tombons sur des jours de fermeture, basse saison oblige. L'hôtel fonctionne aussi comme gîte d'étape du Tour du Mont-Blanc et peut accueillir jusqu'à 38 personnes dans ses quatre dortoirs.

En face de l'hôtel, dans le virage vers Martigny, se trouve l'alpage de la Forclaz. Chaque année, au début du mois de juin, l'inalpe y est fêtée: quand les vaches sont arrivées, une buvette avec des raclettes et des grillades accueille le public. En hors des fêtes, la cabane de l'alpage vend des fromages, des saucisses et du sérac, et tient une petite buvette.

À côté de l'alpage commence le sentier du bisse du Trient, qui offre une promenade splendide et sans effort à l'ombre des mélèzes. Le bisse fut construit par des agriculteurs en 1895 pour amener l'eau du glacier du Trient au col de la Forclaz, pour arroser les cultures dans la combe de Martigny. Mis hors service dans les années 1970, le bisse fut remis en état en 1986 et l'eau y coule maintenant entre juin et septembre. Il offre un joli accompagnement du chemin pédestre

qui mène au glacier. Les enfants apprécieront de suivre les aventures de Charlotte la marmotte, racontées sur 10 panneaux répartis le long du sentier.

Le chemin suit le tracé de l'ancienne voie ferrée qui facilitait le transport des blocs de glace depuis le glacier au col. En fait, avant l'arrivée des réfrigérateurs, la glace extraite des glaciers était un moyen populaire pour garder des aliments au frais, surtout pour les restaurants et brasseries. Avec le développement des chemins de fer au 19<sup>e</sup> siècle, le transport des blocs de glace devenait possible sur des longues distances. Comme le moment coïncidait avec la fin du Petit Age Glaciaire, il y avait plein de glace accessible! Entre 1878 et 1896, des mesures montraient une crue du glacier de Trient de 211 mètres. Il arrivait alors près de l'endroit où se trouve actuellement la buvette du glacier. En



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1865, un entrepreneur local, M. Maurice Robatel, obtenait l'autorisation d'exploiter le glacier. Chaque jour d'été, une trentaine d'ouvriers montaient au glacier pour y faire sauter la glace à la dynamite. Après, ils taillaient des blocs plus ou moins uniformes de plusieurs centaines de kilos et les faisaient glisser sur une sorte de toboggan dans un réservoir au pied du glacier. À partir de 1883, les blocs étaient transportés au col 3 kilomètres plus loin par une voie Decauville, une petite voie ferrée. Vers la fin des années 1880, une dizaine de chariots partait chaque jour d'été depuis le col de la Forclaz jusqu'à Martigny, transportant entre 20 et 30 tonnes de glace par jour. Cette glace était ensuite exportée vers Paris, Lyon et Marseille par un train cargo hebdomadaire. En 1893 l'entreprise de transport de glace a dû arrêter ses activités suite à l'invention des machines pour la production artificielle de glace.

Au 20<sup>e</sup> siècle le glacier de Trient commençait à se retirer, même s'il y avait encore quelques courts intervalles de crue. À partir de 1988, le retrait du glacier s'est accéléré. Depuis la buvette, ouverte en été et située à 1583 mètres d'altitude, nous voyons maintenant une rivière bruyante et tumultueuse et le glacier paraît bien loin. Un panneau explique que si le front glaciaire était à environ 1 kilomètre de la buvette en 1988, il s'est retiré encore plus d'un kilomètre entre 1988 et 2014. Les alpinistes peuvent monter au glacier pour se rendre à la cabane CAS du Trient, qui se trouve à 3170 mètres d'altitude.

