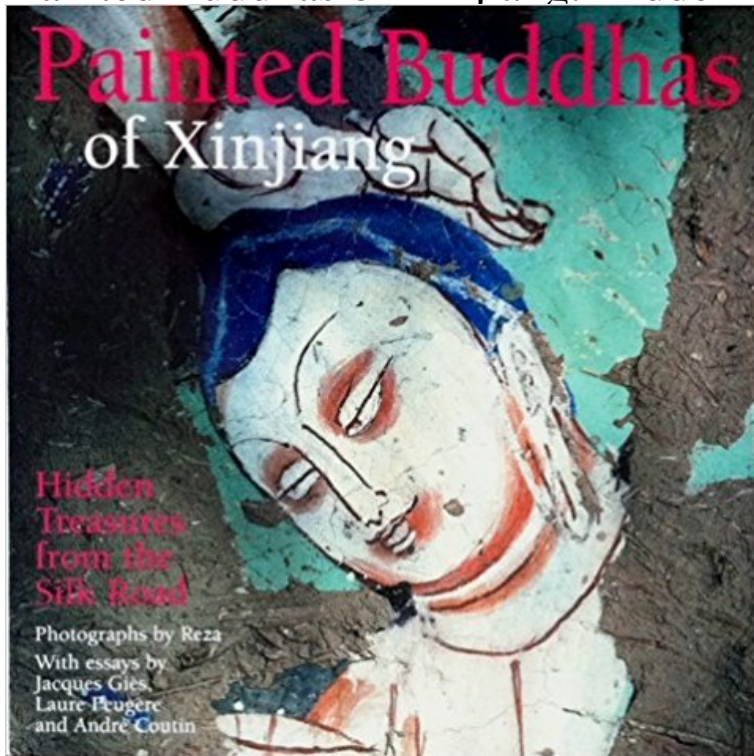


Painted Buddhas of Xinjiang: Hidden Treasures from the Silk Road



Hidden away beneath the mountains of Xinjiang, in former Chinese Turkestan, are a series of caves along what was once the Silk Route, but which have been inaccessible for half a century. After thirty years of negotiation, the photographer Reza finally gained permission to visit the caves 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 colors 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 breasts and birds alike.

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