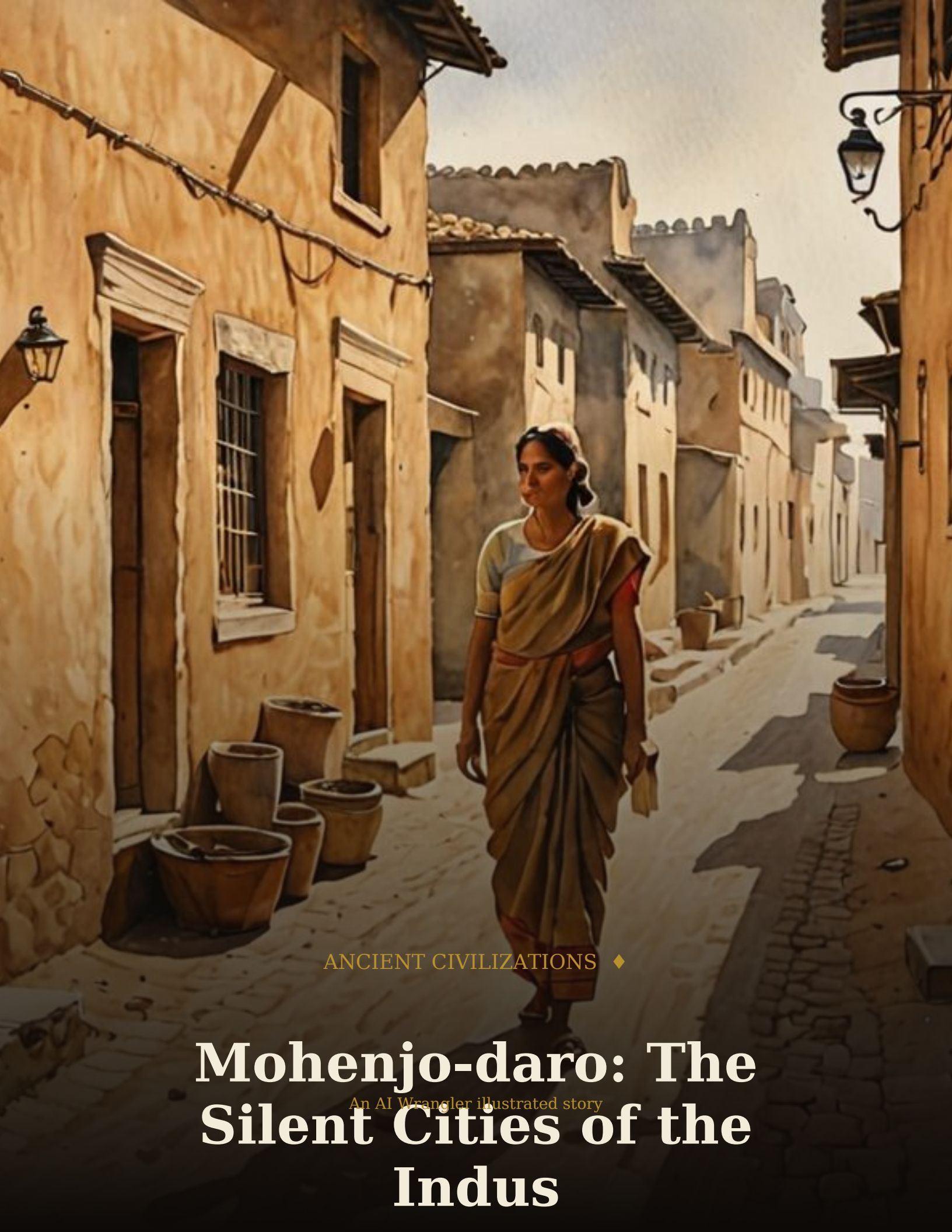




ANCIENT CIVILIZATIONS ♦

Mohenjo-daro: The Silent Cities of the Indus

An AI Wrangler illustrated story



From the film

MARTY

Come close to the fire, friends, for tonight we tell of a civilization you have very likely never heard named, and that is the strangest thing about it, because it was one of the largest and most advanced of the entire ancient world, the equal of Egypt and of the lands between the rivers, and yet it left behind no boastful kings, no great temples to conquerors, no epic of war. It simply built, and thrived, and then quietly faded, and kept nearly all its secrets. Tonight, Carol, the silent cities of the Indus.