Nous prenons simplement et sans risque le chemin du bisse de retour au col. En arrivant, nous remarquons un panneau qui indique des restes de bunkers faisant partie d'une ligne de défense suisse pendant la deuxième guerre mondiale. Entre la

frontière franco-suisse et le col de la Forclaz une quinzaine de fortifications furent construites, dirigées vers l'ouest, pour décourager une éventuelle invasion du Valais par les troupes allemandes à partir de la France. Ces fortifications sont restées actives durant toute la guerre froide, jusqu'à la fin du 20<sup>e</sup> siècle. Nous nous étonnons de ne pas trouver ces bunkers à notre passage au col, mais après le retour à la maison on découvre sur internet qu'un fortin antichar est camouflé en faux rocher, et un fortin d'infanterie, armé d'une mitrailleuse, en faux chalet suisse. Donc pas si étonnant que nous les ayons pas remarqués! Des visites se font sur réservation uniquement.

Tout en regardant autour de nous les alpages, le village de Trient, les magnifiques sommets des montagnes du massif du Mont-Blanc, nous prions pour que les temps de guerre ne reviennent

plus jamais, et que tous les chalets de montagne soient de vraies maisons paisibles — et pas des caches d'armes. ■

**Pour plus d'informations:**

<https://trient.ch/tourisme/randonnees/le-sentier-des-gorges-mysterieuses>

<https://www.valleedutrient.ch/fr/col-de-la-forclaz>

<https://www.valleedutrient.ch/fr/bisse-du-trient-fp264>

<https://www.buvettes-alpage.ch/glacier>

<https://cas-diablerets.ch/cabanes/cabane-du-trient/>

<http://www.fortitroz.ch>



## *Vacationing Down Under: A rhymed essay*

An urge of old nomadic restlessness  
induces temporary homelessness.

An animus to disconnect by choice  
allows a reconnect with primal joys.

Adventuring in endless roads of dust,  
accustomed to the laws of getting lost,

we boost our confidence to find the way  
at least before the end of any holiday.

The yellow road signs often make us smile,  
recurrent wildlife crossings in Australian style.

Clear hiking panels give the history of sites,  
the rules of camping setting forth the outback's rights.

The coastal winds and surf roar on the shore,  
while inland bakes the sun, as eagles soar.

The waterfalls bring welcome cool to woods,  
while aviary concerts liven up our moods.

We love high mountains, rugged cliffs, majestic trees,  
exotic flowers swaying in the breeze,

mysterious billabongs, secluded creeks,  
white ibis, kookaburras, black swans with red beaks.

Grey and brown koalas grunt in eucalyptus.  
Down in streams and lakes swim skilful platypus.

Red kangaroos with joeys hop about,  
black wallabies and wombats don't come out.

On balmy nights sea turtles come ashore to nest,  
they struggle up the tempered sand and have no rest,

until in trance they lay a hundred eggs, year after year.  
The mystic task achieved, they turn to sea and disappear.

Green turtles, loggerheads and flatbacks hatch at dawn  
in Queensland's golden beaches. Instinct drives them on

to seek the light in the horizon, head to sea,  
escaping crabs and seagulls in a run to be.

The natives called this weathered land their home,  
a habitat to hunt, to fish and roam.

Here lived and loved for sixty thousand years a heart  
that pulsates still in music, dance and art.

Rock paintings, etchings feature lizards, crocodiles,  
anatomies of rainbow snakes, whose wiles

created hills and billabongs. Bark paintings dream  
of barramundis, boomerangs and birds that teem.

Aborigines know nature still and seasons,  
live according to ancestral reasons.

We can learn from them the harmony  
of cosmic forces and the will to be.

They managed fire, vast forests and the desert sand,  
until white settlers came in ships to claim the land.

The settlers brought the cows, the rabbits and the sheep.  
They opened mines, built roads, raised buildings steep.

As awesome as the fauna in the parks,  
art galleries and orchestras deserve high marks.

The sails of Sydney's Opera take us in flight.  
Killara's Seidler house breathes art and light.

There's music too in chequered cultivated fields,  
There's drama in plantation and in harvest yields,

There's pride in macadamia, ginger beer, superior wine,  
There's joy in living, mate. "No worries" — Life is fine!

