

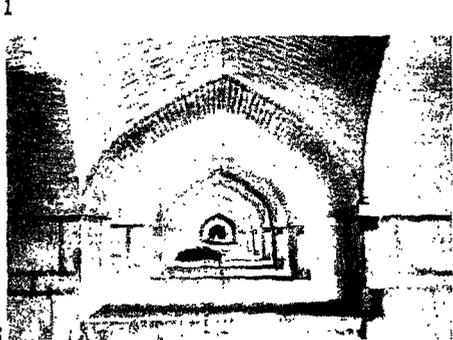
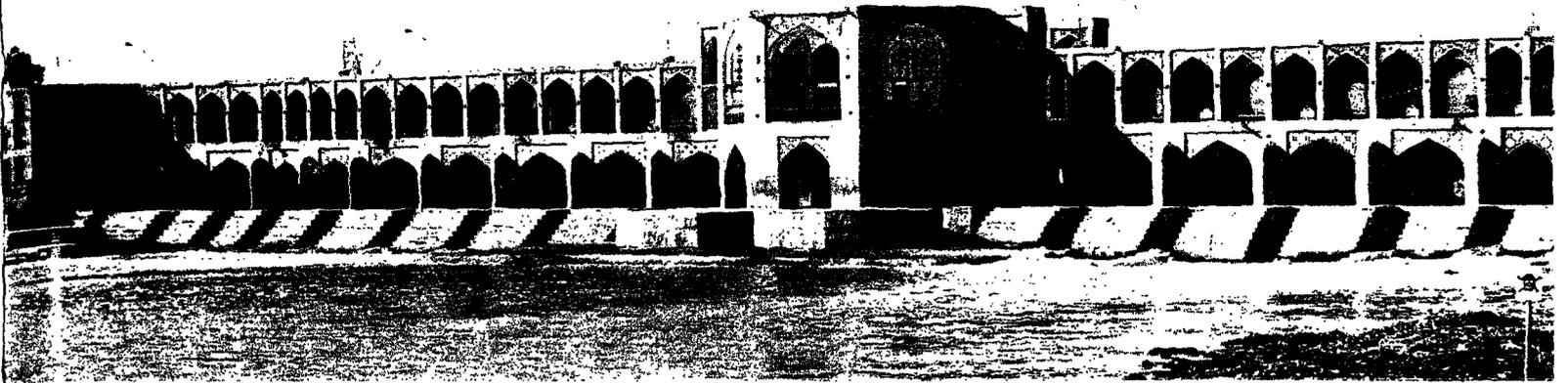
17 18
19 21
20

Facing page: Madrassah of the Mother of the Shah (1706-14): dome and minarets, 17 and 18. Compare the condition of the tiling with the photograph taken c1870 on p258. Details of tiling, 19 and 20; and the courtyard, 21, looking towards the gate into the Boland Bazaar, which was built, like the carrouserui, at the same time as the 'madrassah'.

This page: 1, the Khaju bridge and dam. 2, under the Khaju bridge. 3, the Palace of Mirrors (see frontispiece) with the Khaju bridge in the background, from Coste's 'Monuments Modernes de la Perse', 1867. 4, the Shahrestan bridge.

