

TREASURES OF ASIA

COLLECTION PLANNED BY

ALBERT SKIRA

TREASURES OF ASIA

CENTRAL ASIAN PAINTING



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Color plate on the title page:

Detached leaf of a Manichaean Manuscript, painted on both sides, detail.
Painting on paper from Qočo. Eighth-ninth centuries. (Width 2")
I B 4979, Indische Kunstabteilung, Staatliche Museen, Berlin.

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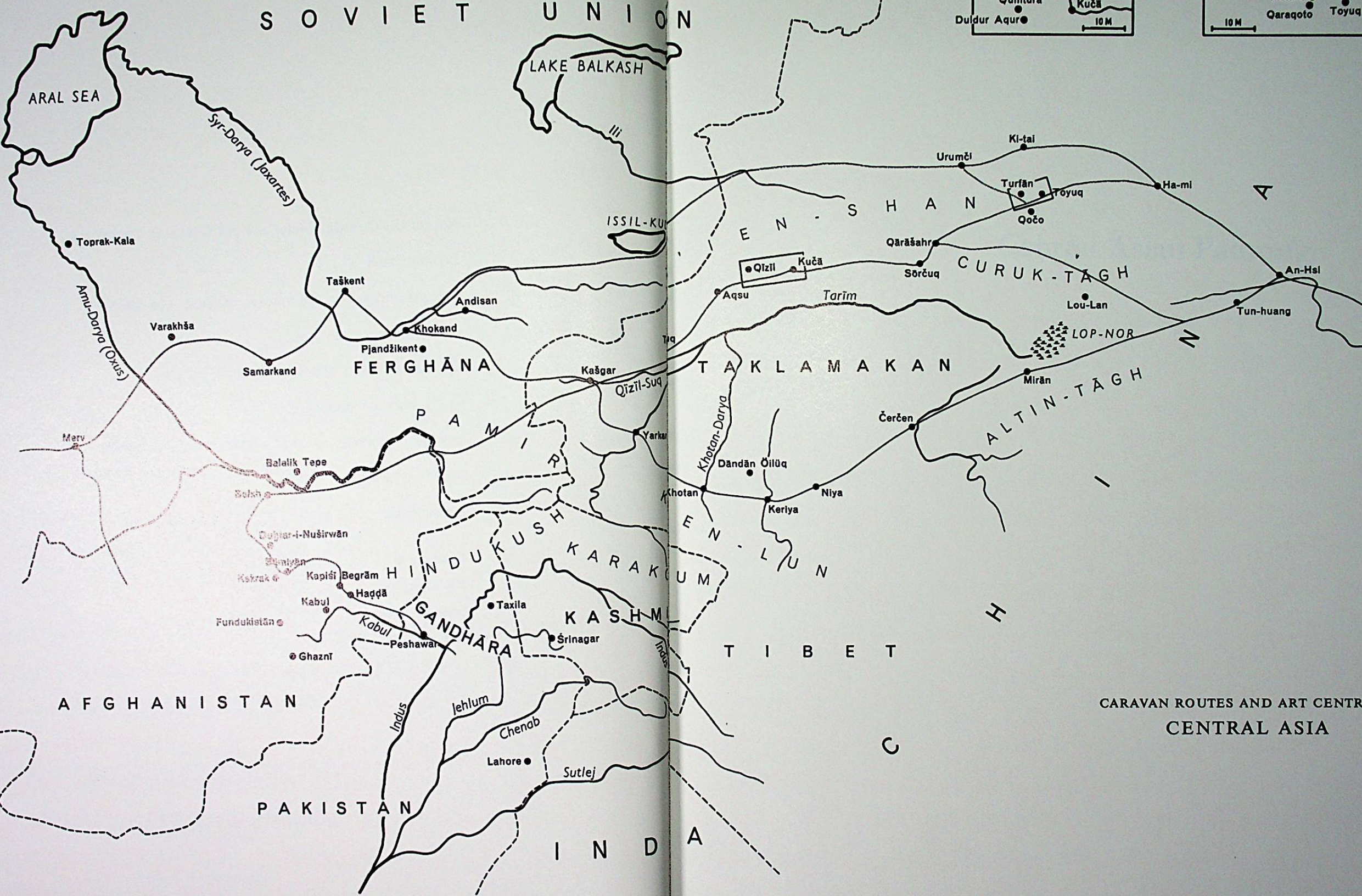
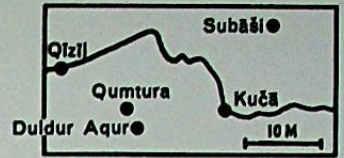
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CARAVAN ROUTES AND ART CENTRES IN CENTRAL ASIA

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TREASURES OF ASIA

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**CENTRAL ASIAN
PAINTING**

by Mario Bussagli

68 REPRODUCTIONS IN FULL COLOR

Central Asia extends from Tibet to China, from India to the Caspian Sea. A region of sand-strewn wastes, it is cut off from the outside world by high mountain ranges. Yet Central Asia at one time had a flourishing civilization centred in the oasis towns along the Silk Road—a civilization unknown in the West until the first European expedition in 1896.

From the beginning of historical times, commercial exchanges and the diffusion of religious ideas gradually made Central Asia a unique meeting ground of artistic and cultural trends from Greece and Rome, Iran, India and China. The classical spirit of the West penetrated to the very heartland of Asia, and so did the influence of Sassanian Persia, mingling there with the traditions of India and T'ang China.

Yet, despite these outside influences, this immense area gradually worked out an artistic idiom of its own which it transmitted in turn to the Moslem lands, to Tibet, even to China. The pictorial arts of Central Asia, frescoes, embroideries, scroll paintings and wooden panels, possess a distinct character of their own: freshness of vision, untrammelled boldness and a welcome diversity. But there is a further quality still more unusual. Produced in times and places that were fraught with danger, and brought to light by twentieth-century explorers and archaeologists, the painting of Central Asia is seen to be the work of men whose hardihood and perseverance in the invention of forms probably have few parallels elsewhere.

Color plate on the cover:

The Thousand-Armed Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara.
Painting on paper from Tun-huang,
Kansu province, northwest China.
Ninth century.
Musée Guimet, Paris.