

*Asia held them captive in her cold embrace:  
explorers on the Silk Road*

**S**URVEYING and exploration of Silk Road terrain were often used as the acceptable face of the Great Game. As the Survey of India sent out its pundits to measure and map the great mountain ranges of India's northern borders, with an eye on routes through the passes, trade prospects and possible annexations or 'spheres of influence', Russia sent similar expeditions. There were also semi-independent explorers like Sven Hedin and Sir Aurel Stein, whose lengthy expeditions involved a complex combination of mapping, collecting and information-gathering. Many of the great names of Silk Road exploration in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Przhevalsky, Hedin, Stein and Ney Elias, were very distinct characters, determined, immensely brave, highly intelligent and extremely anti-social. The very length of their expeditions, the distance they set between themselves and the drawing-rooms of Oxford, St Petersburg and Oslo, may have contributed to their isolation, but it seems clear that they chose to isolate themselves in the deserts and mountains of Central Asia. None of them married. Some have suggested that Przhevalsky was homosexual, and he was certainly a contradictory character: 'a man of ruthless determination and of shy tenderness, an apostle of European superiority who loathed European society, an explorer of China who despised the Chinese, a big-game hunter on an epic scale who mourned the death of his dogs, a major-general who disliked the army . . .'<sup>1</sup>

Hedin offered a rather evasive explanation for his single state: 'I have been in love many times, but Asia remained my bride. She has held me captive in her cold embrace, and out of jealousy would never let me love any other. And I have been faithful to her, that is certain.'<sup>2</sup> Aurel Stein maintained an enormous, engaged correspondence with family and friends, writing letters every night from frozen tents in the deserts, but seems to have preferred to maintain his social and emotional life at this epistolary remove. When Ney Elias died in 1897, Professor E. H. Parker wrote to *The Times* recalling a conversation they had had in Tianjin in 1872, when Elias was still working for an import-export company in Shanghai and Parker was a language student in the Chinese Consular Service:

'We sat up talking until two in the morning . . . in the course of our conversation he said: "I have definitely cut myself off from a business



*Sven Hedin in Kashgar,*  
1893-6

career. I hate business and have no aptitude for it. But I feel I have the capacity to do something worth doing and if I cannot get a big job in the engineering line I am thinking of striking across Mongolia and hunting up the mysterious city of Karakorum. I would give anything to be able to face company as you do. I am not a bit timid and have complete confidence in myself: but I am cursed with the most extraordinary constitutional shyness and the moment I walk into a room I feel as though my tongue were glued to my mouth. I have tried to conquer it in every way, but it is perfectly hopeless. I shall never be able to do

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anything in the social line, but I am not going to give in, I will do something." '3

The earliest of these great explorers to travel through the wilder regions of the Silk Roads was Nikolai Przhevalsky (1839–88). His first expedition (1870–3) was financed by the Russian War Department, the Imperial Geographical Society and the St Petersburg Botanical Gardens. His ambition was to map the Ordos plateau, explore Southern Mongolia and, ambitiously, locate the source of the Yellow River and get to Lhasa. Though he was unsuccessful in the last two aims, he was able to inform the War Department about Yakub Beg's uprising and the Empire of Western Turkestan based in Kashgar: for the Imperial Geographical Society he mapped and surveyed 7,000 miles, and he overwhelmed the Academy of Sciences in St Petersburg with '5,000 plant specimens, 1,000 birds, 130 skins of large and small mammals, 70 specimens of reptiles, and in excess of 3,000 insects'.<sup>4</sup>

Przhevalsky's second expedition (1876–8) was more political, for he was to proceed to Kashgar and negotiate with Yakub Beg. On this trip, unimpressed by Yakub Beg (who died in 1877), he found Lop Nor (which was to be more extensively investigated by Sven Hedin and Aurel Stein) and proceeded towards Lhasa with 70 lbs of Turkish delight as a bribe. As on his previous attempt, his supplies ran out and he himself became ill and had to turn back before reaching Lhasa. Determined to reach the Tibetan capital, he returned on his third expedition (1879).