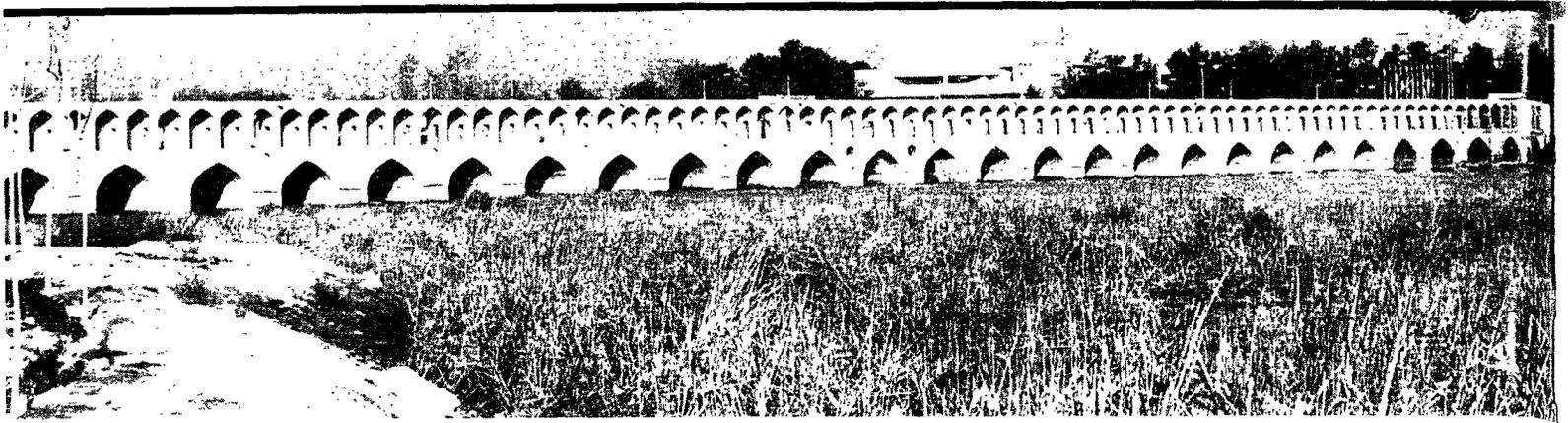
LIFE LINE 3

WATER

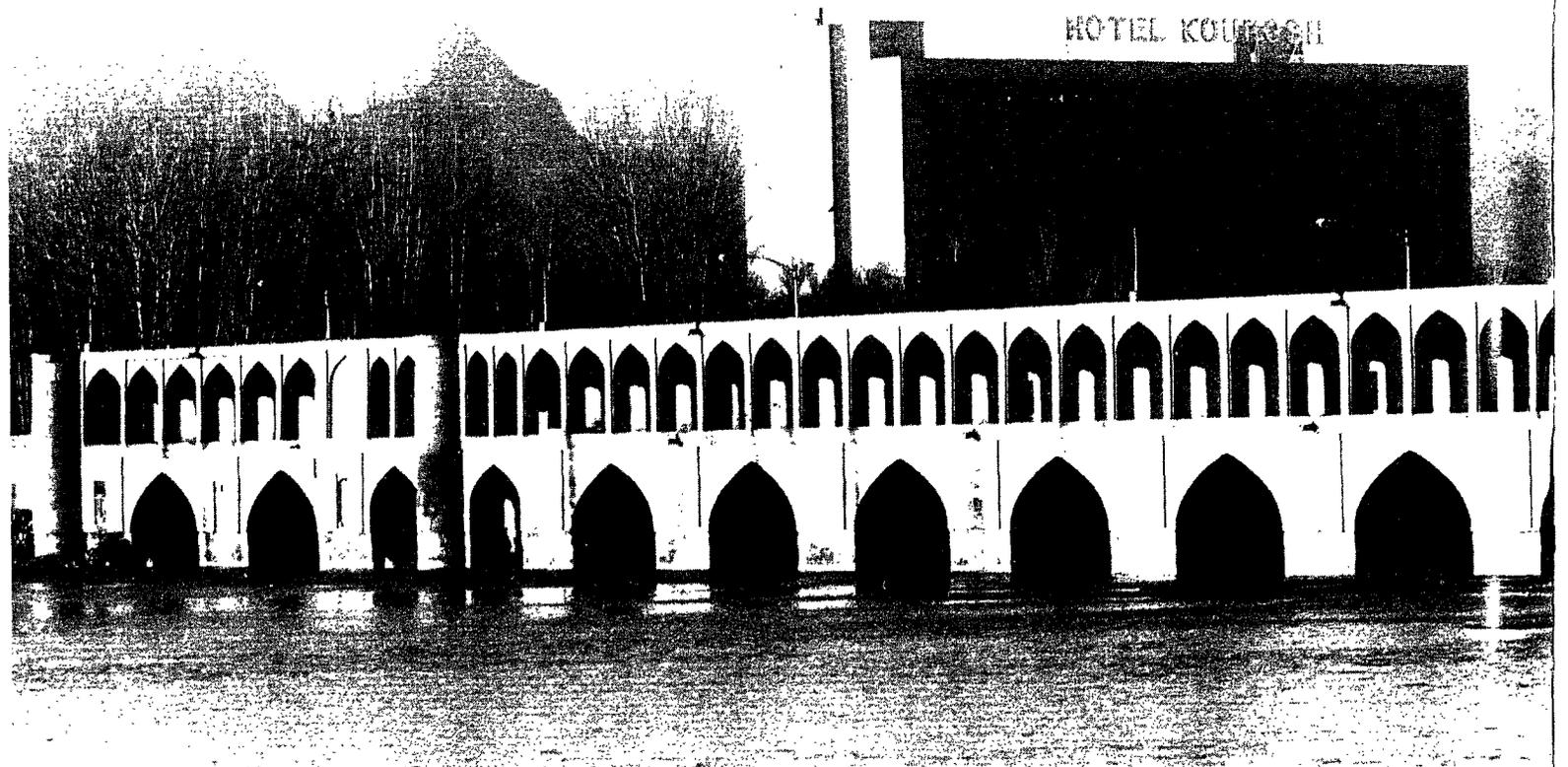


4





5



6

The Allahverdi Khan bridge disfigured by a cinema on the north bank, 5, and by the Kourosh Hotel on the south bank, 6.

