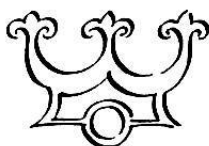


THE ROAD TO MIRAN

Travels in the Forbidden Zone of Xinjiang



Christa Paula



HarperCollins *Publishers*

HarperCollins *Publishers*
77-85 Fulham Palace Road,
Hammersmith, London W6 8JB

Published by HarperCollins *Publishers* 1994
1 3 5 7 9 8 6 4 2

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Maps drawn by John Callanan

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A catalogue record for this book is
available from the British Library

ISBN 0 00 255124 1

Set in Linotron Bembo by
Rowland Phototypesetting Ltd, Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk

Printed in Great Britain by
HarperCollins Manufacturing Glasgow

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TO THE MEMORY OF
PROFESSOR JOHN F. HASKINS

The remarkable story of an exceptionally daring quest for the ancient kingdom of Shanshan, in the remote, forbidden and perilous desert regions of southern Xinjiang in China.

Christa Paula, an intrepid young student of Central Asian art and archaeology, set off in late 1989 to explore – far from the famous, well-trodden ‘Silk Road’ of Marco Polo – an area that is closed to Westerners as well as to most Chinese, and one which is firmly under military rule. Tall and blonde, she travelled for the most part incognito, disguised in a Pathan cap, old grey jacket and big padded trousers.

Her goal was Miran, the ancient Buddhist site of fabulous second-century wall paintings left untouched until the beginning of the twentieth century. (The last Westerner to set foot in Miran was Sir Aurel Stein, in 1914.) In the company of Chang, a maverick taxi-driver and self-styled Chinese James Dean, Christa Paula travelled through an area dotted with nuclear testing sites, forced labour camps and mines in which prisoners dig and process asbestos without protective clothing. She discovered that villages which exist on maps are now radiation-contaminated ghost towns, and she witnessed everywhere the seeds of discontent and political unrest.

Combining scholarship with exotic adventure and an unusual love affair, *The Road to Miran* is a travel book of rare distinction – a journey as much through China’s past as through its present.

£18.00 net

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Illustrations

- 1 Rest stop in the shadow of the Muztagata, the father of all ice mountains.
- 2 A noodle-maker in Tashmalik conducting his pasta symphony.
- 3 Performers in front of the Idga Mosque on a Friday afternoon.
- 4 Only the old and the ugly wear the veil in Kashgar.
- 5 Advertising above a department store on Jiefang Street, Kashgar.
- 6 On my search for the Buddhist sites of Tumxuk, I found an Islamic hermitage in Tulumush.
- 7 Ming Oi, the thousand caves of Kizil north-west of Kuqa.
- 8 *Chez Turku* . . . Very short back and sides, please.
- 9 The 'forbidden' half of Subashi; stupa and monastic complex from the seventh century, twenty kilometres north of Kuqa bazaar.
- 10 Sometimes the ruins reminded me of sculptures by Henry Moore.
- 11 Woman and child in the old city of Kuqa.
- 12 Women have caught on to the new market economy with a vengeance.
- 13 Beacon tower from the third century, still guarding the approach to the Buddhist caves of Kizil Kara near Kuqa.
- 14 Mender of metal pots and vessels, Kuqa.
- 15 The one-stop Uighur bank, *bureau de change* and building society.
- 16 Each region has its unique headwear and faces.
- 17 The local version of a minicab service: my camel guide in Qiemo.
- 18 Growing up Uighur still means being surrounded by a large network of family and friends.
- 19 The vast remains of Kharakhoja, the capital of Uighuristan from the ninth to the thirteenth century.
- 20 Masterpiece in brick: the Emin minaret, Turfan.
- 21 United Colours of Benetton, courtesy of the caretaker's children at the Buddhist caves of Bezeklik.
- 22 Having a chat: donkey taxi in front of the great sand dune, Bezeklik.
- 23 Bakery near the Turfan Number One Guesthouse.

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- 24 Modern caravanserai or truck stop near Argan on the road to Miran.
- 25 The daughter of a Han Chinese family sent into 'exile' in Xinjiang.
- 26 The eighth-century Tibetan fort in the centre of ancient Miran.
- 27 The interior of the fort.
- 28 By criss-crossing Stein's exploration track, I discovered four uncharted structures at Miran.
- 29 The famous second-century Buddhist shrine at Miran, from which Stein excavated the wall paintings now in Delhi.
- 30 The Buddhist Vihara in the north-eastern sector of Miran, probably from the fourth century.
- 31 On the eastern façade of the Vihara I discovered remnants of a standing Buddha figure.
- 32 Fragment of a second-century wall painting extracted by Stein from the central register of shrine MIII.
- 33 The base of the interior wall of the circular shrine MV was once decorated with a garland-carrier motif and busts of men and women of different nationalities, reflecting the international milieu of the ancient Silk Road.

ENDPAPER: The 'angel dado' from MIII (Miran fragment).