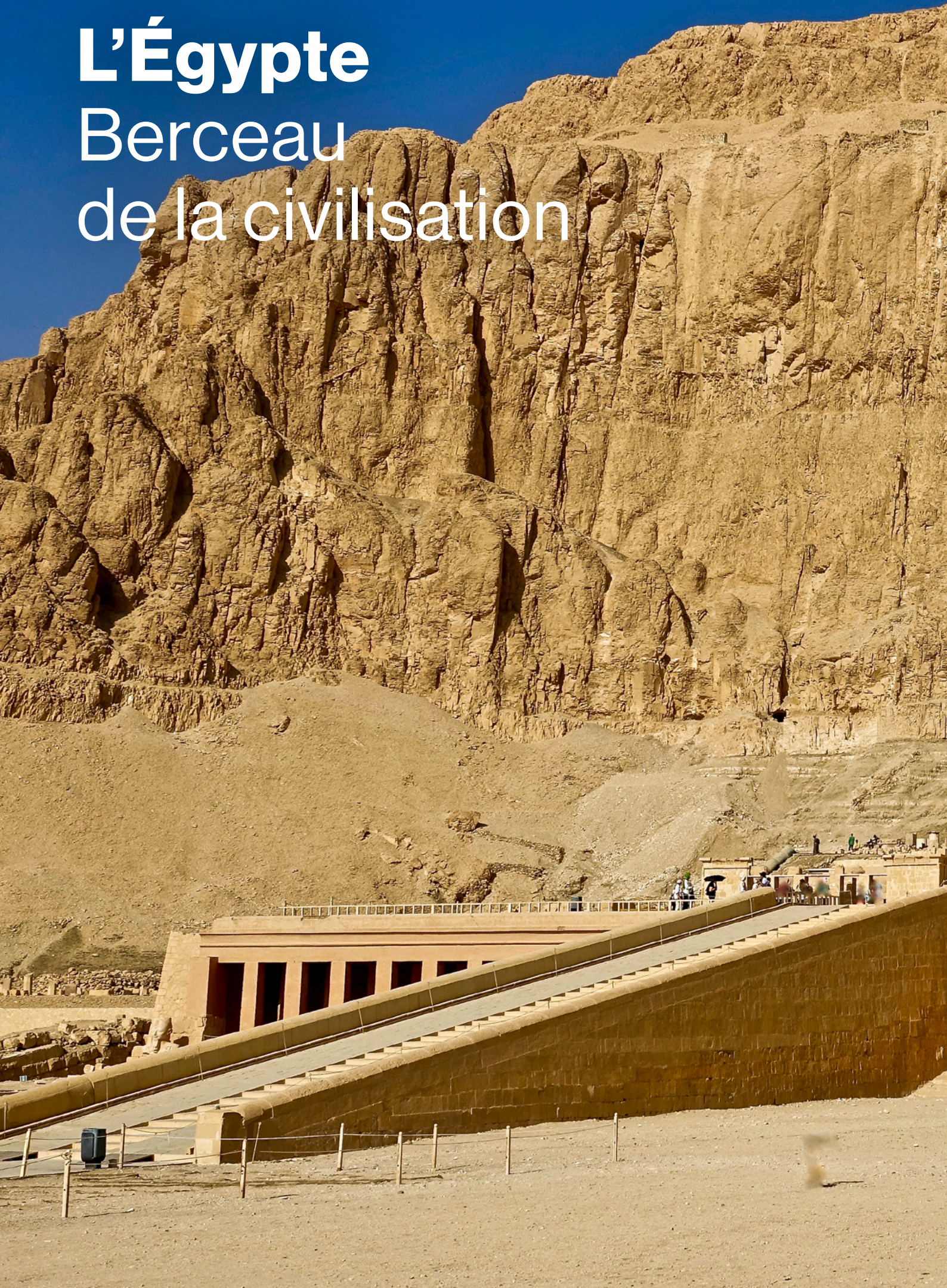
Ephemeral as dappled butterflies,  
invigorating as the radiant skies,

vacations mean discovery and learning,  
shifting gears and reassessing, dreaming, yearning.

Ethereal as a passing cloud,  
ephemeral as silence in a crowd,

vacations hover timelessly,  
and soon – too soon – recede in memory.

# L'Égypte Berceau de la civilisation







Le Nil a toujours été considéré comme le fleuve le plus noble de ceux que la nature étale aux yeux de l'homme.

