

A
TRAVELLER'S
COMPANION TO
CENTRAL
ASIA

Kathleen Hopkirk

JOHN MURRAY

*To my husband Peter,
who first travelled with me through Central Asia
over twenty years ago*

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CONTENTS

<i>Illustrations</i>	vi
<i>Preface</i>	vii
<i>A Note on Spellings</i>	xii
Introduction: The Rise, Fall and Rise Again of Central Asia	1
1. Ashkhabad: Heat, Dust and Pestilence	23
2. Bokhara: The Forbidden City	39
3. Geok-Tepe: Last Stand of the Turcomans	63
4. Gilgit, Hunza and the Great Game	72
5. Kashgar: Great Game Listening-Post	94
6. Khiva: The Freeing of the Slaves	123
7. Merv and Bairam Ali: Stepping Stone to India?	146
8. Samarkand: City of the Scourge of God	163
9. The Silk Road	180
10. Tashkent: Tsarist Bridgehead	196
11. The Transcaspian Railway	220
12. Tunhuang: The Secret Cave	235
13. Turfan: Cockroaches, Scorpions and Spiders	246
14. Urumchi: Most Sinister Town in Asia	261
15. Three Modern Capitals: Alma Ata, Bishkek and Dushanbe	277
<i>Principal Sources</i>	284
<i>Index</i>	287

ILLUSTRATIONS

(between pages 148 and 149)

1. The Minari Kalian, or Tower of Death, Bokhara
2. The Ark, Bokhara
3. An Uzbek in the Emir's harem, Bokhara
4. A Tajik in the Emir's harem, Bokhara
5. The Emir of Bokhara's personal troupe of dancing boys
6. The conquered Turcomans of Geok-Tepe, 1898
7. Road-building to Gilgit, 1891
8. The British Consulate, Chini-Bagh, Kashgar
9. The Macartney family at Kashgar
10. A caravanserai in Khiva
11. The Bibi Khanum mosque, Samarkand
12. Street scene, Samarkand, 1907
13. Tamerlane's tomb, the Gur Emir, Samarkand
14. Romanov Street, Tashkent
15. The terminus of the Transcaspian railway, Krasnovodsk
16. The cave-temples at Tunhuang

MAPS

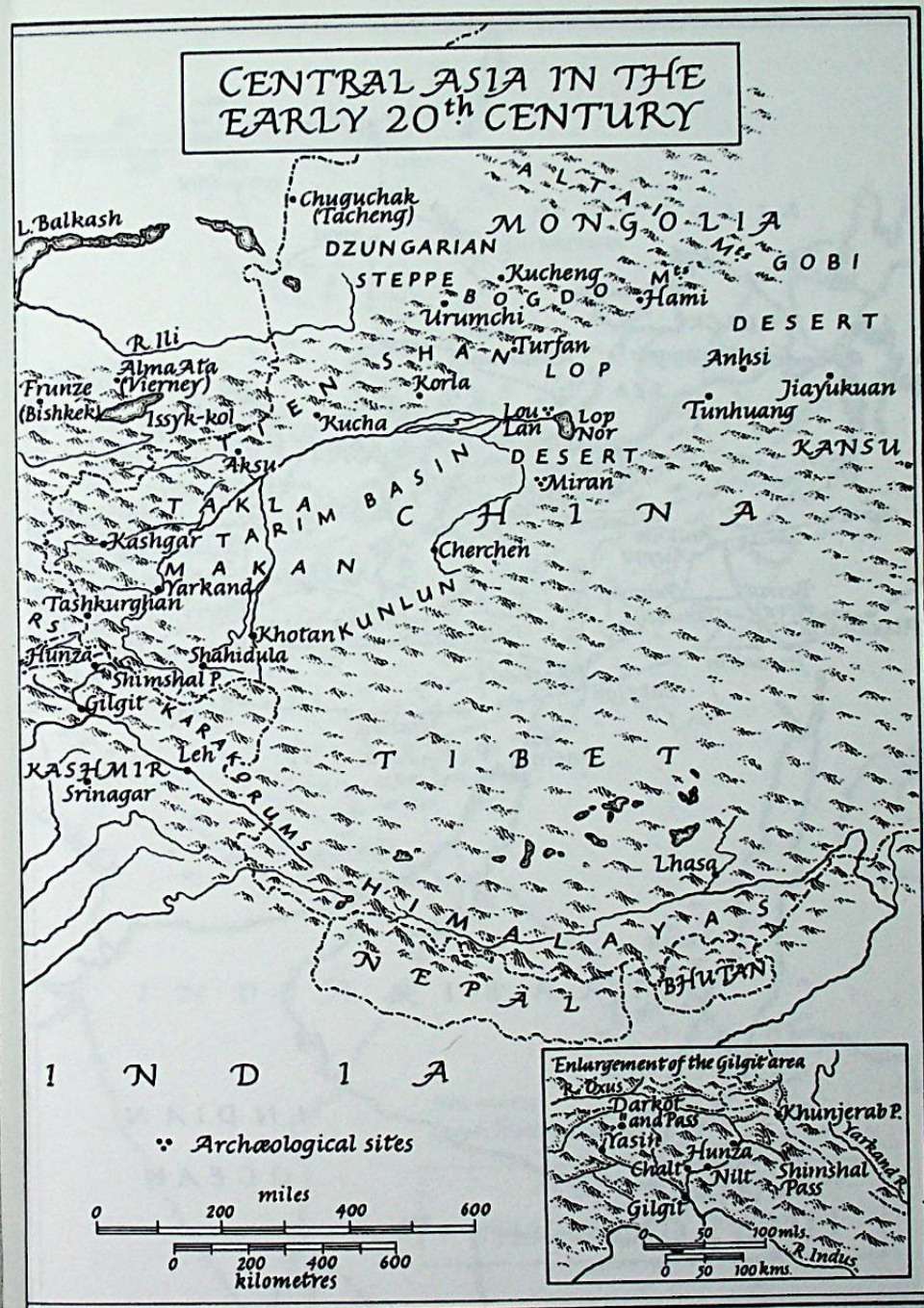
Central Asia in the early twentieth century
The main Silk Road trails