Tibet, with its borders with China and India, long part of Silk Road trade (tea-bricks and silks from China exchanged for gold and precious stones) offered tantalising prospects to explorers and players in the Great Game. Its altitude, protected by mountains, made it difficult of access but it was largely the Tibetans' determination to keep foreigners out that frustrated early efforts to reach it. Conscious of the pressure from expansionist Russia and Britain, determined to protect their religion and culture (rumours flew that Przhevalsky had come to kidnap the Dalai Lama) and their gold fields which were only partially exploited owing to the Tibetans' belief that 'nuggets contained life and were the parents of gold dust',<sup>5</sup> the Tibetan militia turned Przhevalsky back from the frontier. Furious, Przhevalsky recorded in his diary that, in order to make life harder for any British rivals, he showed the Tibetans maps and surveys that had been made secretly at great personal risk several years earlier by Survey of India pundits and published by the Royal Geographical Society in London.<sup>6</sup>

Przhevalsky made a further, final attempt to reach Lhasa on his fourth expedition (1883–5). Once again, he failed. On this last expedition, he took with him a young distillery clerk, Pyotr Kozlov



*Nikolai Przhevalsky*

(1863–1935), who was to succeed him as Russia's foremost explorer of Central Asia, collecting masses of documents from Dunhuang and, above all, the ancient Tangut capital of Kharakhoto in 1909 and 1923.

Though he failed to reach Lhasa, Przhevalsky's discoveries, particularly of animal and botanical specimens, many of which bear his name, were of considerable importance. He found new rhododendrons, delphiniums, gentians, a new maidenhair fern, three new honeysuckles, a new poppy, the red *Rosa przewalskii*, a rare hedge-sparrow that he named for Kozlov, *Prunella koslowi*, and, on his third expedition, the last wild horse sub-species, Przhevalsky's Horse.<sup>7</sup> This small yellowish animal, with a 'short and erect' or punk mane, was discovered in western Mongolia but now survives only in zoos. In the 1880s a circus proprietor, Carl Hagenbeck, paid for the explorer William Greiger to go out to collect the small horses for him. They were not easy to catch but Greiger developed a system of chasing the herds till the foals could no longer keep up, whereupon they were collected and introduced to suckling mares back at camp. The mortality rate was high:

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setting off for home with fifty-two foals, Greiger only managed to deliver twenty-eight animals to the Hamburg circus.<sup>8</sup>

Not far behind Przhevalsky was Sven Hedin (1865–1952) who began by surveying and map-making and gradually came to include the collection of antiquities in his explorations. A small man, trained in geology, physics and zoology at the University of Stockholm, and in physical geography at Berlin University by the great Baron von Richthoven (who had given the Silk Roads their name), he was, perhaps, the most physically reckless of all, coming very near death at times and, though he survived to old age, leaving a trail of dead men, ponies and camels behind him. To be hired by Hedin on one of his trips meant almost certain death for man or beast. His autobiography, which dealt only with his explorations, not any other aspect of his life, was entitled *My Life as an Explorer* (1926) and is a 'Boy's Own' series of death-defying exploits. He began on a confident note: 'Happy is the boy who discovers the bent of his life's work during childhood. That, indeed, was my good fortune. At the early age of twelve my goal was fairly clear. My closest friends were Fenimore Cooper and Jules Verne, Livingstone and Stanley, Franklin, Payer and Nordenskiöld, particularly the long line of heroes and martyrs of Arctic exploration. Nordenskiöld was then on his daring journey to Spitsbergen, Novaya Zemlya and the mouth of the Yenisei river. I was just fifteen when he returned to my native city – Stockholm – having accomplished the North-East Passage.'<sup>9</sup>

On one of his early journeys to Persia, Hedin had been asked by 'a famous professor of medicine and anthropology' to bring back the skulls of some Zoroastrians from the Tower of Silence where the dead were laid out to be dried by the sun. Cranial measurement was one of the main activities of nineteenth-century anthropologists but collecting these skulls was an unpleasant task, told with scandalous relish by Hedin. 'Accordingly, in the middle of June, when summer was at its height, and the thermometer registered 106 in the shade, I set out with Dr Hybennet for the Tower of Silence, the funeral-place of the fire-worshippers, southeast of Teheran. We chose the early hours for our raid . . .

