

REZA

# Painted Buddhas of Xinjiang

Hidden Treasures  
from the Silk Road

Jacques Giès  
Laure Feugère  
André Coutin

ART MEDIA RESOURCES

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|   |     |
|---|-----|
| Introduction . . . . .                  | 7   |
| The Hidden Treasures of Turkestan . . . | 16  |
| Symbols of the Buddha . . . . .         | 56  |
| Past Lives: the Jatakas . . . . .       | 84  |
| Gods and Humans . . . . .               | 108 |
| Animals . . . . .                       | 132 |
| Glossary . . . . .                      | 164 |
| Further Reading . . . . .               | 166 |
| The Caves of Kucha: Numerical List .    | 167 |



# Painted Buddhas of Xinjiang

*Hidden Treasures from the Silk Road*

Hidden away beneath the mountains of Xinjiang, on the Silk Road in what was formerly Eastern Turkestan, are a series of caves that were inaccessible for half a century. After thirty years of negotiation with the authorities, the photographer Reza finally gained permission to visit the caves and became the first Westerner to record the extraordinary frescoes they contained.

Intended as a focus for pilgrimage and prayer, these paintings, produced by monks in the kingdom of Kucha between the fourth and seventh centuries AD, depict scenes from Buddhist mythology, its symbols, characters and creatures, and tell the story of the Buddha Shakyamuni and his previous lives. Their freshness and contemporary quality, their rich colours and combination of Persian, Afghan, Indian and Chinese styles, are astonishing to the Western eye. Here are flying angels, bodhisattvas and demons; here too are princes, musicians, hunters, merchants and some of the ordinary people of the vanished kingdom of Kucha. Perhaps most enchanting are the paintings of animals, whether the local wildlife or exotic species that were conveyed along the Silk Road towards the Chinese court: despite their simple style, they perfectly capture the movement of beasts and birds alike.

*With 98 colour illustrations and 3 maps*

REZA is an internationally known photographer and reporter. His work has been shown in numerous exhibitions and has appeared in the *National Geographic Magazine*, *Stern*, *Geo* and *Paris Match*. He was awarded the World Press Prize in 1983, 1986 and 1996.

JACQUES GIÈS is chief curator at the Musée Guimet in Paris and in charge of the department of Chinese and Central Asian Buddhism.

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