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Foreign Devils on the Silk Road: The Search for Lost Cities and Treasures of Chinese Central Asia

Peter Hopkirk

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The Silk Road, which linked imperial Rome and distant China, was once the greatest thoroughfare on earth. Along it traveled precious cargoes of silk, gold and ivory, as well as revolutionary new ideas. Its oasis towns blossomed into thriving centers of Buddhist art and learning. In time it began to decline. The traffic slowed, the merchants left and finally its towns vanished beneath the desert sands to be forgotten for a thousand years; however, legends grew up of lost cities filled with treasures and guarded by demons. In the early years of the last century foreign explorers began to investigate these legends, and very soon an international race began for the art treasures of the Silk Road. Huge wall paintings, sculptures and priceless manuscripts were carried away, literally by the ton, and are today scattered through the museums of a dozen countries. Peter Hopkirk tells the story of the intrepid men who, at great personal risk, led these long-range archaeological raids, incurring the undying wrath of the Chinese.

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