'We took with us a kurchin, or soft saddle-bag, in the two pockets of which we put straw, paper and two water-melons, each the size of a man's head.'

When they arrived at Hashemabad, Hedin scaled a ladder and hauled Dr Hybennet on to the coping of the tower. 'A rank, sickening smell of decaying corpses met us . . . There were sixty-one open shallow graves. In about ten of them lay skeletons and corpses in various stages of putrefaction. Whitened and weatherbeaten bones lay piled alongside the wall.



*Tower of Silence near  
Teheran, photographed  
by Hedin in the 1890s*

‘After some deliberation I selected the corpses of three adult men. The freshest corpse had been there only a few days; yet its soft parts, the muscles and entrails, had already been torn away and eaten by birds of prey. The eyes had been picked out but the rest of the face remained, dried up and as hard as parchment. I detached the dead man’s skull and emptied it of its contents. I did similarly with the second head. The third had been lying in the sun so long that its brains were dried up.

‘We had taken the saddle-bag and the crock of water with us over the wall, pretending that we were going to have lunch there. I used the water to wash my hands. Then I emptied the bag, wrapped the skulls in the paper, after first filling them with straw, and then put them in the bag in place of the water-melons. The bag thus retained its shape and did nothing to arouse the driver’s suspicion except the offensive smell . . .

‘We buried the skulls in the ground, left them there for a month, and

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afterwards boiled them in milk, until they were as clean and white as ivory.

'The need for all this secrecy is obvious. What would the superstitious Persians and Parsees have thought of us had they learnt that we infidels were going about stealing skulls from their funeral places? Besides, Hybennet was physician-in-ordinary to the Shah and, specifically, his dentist. People might have supposed that we intended to remove the teeth from the jaws of the skulls for subsequent use in the Shah's gracious mouth. There might have been disturbances and riots.'<sup>10</sup>

He explored the old Khanates: Merv with oxblood-coloured rugs, Bactrian camels, 'the famous Turkoman horses with clumsy heads and slender necks', and Bokhara, 'the Sogdiana of the Greeks, the Transoxiana of the Romans', described in a mysterious couplet quoted by Hedin,

If that Bold One of Shiraz gain our hearts,  
For his dark mole, I will give Samarkand and Bokhara.

Hedin discoursed on Bokhara's history, sacked by Genghis Khan and taken by Tamerlane, and recounted the more recent horror, early in the Great Game, when Colonel Stoddart and Captain Conolly had been seized in 1842, thrown into the 'famous vermin pit' and beheaded. By the time Hedin visited it, the population was very mixed, as it had probably been centuries earlier when it was a major entrepôt near the end of the Silk Roads. There were 'Tajiks, of Iranian stock . . . the Uzbeks and Jaggatai Turks of the Mongolian race; and the Sarts, a mixed race . . . Persians, Afghans, Kirghiz, Turks, Tatars, Caucasians and Jews'.<sup>11</sup>

On his first crossing of the Pamirs in 1894, which he made, against advice, in winter, he 'became afflicted with a violent rheumatic inflammation of the eyes . . . The expedition was broken up and, blindfolded, I proceeded with my little caravan past Kara-kul and Bulun-kul and further along the wild narrow valley of the Gez-daria, notorious as the resort of robbers and escaped thieves.'

Still blindfolded, he crossed the river, which 'hurled itself between mighty boulders, foaming and roaring. The men waded through the water in order to support the horses, which might have drowned but for this assistance.'<sup>12</sup>

He survived to reach Kashgar (his second visit) where, running across Great Game enmities, he re-acquainted himself with 'my old friend Petrovsky', the Russian consul, 'the hospitable Mr Macartney and the witty Father Hendricks', who had helped the British representative Macartney to construct his household furniture out of old boxes.