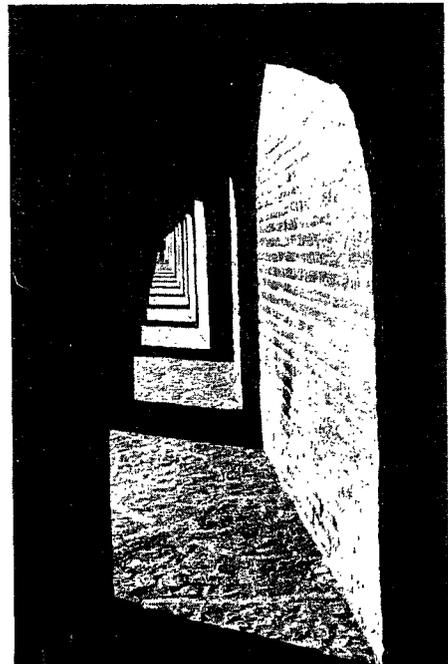
7. one of the covered galleries which flank the central roadway of the Allahverdi Khan bridge.

Water has always been an essential element in Iranian towns. Its rarity in an arid country made people respect and treasure it. Indeed Islam holds that water is holy. With the influence of religion in decline, water today is commonly defiled with garbage, while the empty pools in caravanserais are used as dumps.

Although none of the riverside gardens and palaces survive (the Palace of Mirrors, 3, on the south side of the Khaju bridge was standing within living memory), it is still possible to walk along considerable stretches of the Zayandeh's banks. It is down there at river level, well below the busy roads which now line the embankments, that the full splendour and originality of the two great Safavid bridges can be best appreciated. The Khaju bridge, 1, 2 and 3, built under Abbas II (1642-66), is also a dam with

sluice gates in the narrow channels between the monumental flights of stone steps. The originality of the brick superstructure lies in the covered side galleries and in the projecting pavilions which make it more a palace than a bridge. Curzon¹ called it the most stately bridge in the world, but its stately function of giving access to the Khaju Chahar Bagh and the main bazaar route of the city (see p259) has long since ceased. Once a popular evening resort of Isfahanis, it has become a mere thoroughfare where none but the curious tourist stops.

The Allahverdi Khan or Sio-se bridge ('sio-se' means thirty-three and refers to the number of arches), 5-7, was built under Abbas I soon after 1600 to link the city with the royal gardens of Hejar Jerib. It is far longer than the Khaju bridge and consists of continuous arcades uninterrupted by pavilions, though Coste's drawing shows that it once terminated at its northern end in a squat tower. Like the Khaju bridge, the central roadway is flanked by covered galleries which made these



7

structures almost impregnable in a siege. Within the thickness of the piers, steps lead up to the roof and down to the river, so that promenaders could cross the bridge on three different levels. Today only the middle level may be used, and pedestrians are denied the possibility of escaping from wheeled traffic. When the restoration project, prepared by the Isfahan office of the Ministry of Culture, is completed and the bridge made pedestrian, all three levels should again be made accessible—a desire shared by the Ministry of Culture but not necessarily by other authorities who have the final word. Far more serious is the visual encroachment by new buildings like the Kourosh Hotel, 6, and the cinema on the north bank, 5. After several years' valiant resistance by the Co-ordinating Committee (see p300), the monster hotel finally slipped the net and got built, to the detriment of the historic bridge and of the magnificent mountain scenery. The cinema might have been acceptable in brick or, like the adjacent development, concealed behind a belt of trees. Rendered and painted pale blue, it remains an eyesore which disturbs the serenity of the bridge. These are warnings, for in the next 20 years the embankments of the Zayandeh river are likely to be developed. They are simple warnings: not to go high, to consider carefully the colours and materials of the new buildings and to plant trees. The oldest bridge of all, the Shahrestan bridge, 4, lies some 3 km east of the city. Its stone piers, which may have been designed by the Roman engineers who were taken prisoner at Edessa (AD 260), recall the early origins of the place, for the present village of Shahrestan stands on the site of the Sassanian town of Jay, founded in the last quarter of the fifth century AD. The pointed arches—large alternating with small—are Seljuk (eleventh and twelfth century) and reflect perfectly in the stagnant water, the river having recently been diverted southwards. Although the surroundings are still rural, the haphazard growth of the city eastwards will soon reach Shahrestan unless planning controls are applied more vigorously.

In addition to the Zayandeh river, Isfahan is fed by mountain water carried in channels or 'jubes', which meander in profusion through the city, 9 and 11. They are invariably lined with trees and could, if kept clean, provide routes of considerable scenic beauty which shade and water would make cool even on the hottest summer's day. Action by the municipality is promised, but it would have to be combined with an energetic drive to teach people to be clean. The rehabilitation of the 'jubes' and their maintenance would bring back a uniquely rural quality to an otherwise very urban place.

¹ *Persia* by Lord Curzon. London, 1892.

8, typical water channel in Isfahan, from *'La Perse'* by Jane Dieulafoy, 1887.

9, the dilapidated condition of a water channel today, with new development on the left.

10, the moat with the eroded sides of what was once the Buyid citadel is used, like the water channels, as a rubbish dump.

11, the water channels could provide routes of scenic beauty and with a rural quality in the very heart of the city.