© Claude Maillard

## ÉGYPTE (2/4)

# Au fil du Nil

Parmi les grands fleuves de la planète, le Nil a toujours été considéré comme le plus noble de ceux que la nature étale aux yeux de l'homme. Trait d'union entre l'Afrique et le monde méditerranéen, c'est grâce à lui que la vie a prospéré et que des civilisations parmi les plus prestigieuses de l'Histoire se sont développées dans une partie de l'Afrique de l'Est.

### CLAUDE MAILLARD

«L'Égypte est un don du Nil» aurait affirmé Hérodote, l'illustre historien et géographe grec lors d'un voyage sur la terre des pharaons au V<sup>e</sup> siècle avant notre ère. Les Égyptiens de l'Antiquité avaient quant à eux élevé le fleuve au rang d'une divinité, Hâpy, personnifiée sous l'apparence d'un homme aux formes androgynes, portant des mamelles nourricières.

D'une longueur d'environ 6700 km, le Nil est issu de la rencontre du Nil Blanc et du Nil Bleu. Sortant du lac Victoria, le plus grand lac d'Afrique bordé par le Kenya, l'Ouganda et la Tanzanie, le Nil Blanc parcourt la forêt équatoriale avant de gagner la savane à Khartoum. C'est là, dans

la capitale du Soudan, qu'il s'unit avec le Nil Bleu descendu en trombe du lac Tana situé à 2730 m d'altitude sur les hauts plateaux tempérés d'Éthiopie. Puis le Nil traverse les régions désertiques du Soudan et d'Égypte avant de se jeter dans la mer Méditerranée après que son cours se soit divisé en de nombreuses branches qui forment un vaste delta marécageux de 24000 km<sup>2</sup>.

Le Nil a littéralement irrigué et façonné la civilisation égyptienne. Chaque été, lors des crues, charriant des limons arrachés aux régions volcaniques d'Éthiopie, il a permis le développement d'une agriculture vivrière sur ses rives fertilisées. Principale voie de communication, il a favorisé le commerce entre Thèbes,

l'actuelle Louxor (capitale du Moyen Empire de 2030 à 1735 av. J.-C.), la Nubie (riche en or) et la Basse-Égypte qui s'étend du nord de Memphis (capitale de l'Ancien Empire de 2700 à 2200 av. J.-C.) jusqu'à l'embouchure du delta. La quasi-totalité des cités antiques d'Égypte se situaient le long de la vallée du fleuve, dans l'étroite bande d'oasis verdoyante au milieu du désert.

### Saqqarah, la première pyramide du monde

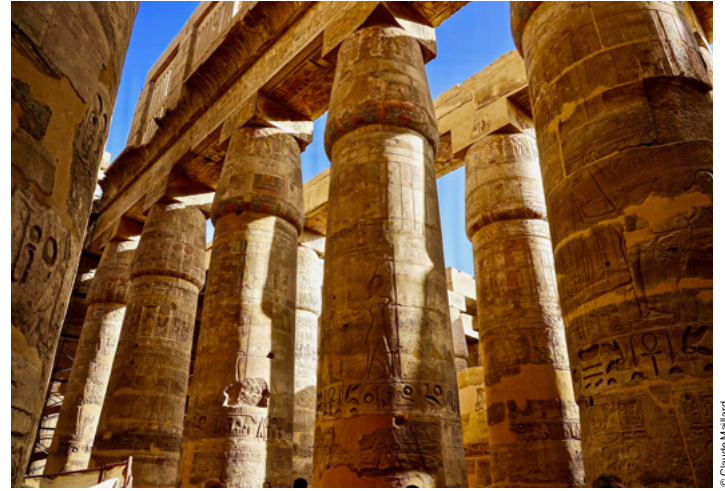
C'est donc au fil du Nil que notre aventure, à la découverte des trésors de l'Égypte antique, va se poursuivre. Mais avant de prendre le train pour regagner Louxor, puis Edfou où notre bateau nous attend, il serait inconcevable de quitter Le Caire

(voir le *newSpecial* précédent) sans nous rendre à Saqqarah, la nécropole de Memphis, la plus ancienne capitale du monde fondée par le pharaon de la I<sup>ère</sup> dynastie Menès. Depuis 2018, Saqqarah, qui a servi de nécropole aussi bien pour les pharaons que pour les élites durant toute l'histoire égyptienne, n'en finit pas de dévoiler ses trésors. Plus de 300 sarcophages de bois datés du Nouvel Empire ont été découverts sur le site qui est de loin le plus vaste d'Égypte.