CAROL

A civilization as great as Egypt that I have never even heard of. Marty, how is that possible? How does something so vast slip out of memory so completely?



MARTY

Because it kept no memory we can read, Carol, and there lies the whole mystery, but let me first make you feel how great it was. More than four thousand years ago, along the Indus River and its neighbors, in what is now Pakistan and northwestern India, there flourished a civilization we call the Indus, or the Harappan, spread across a territory larger than either Egypt or the kingdoms of Mesopotamia. It had great cities, chief among them one we now call Mohenjo-daro, home to tens of thousands of people. And when it was dug up in the last century, Carol, what astonished the archaeologists was not gold or grandeur. It was the plumbing.



CAROL

The plumbing, Marty? Of all the things to astonish them. You will have to explain that.



MARTY

Gladly, Carol, because it tells you everything. Mohenjo-daro was not a jumble of huts around a palace. It was a carefully planned city, laid out on a neat grid of streets crossing at right angles, as orderly as any modern town. The houses were built of standardized baked bricks, all made to the same proportions across the whole civilization, hundreds of miles apart, which speaks of astonishing organization. And most remarkable of all, Carol, the city had a sophisticated system of covered drains running along the streets, and many houses had their own bathrooms and toilets connected to it, and wells for clean water. Four thousand years ago, Carol, the ordinary people of the Indus had cleaner streets and better sanitation than most of the world would enjoy again for thousands of years.



CAROL

Household bathrooms and covered drains, four thousand years ago, for ordinary people. Marty, that is not just advanced, it is thoughtful, it is a whole society caring about clean water for everyone. And you said no palaces, no kings?