## *The Silk Road*

In 1895, Hedin proposed to travel from Merket on the Yarkand river, just east of Kashgar, across the southwestern corner of the Taklamakan desert to the Khotan river, down to the oases of the southern Silk Road, taking with him four men, eight camels, two guard-dogs and a mobile larder of sheep, hens and a cockerel. 'I hoped to cross the desert in less than a month, and move towards the cool heights of northern Tibet during the warm summer months. We therefore took fur coats, blankets and winter clothes. Our arsenal consisted of three rifles, six revolvers and two heavy ammunition boxes. I had three cameras, together with a thousand glass and celluloid plates, the usual astronomical and meteorological instruments, and finally some scientific instruments and a Bible.'

The journey started off quite pleasantly, though the camels misbehaved, and they travelled past sweet-water pools, through groves of poplars and vast reed-fields where Hedin dozed off to sleep in his tent as he listened to 'the sound of the splashing water as the men poured it into the tanks' ready for the next stage. One dog disappeared: Hedin later considered the dog had been wise to stay by the lake as the camel-train moved off into the sands where 'not a trace of vegetable or animal life was to be seen, not a wind-driven leaf, not a moth'.

In the barren sands, Hedin soon discovered that the water-tanks had not been fully filled. Within days, deprived of any water at all, two camels were dead. A few days later, two more camels died, Hedin sparing his readers none of the details. 'The "Old Man" had lain down, his legs and head stretched out on the sand, while "Big Blackie" had stood erect, with trembling legs, unable to take another step . . . The blood flowing in their veins grew thicker and thicker. The "Old Man" had probably died first. Then "Big Blackie" was alone. Finally he, too, died, in the majestic stillness of the desert; and in due time the shifting sand-hillocks would bury the remains of the two martyrs.'

A violent sandstorm halted the caravan; another camel fell down a ridge and was abandoned, together with his load, for by now Hedin was desperately jettisoning ammunition, fur coats and empty water-tanks to reduce the load on the surviving camels.

On May Day, 'a spring-time feast of joy and light at home in Sweden', Hedin was reduced to drinking Primus fuel (which was turned down by the remaining dog) and by next morning, the first of his men 'had already begun his death-struggle'. The others drained the blood of the rooster and then the sheep, 'which had followed us as faithfully as a dog without complaining', and then turned to camel's urine which gave them stomach cramps and made them vomit.

Leaving the two moribund men behind, the survivors – 'only the hens remained cheerful' – struggled on for a while, until another of the



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men collapsed and the camels lay down. At this point, Hedin abandoned hope, but still in a terribly organised way: 'seeing that the game was up, I decided to forfeit everything except my life. I even sacrificed diaries and records of observations, and took along only what I always carried in my pockets, namely, a compass, watch, two chronometers, a box of matches, handkerchief, pocket-knife, pencil, a piece of folded paper, and by the merest chance, cigarettes.' He stroked the surviving dog, 'and left it to him to decide whether he would stay or go with us. He stayed, and I never saw the faithful dog again.'

He walked on with one servant, Kasim, who soon collapsed, particularly when they discovered that they had, like Pooh and Piglet, been following their own tracks, hoping that they might have been those of previous travellers who knew where they were going. Leaving Kasim to die amongst a group of poplars, Hedin struggled on, 'as though led by an invisible hand'. He finally came to the dried bed of the Khotan river. But a waterbird led him to a pool, a rare survivor of the freshet floods of the early summer.

Hedin returned to Kashgar in June: two of his men had survived, and one camel, amazingly enough the one carrying his diary, maps, money and two rifles. And, despite the horror of the trip and its considerable waste of men and animals, he set off again in December 1895, with one of the survivors (jobs must have been scarce in Kashgar). This time, he was not just surveying and map-making, but also actively looking for treasures and lost cities. In Khotan and Yarkand he acquired terracotta figurines, Buddha images, Christian relics, coins and manuscripts, and he explored some of the ruins near the Keriya river.