De nombreuses pyramides ainsi que des mastabas y sont construits, mais c'est surtout le complexe funéraire de Djéser qui fait de cet endroit un lieu unique au monde. C'est ici que démarre l'histoire des pyramides avec un



Les Colosses de Memnon, monumentales statues d'Amenhotep III, roi de la XVIII<sup>e</sup> dynastie qui a régné de 1390 à 1352 avant notre ère.



L'impressionnante salle des colonnes du temple de Karnak construit par plusieurs pharaons entre 2200 et 360 av. J.-C.



Vingt-six statues majestueuses de la reine Hatchepsout ornent la façade de la seconde terrasse de son temple.

«prototype» impressionnant: la pyramide à degrés de Djéser, la toute première tombe (en l'occurrence celle du pharaon Djéser, le premier roi de la III<sup>e</sup> dynastie et considéré comme le fondateur de l'Ancien Empire) à avoir été conçue et réalisée sous cette forme.

Haute de 62 mètres, elle a été construite par l'architecte Imhotep vers l'an 2630 avant notre ère et elle est à l'origine de la réalisation des pyramides de Gizeh et du reste des pyramides égyptiennes. Égyptologue français de renommée, Jean-Philippe Lauer consacra toute sa vie à étudier les vestiges de ce chef-d'œuvre de l'Ancien Empire pour en percer les secrets de sa conception. Il mettra au jour un

somptueux trésor, des dizaines de milliers d'objets, notamment issus du remarquable complexe funéraire de King Teti, témoins captivants d'une époque méconnue. Il présidera également à la reconstruction des monuments détruits dans la nécropole du roi, une tâche colossale dont il s'acquittera avec un grand talent.

#### Louxor, un musée à ciel ouvert

Après une dizaine d'heures passées dans le train, essayant tant bien que mal de trouver le sommeil, nous apercevons Louxor se profilant à l'horizon. Il est 7 heures, la ville de 450 000 habitants, l'une des plus ensoleillées au monde, se réveille. Lorsque dans l'Antiquité Louxor portait le nom de Thèbes, la ville fut à plusieurs reprises la capitale de

l'Égypte. Situé sur la rive droite du Nil, à 650 km au sud du Caire, l'endroit regorge de sites remarquables, de palais, de statues majestueuses et de temples rendant hommage aux pharaons de tous les temps mais aussi aux divinités de l'ancienne Égypte. Édifiés dans l'antique Thèbes, les temples de Karnak et de Louxor figurent parmi les sites archéologiques les plus riches du monde.

Dédié au dieu Amon-Rê, Karnak abrite une succession de monuments plus somptueux les uns que les autres. Dès l'entrée, 40 sphinx avec leur tête de bélier nous accueillent. S'étendant sur plus de 2 km<sup>2</sup>, construit entre 2200 et 360 av. J.-C., c'est le plus grand complexe religieux de toute l'Antiquité. Classé au patrimoine

mondial de l'UNESCO depuis 1979, le site est entouré par une muraille de 8 mètres d'épaisseur. C'est là que l'égyptologue Georges Legrain découvre près de 8000 statues, bronzes, stèles et autres trésors captivants en 1903 et 1904. Les chapelles blanche de Sésostris Ier et rouge d'Hatchepsout nous émerveillent tout autant par leurs bas-reliefs d'une finesse exceptionnelle. D'autres vestiges comme les temples de Khonsou, de Ptah et d'Opet se distinguent par leurs ornements d'une grande richesse.

