

FOREIGN DEVILS ON THE SILK ROAD

The Search
for the Lost Cities and Treasures
of Chinese Central Asia

PETER HOPKIRK

John Murray

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- 1 The Main Routes of the Old Silk Road
- 2 Chinese Turkestan and Adjacent Areas

SOURCES OF ILLUSTRATIONS

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Note on Place Names

Apart from the different ways of romanising Chinese and Turkic place names (Tun-huang, Touen-houang, Dun-huang), some towns and villages possess several totally different names – a Turkic one, a Chinese one, a Mongolian one and sometimes one or more historic titles. Thus Urumchi (Wurumuchi) is sometimes called Tihwa by the Chinese, also Bung Miao Tze, Bashbalikh and Peitin – the last two being ancient names. Kashgar is also known as Kashi Shi, Yarkand as Shache, Hami as Kumul, and so on. All this can be extremely confusing to a reader who turns to other sources, whether books or maps. I have used, throughout, the name by which a place is best known, or was known at the time by those who visited it in the course of this narrative.

Foreign Devils on the Silk Road

The search for the lost cities and treasures
of Chinese Central Asia

Reviled in China but revered in the West. Such is the fate of those foreign explorers who, early this century, re-discovered the lost cities of the Silk Road and carried off their art treasures. Here, told for the first time, is the story of this strange and contentious episode in Central Asian history.

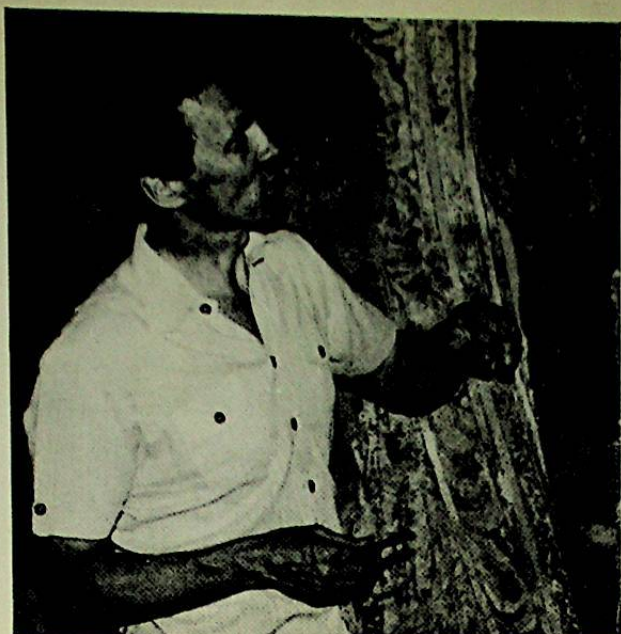
The Silk Road, the great trans-Asian highway linking the two superpowers of the day – Imperial Rome and distant China – reached its height during the T'ang dynasty. Along it travelled precious cargoes of silk, gold, ivory, exotic animals and rare plants – also revolutionary new ideas, art and knowledge. Its oasis towns blossomed into thriving trading centres, centres of Buddhist art and learning, and refuges for Nestorian Christianity and Manichaeism.

Gradually, as the Chinese lost control of the region, the Silk Road declined. The traffic slowed and the merchants left. Many of the towns were abandoned to the all-devouring desert sand. Finally, in the tenth century, western China fell to Islam and its rich Buddhist past was almost wholly obliterated.

Local legends claimed that 300 towns lay buried beneath the Taklamakan Desert, and these were surrounded by fanciful tales of great treasures protected by demons. Then, in 1896, Sven Hedin stumbled on one of these once-rich towns, and the international race for the Buddhist and other treasures of the Silk Road began.

Sir Aurel Stein from British India led the way, closely followed by archaeologists from Germany, France, Japan, Russia, and the United States. Huge wall-paintings, sculptures, silks, Buddhist texts and other important early manuscripts were carried off wholesale by camel caravan, and today are scattered through the museums and institutions of a dozen countries.

In piecing together this little-known chapter of China's history, Peter Hopkirk tells of the intrepid and determined men who, at great personal risk, led these long-range archaeological raids, and traces the fate of the works of art they removed.



The Author at Bezeklik

For five years Chief Reporter of *The Times*, Peter Hopkirk now specialises in Middle Eastern and Asiatic affairs. During twenty-seven years as reporter and foreign correspondent he has travelled widely throughout the world, including six visits to China (most recently to Chinese Central Asia, where this book is set), and the surrounding Asiatic regions of Russia, Afghanistan, Himalayan India and Mongolia. Peter Hopkirk is a collector of rare books on Central Asia.

Other Books of Interest:

WHEN MEN AND MOUNTAINS MEET

The Explorers of the Western Himalayas 1820-75

John Keay

THE GILGIT GAME

The Explorers of the Western Himalayas 1865-95

John Keay