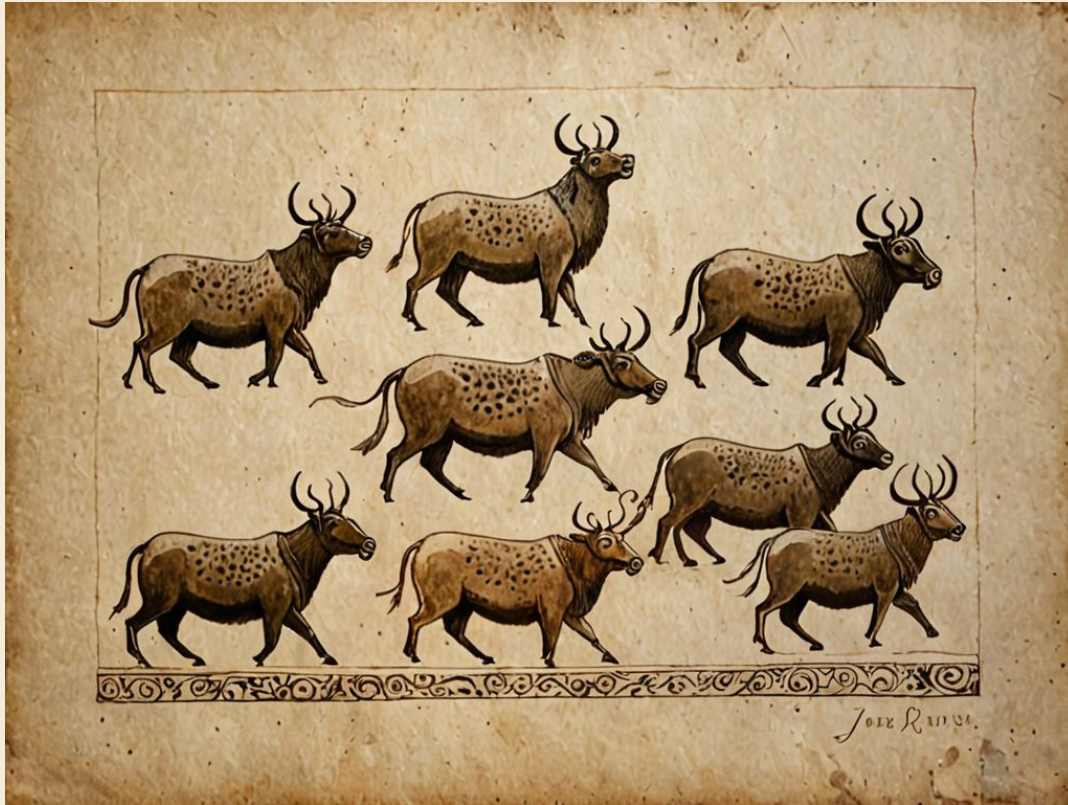
MARTY

This is the deepest riddle of them all, Carol, and it sets the Indus apart from every other great ancient civilization. In Egypt we find the colossal tombs of god-kings and the temples of the mighty. In Mesopotamia, palaces and monuments to conquering rulers. But at Mohenjo-daro and its sister cities, archaeologists have found almost nothing of the kind. No grand royal tombs stuffed with treasure. No towering palace for a king. No great statues of a ruler glaring down. The largest and most impressive public building they found, Carol, was not a throne room but what appears to be a great communal bath, a beautiful watertight pool, perhaps for cleansing or ritual. A civilization that built its grandest monument to bathing, not to a warlord.



CAROL

No kings, no war-monuments, but a great public bath at the heart of the city. Marty, that paints a picture of a people utterly unlike the others, almost peaceful, almost equal. Is that true? Were they?



MARTY

We must be careful, Carol, for absence of evidence is not proof, but the picture is remarkably gentle for the ancient world. They have found strikingly little sign of warfare, few weapons compared to other peoples, no evidence of great armies or violent conquest, no walls built for battle in the way of other cities. Instead, the evidence speaks of trade, wide and peaceful, their goods carried far across the ancient world, and of craft, and cleanliness, and order, sustained across a huge area for many centuries without, it seems, a single strongman stamping his face on it all. It may be the closest the ancient world ever came, Carol, to a great civilization that ran on cooperation rather than conquest.



CAROL

A great and gentle people, then, running on trade and order instead of war and kings. Marty, that is beautiful, and it makes what is coming so much sadder, because I know they are gone. What happened to them?

MARTY

They faded, Carol, around thirty-nine hundred years ago, gradually, and here again drought and the shifting of the natural world seem to be the culprits, as with the Maya. The evidence points to the climate turning against them, the monsoon rains weakening, and, most cruelly, the great rivers on which everything depended beginning to shift their courses and dry up. And a civilization built entirely upon those rivers, however clever and orderly, cannot survive the rivers themselves changing their minds. The great cities were slowly abandoned, the people drifting away to smaller villages and eastward toward more reliable waters, and the brilliant urban world of the Indus quietly came apart, not in fire or conquest, but in a long, dry sighing away.

CAROL

The very rivers that made them abandoning them. Marty, there is that theme again, the changing world outlasting even the wisest people. But you began by saying they kept their secrets. What did you mean?

MARTY

I meant the cruelest loss of all, Carol, and the reason you had never heard their name. The Indus people had writing. They left behind hundreds and hundreds of little inscriptions, chiefly on small carved seals, short strings of an elegant, mysterious script. But that script, Carol, has never been deciphered. No one, to this day, can read a single word of it. We do not know what language they spoke. We do not know the names of their cities, for Mohenjo-daro is only a modern name meaning the mound of the dead. We do not know the names of a single one of their people, or their gods, or their kings, if kings they had. A whole vast, brilliant, gentle civilization is entirely, eternally silent to us, Carol, because we cannot read the one thing they left to speak with.

CAROL

They are speaking to us across four thousand years and we cannot understand a word. Oh, Marty, that is the loneliest thing in all our tales. What is the meaning you take from the silent cities?

MARTY

This, Carol, and it humbles me. We tend to measure the greatness of the ancient world by its noise, by the tallest pyramid and the most fearsome conqueror and the grandest tomb, by the civilizations that shouted their names down the centuries. And here is the Indus, perhaps the most quietly admirable of them all, clean and orderly and peaceable and kind to its ordinary people, and it is nearly forgotten precisely because it did not shout, because it built bathhouses instead of war monuments and left us puzzles instead of boasts. It reminds me, Carol, that history remembers the loud, but it is not always the loud who were the best at living. Somewhere in that unreadable script may be the wisdom of the gentlest great people who ever built a city, and we may never know it. I'm Marty Shepard.

CAROL

And I'm Carol, and tonight I am thinking of the clean streets and the great quiet bath of Mohenjo-daro, and a kind and clever people speaking to us in words we cannot read. The best among us are not always the loudest, friends. Come back to the fire.