Situé à moins de 3 km de là, le temple de Louxor consacré au dieu Amon est relié à celui de Karnak par une allée fraîchement rénovée bordée d'un millier de sphinx à tête de bélier et

corps de lion. Construit entre 1400 et 1000 av. J.-C. sous l'ordre des pharaons Aménophis III et Ramsès II, Louxor est l'un des temples les plus spectaculaires d'Égypte. A l'entrée, deux obélisques monolithe en granit rose hauts de 25 m dominaient l'édifice mais depuis 1833, l'un d'eux a été transporté à Paris pour être élevé place de la Concorde. La monumentale façade du temple était à l'origine recouverte d'un enduit blanc orné de plaques de métaux précieux et d'un décor sculpté peint de couleurs vives. Devant, six colossales statues ont été construites en l'honneur de Ramsès II, le tout puissant roi dont le règne est considéré comme l'apogée de la puissance et de la gloire de l'Égypte.

### **Le fabuleux règne de Ramsès II, pharaon glorieux**

Jamais monarque n'a exercé une telle fascination que Ramsès II. De son vivant, mais aussi plus de 3000 ans après sa mort. Le pharaon disparaît presque centenaire. Il a régné 66 ans (1279 à 1213 avant notre ère), aura eu au moins six grandes épouses royales. Son histoire d'amour avec Néfertari a traversé les siècles.

Peu de souverains égyptiens ont connu un règne aussi glorieux que celui de Ramsès II. Issu de la XIX<sup>e</sup> dynastie, le fils de Séthi Ier et de Touy se distingue dès sa jeunesse par son intelligence, sa force physique et son maniement habile des armes. Vainqueur des Hittites lors de la célèbre bataille de Qadesh (Syrie), en 1274 avant J.-C., Ramsès II façonne sa propre légende de conquérant redoutable en évoquant ses exploits guerriers dans des récits ou des scènes gravés sur les murs des temples. Mais le flamboyant monarque ne se contente pas de briller sur les champs de bataille; c'est aussi un bâtisseur infatigable. Passionné d'architecture, il crée une nouvelle capitale à l'est du delta du Nil, Pi-Ramsès, la superbe «Ville turquoise», et

fait ériger d'imposants temples à sa gloire, comme ceux d'Abou Simbel et de Karnak.

### **Le mystère des hiéroglyphes**

La civilisation pharaonique a vécu près de 3500 ans. Au regard de notre propre civilisation, il est aisé de comprendre que, malgré l'image un peu figée que nous en donnent les hiéroglyphes, la langue et l'écriture égyptiennes ont évolué sur une aussi longue période. Les mystérieux hiéroglyphes, qui ornent les temples et les tombeaux égyptiens, ont fasciné des générations d'égyptologues. Les inscriptions gravées sur les parois des chapelles funéraires, sur des stèles ou des statues nous éclairent sur la vie des pharaons et hauts dignitaires du royaume. Elles vantent leurs vertus, inspirant respect et admiration pour les illustres défunts. Des textes mathématiques, astronomiques et médicaux, rédigés sur de superbes papyrus, nous renseignent aussi sur les connaissances remarquables des Égyptiens dans ces domaines. Ces nombreux types d'écrits ont passionné les grands égyptologues ces siècles derniers, dont Jean-François Champollion.

Captivé par l'Égypte antique dès sa jeunesse, le linguiste et égyptologue français consacra sa brève vie à percer le mystère des hiéroglyphes et à décoder des textes dont le sens est resté une énigme pendant des siècles. C'est grâce à la connaissance du copte, la langue liturgique des chrétiens d'Égypte, que Champollion déchiffra les inscriptions gravées sur la pierre de Rosette, mystérieux monolithe découvert en 1799, en pleine campagne d'Égypte, par un officier de Bonaparte. Il se servira ensuite de cette pierre pour créer un alphabet phonétique des caractères hiéroglyphes.