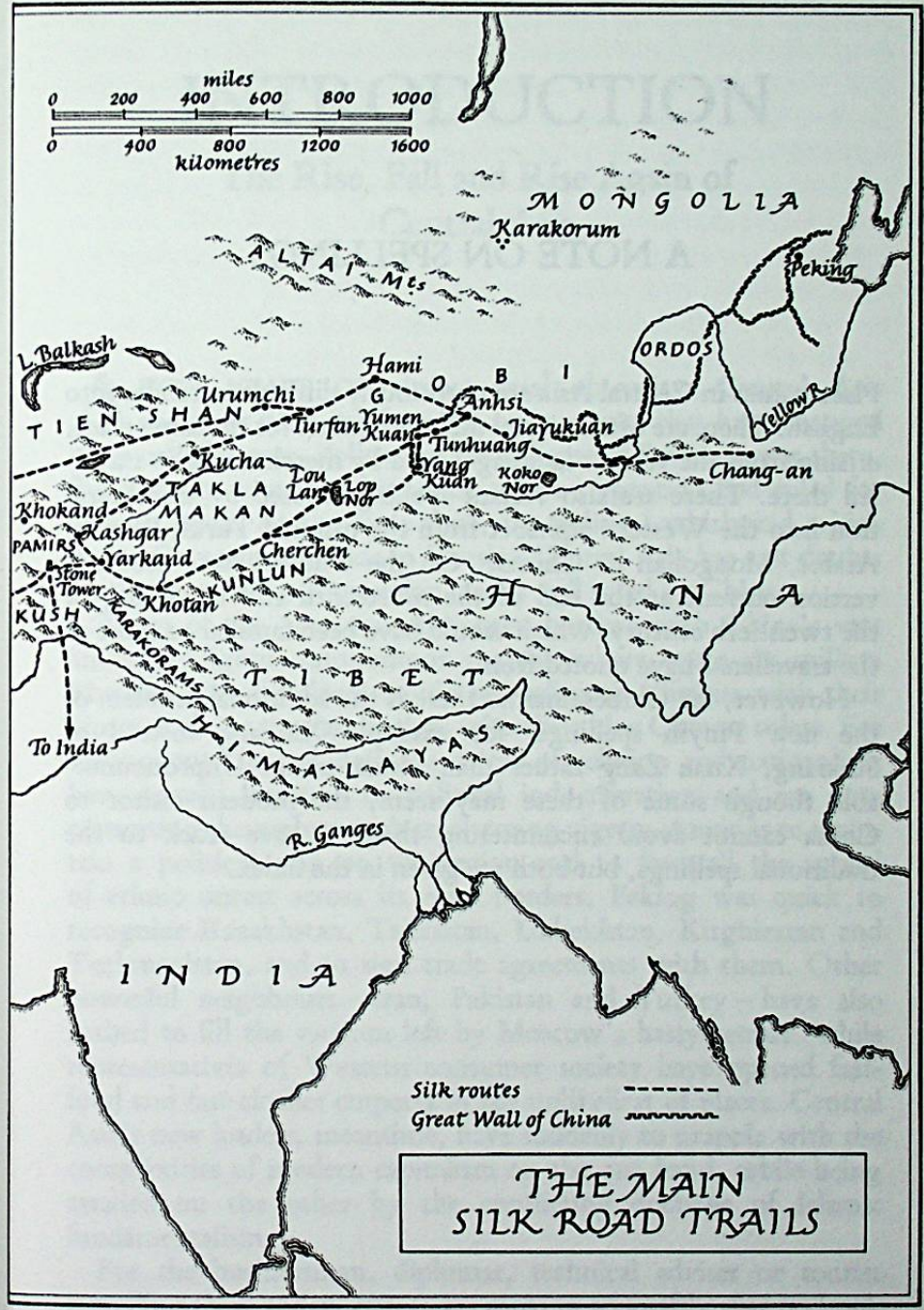
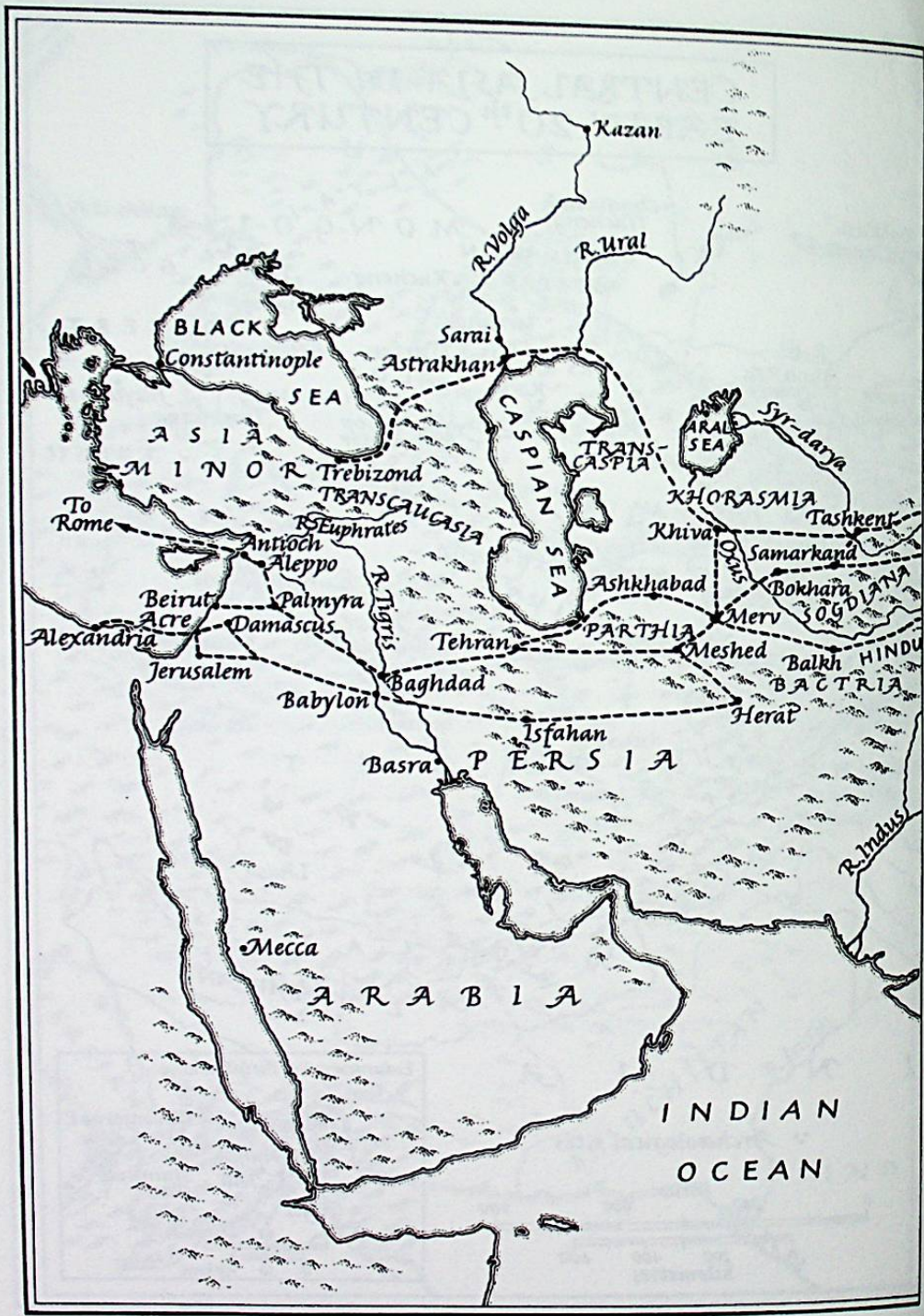
viii-ix
x-xi

PREFACE

Central Asia covers a vast swathe of territory, 2,000 miles from east to west, and I have had to restrict the scope of this book in order to keep it to a manageable size. The fifteen towns and cities which I have included all lay astride the Silk Road, one of the great trade routes of the ancient world. All have witnessed extraordinary events over the centuries. For reasons of space I have left out cities like Sian and Lanchou which, although once on the Silk Road, are in China proper, as well as the whole of Afghanistan and Tibet, which were never on the main trade routes. Tibet has in any case been thoroughly covered in numerous recent books, while Afghanistan is currently so unstable – not to mention strewn with literally millions of anti-personnel mines – as to be virtually unvisitable.

In gathering material for this book I owe a particular debt to the works of Sir Fitzroy Maclean, the father of modern writing on Central Asia, and John Keay, the master historian of Himalayan exploration. But most of all I am indebted to my husband Peter Hopkirk, who shared with me his knowledge of the region and its travellers, and his extensive library.





Central Asia: A Traveller's Companion is both an alphabetical handbook to the region and an epic tale of violence and treachery, courage, faith and vision.



'As scholarly as it is exciting,' John Colvin,
ex-Ambassador to Mongolia

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