### **L'ultime demeure des pharaons du Nouvel Empire**

Face à Louxor, sur la rive ouest du Nil, là où le soleil se couche pour éclairer les morts, le temple

d'Hatchepsout est l'un des plus beaux chefs-d'œuvre architecturaux au monde. Érigé au fond d'un amphithéâtre, au pied de falaises abruptes, il témoigne de l'un des règnes les plus extraordinaires de l'histoire de l'Égypte. Il est accolé aux ruines des temples funéraires de Montouhotep II et de Thoutmôsis III, tous construits sur le site de Deir el-Bahari consacré à la déesse Hathor. Des trois édifices, seul celui d'Hatchepsout a réussi à maintenir sa splendeur encore aujourd'hui et éblouit toujours autant les visiteurs. Conçu par l'architecte Sennemut, il est dédié à Hatchepsout, la seule femme qui a régné en Égypte pendant une longue période (cinquième souveraine de la XVIII<sup>e</sup> dynastie, 1479 à 1457 avant notre ère). Il a été construit entre les 7<sup>e</sup> et 21<sup>e</sup> années de son règne et comporte une partie excavée dans la roche et une autre zone extérieure formée par trois terrasses.

Proche, adossé à la colline thébaine, le temple de Médinet Habou est le temple commémoratif du pharaon Ramsès III qui a régné sur l'Égypte en 1185-1153 av. J.-C. Il constitue un des chefs-d'œuvre les plus aboutis de la fin du Nouvel Empire, avec son somptueux palais, ses imposantes colonnes et sa superbe salle hypostyle aux peintures exceptionnellement bien conservées. Son emplacement est tel qu'il forme un quadrilatère avec ceux de Karnak, Louxor et Deir el-Bahari (complexe funéraire composé de temples et de tombes). Ces quatre temples sont d'ailleurs reliés par des voies de communication qui sont des chemins de procession. Le village de Médinet Habou est le lieu de naissance de l'ancien dieu égyptien Amon considéré par les anciens comme le plus important, celui qui se tenait au-dessus de tous les dieux.

Avoisinant, blotti derrière un massif montagneux évoquant la silhouette d'une pyramide qui culmine à 470 m se situe

un autre lieu chargé d'histoire: la Vallée des Rois. Ultime demeure des pharaons du Nouvel Empire (1539-1075 av. J.-C.), de Thoutmôsis I à Ramsès XI, c'est dans cette vallée qu'ont été placés leurs tombeaux. A cette époque, la vallée est devenue un cimetière royal pour les pharaons mais également les reines, les princes, les hauts dignitaires et les élites des XVIII<sup>e</sup>, XIX<sup>e</sup> et XX<sup>e</sup> dynasties. L'accès s'y fait après avoir contourné les Colosses de Memnon, deux gigantesques statues d'Aménophis III construites il y a 3400 ans. Hautes de 14 m et pesant chacune 700 tonnes, elles montrent le pharaon très paisible, les mains sur les genoux, regardant le soleil levant.

Plus de 60 tombeaux richement décorés ont été mis au jour dans la Vallée des Rois, dont celui de Toutankhamon, l'enfant roi, et de son extraordinaire trésor, à découvrir dans le prochain numéro du *newSpecial*. ■

**Plus d'information:**  
Altai Travel  
[info@altai-travel.com](mailto:info@altai-travel.com)  
+33481685620



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Garry Aslanyan – newSpecial  
OMS, 20 av. Appia, CH-1202 Genève, Suisse  
Par courrier électronique: info@newspecial.org

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Garry Aslanyan – newSpecial  
WHO, 20, av Appia CH-1202 Geneva, Switzerland  
By email: info@newspecial.org



newSpecial  
WHO, office 4139  
20 av. Appia  
1202 Genève  
info@newspecial.org

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ILO

Éditeur / Publisher  
Publicité / Advertising  
C.E.P.S.A.  
Quai Gustave-Ador 42  
1207 Genève  
T. +41 22 700 98 00  
cepinfo@bluewin.ch

Graphisme / Design  
Atelier Schnegg+  
Michel Schnegg  
Rue du Simplon 5  
1207 Genève  
T. +41 22 344 72 90  
www.atelier-schnegg.ch

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Courvoisier-Gassmann SA  
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2504 Bienne  
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C.E.P. SA  
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1207 Genève  
Tél.: 022 700 98 00  
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