On his return to Europe in 1896, he describes in his autobiography how he was fêted: in Berlin by the Baron von Richthofen; in London, where he stayed with 'Dr Livingstone, I presume' Henry Stanley, and met the Prince of Wales and Sir Clements Markham of the Royal Geographical Society who awarded him a Founder's Medal and made him an honorary member; and in Paris, where he met Félix Faure, President of the Republic, and Roland Bonaparte and Milne Edwards of the French Geographical Society. In Sweden, the king himself linked Hedin's name with that of the great explorer Nansen: 'At the risk of his life and with indomitable energy, Nansen has searched for land among the ice-fields of the Arctic Ocean. Sven Hedin, a son of Sweden, has searched for water – the water that does not flow very freely in the sandy deserts and steppes of interior Asia. A king's duties are often heavy but his privileges are often precious. I am exercising one of these privileges when, in the name of the Swedish nation, I address myself to the political and social representatives of that people assembled here and call on them to join with me as spokesman of the



*Sven Hedin with a prize Kirghiz camel on his expedition of 1896*

sentiments cherished by the Swedish people, when I cry aloud the name of Sven Hedin.<sup>13</sup>

In 1899, sustained by the support of King Oscar and Emmanuel Nobel, Hedin set off once more from Kashgar to the Yarkand river in order to cross the Taklamakan by boat until the river froze. After three months of drifting with the current, occasionally hoisting a sail to improve progress, to the open-mouthed amazement of passing caravans, he made a twenty-day trek across the desert, carrying water in the form of ice-blocks, to the oasis of Cherchen on the southern Silk Road. From there, he headed northeast to the Lop desert at the eastern end of the Taklamakan.<sup>14</sup> Discovering the ruins of houses, he picked up a few coins and pieces of carved wood before heading back (once again with the intention of getting to Tibet). In a complicated series of events – a man left a spade behind and, when he went to fetch it, reported on more and better woodcarvings – and amid disasters of the normal Hedin sort in Tibet – loss of one man, ten horses and three

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camels and one man left footless through frost-bite – he returned to the site in the Lop desert and collected documents on wood and paper, in Kharosthi and Chinese, which eventually revealed that the site was that of Loulan, lost to sight and knowledge for hundreds of years.

Hedin's description of the site – 'Houses, towers, walls, gardens, roads . . . the habitat of Death and Silence' – and the finds – 'horizontal friezes with seated Buddhas, and vertical wooden posts with standing Buddhas . . . lotus and other flower ornaments . . . rags, fish-bones [illustrating the very different way of life before the desertification of the Lop lake], a few grains of wheat and rice' – was enhanced by his pencil sketches. He was a good amateur artist, publishing a number of volumes of drawings of places and people in Central Asia and Tibet which were informative and occasionally elegant.

In 1901 Hedin made his first attempt to reach Lhasa. Knowing how unlikely it was that the Tibetans would allow him to pass, he followed the example of the earlier Survey of India pundits and disguised himself as a Buriat Buddhist pilgrim. He was discovered and turned back, five days' journey short of his objective, which he afterwards described (sight unseen) as not worth the effort, anyway.<sup>15</sup>

He made a second attempt to reach Tibet in 1906, eschewing Lhasa in favour of a 'systematic scientific exploration of southern Tibet'.<sup>16</sup> But this was after the British had finally broken through Tibetan resistance with a military expedition led by Francis Younghusband, riding into Lhasa in 1904. Younghusband's expedition, which proceeded despite contradictory telegrams flying backwards and forwards between London, Delhi and Tibet, had been despatched by Lord Curzon, the viceroy of India, as a result of rumours of an agreement between Russia and China over Tibet. Though the Tibetans resisted Younghusband's advance, the conflict was hopelessly one-sided, for the Tibetans were poorly armed and no match for the British machine-guns 'Bubble and Squeak' which, at Guru, killed 628 Tibetans and left 222 wounded, with only 12 wounded soldiers on the British side.<sup>17</sup> Growing increasingly ambivalent about the expedition, Lord Curzon summarised three conflicting schools of thought, just before Younghusband entered Lhasa, as:

1. The extreme – Younghusband
2. The less extreme like myself who think that the treaty ought to be concluded, that it ought to provide for an agent somewhere, that we ought not to leave Tibet and possibly Lhasa until it is concluded, and who want to exercise some sort of influence in Tibet in the future.
3. Those who think that any treaty, even if we can conclude it, will be a farce . . . they want the expedition to be merely retributive.<sup>18</sup>

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The treaty that was signed between Tibet and Britain on 7 September 1904 provided for recognition of the frontier of Sikkim, open trade routes between India and Tibet and the razing of forts along the way, and the establishment of a British Agent in Gyantse with the right to visit Lhasa as he felt necessary. It also stipulated that Tibet should have no 'dealings of any kind with any foreign power without Britain's consent'.<sup>19</sup> The freedom of the British Agent to visit Lhasa, and the occupation of the Chumbi valley for seventy-five years, ostensibly to protect Indian traders, were both additions of 'the extreme - Younghusband'.

Lord Curzon admired Sven Hedin and encouraged him in his preparations for his second expedition to Tibet, even ordering that pundits be specially trained in Dehra Dun to assist him in his survey. After Curzon resigned in 1905, his successor, Lord Minto, also supported Hedin, believing that his survey would be useful to the British, but the new Secretary of State for India, Lord Morley, refused to allow Hedin into Tibet. Hedin wrote, 'My God, how I hated Morley . . . The English were worse than the Tibetans.'<sup>20</sup>

Already anti-English, Sven Hedin was in Sweden when the First World War broke out and found himself with 'an irrepressible desire to observe war at close quarters under fire. Studying modern war on the battlefield is a valuable experience.' Fresh from his rather destructive expeditions, he expressed the pious view that he might therefore learn to 'abhor war as such' and the irresponsibility of national leaders. He chose to admire the German armies in action. 'No-one but the Kaiser could grant permission for a foreigner to visit the German fronts' and permission was granted. Hedin spent time with Ludendorff, Hindenburg and von Bülow, and on the Italian front, and was widely criticised and satirised for his pro-German stance.<sup>21</sup>

In 1937, Hedin arrived in China once more, to reconnoitre a link for a Lufthansa route from Berlin to Urumqi and thence to Peking. He brought with him aviation experts, meteorologists, archaeologists and palaeontologists for a thorough scientific survey. In Peking, the expedition was met with hostility and informed that foreigners were not needed to explore China. Rumours spread that the air-route was only planned so that Silk Road treasures could be conveniently airfreighted out of China. Hedin argued for six months and finally had to agree to take ten Chinese scientists with him, re-name the trip the Sino-Swedish Expedition and refrain from taking anything out of the country. His expedition did manage to take some textile finds and manuscripts back to Sweden but they worked under very difficult conditions, having to arm themselves with rifles and revolvers because of local unrest. And true to Hedin's usual form, eight members of the expedition died from various causes.



Hedin's employment by Lufthansa was not surprising. He had never been a neutral Swede. Having supported Germany in the First World War, he was fêted by the Nazis in the Second World War (when he does appear to have been trying to do something for Finland).

In 1935, he accepted an invitation to make a lecture tour in Germany. When he was visiting Goering, his host 'suddenly pulled out his watch and exclaimed, "Donnerwetter, it is five to six and at six o'clock you have to be with Hitler!"' Hedin described Hitler as affable: 'He received me at the Reich Chancellery as though we had been old friends. He was tall and manly, a powerful and harmonious figure who held his head high, walked erect and moved with assurance and control.'

Hitler asked the seventy-year-old Hedin for ' "the key to your secret . . . Tell me what you do to keep so healthy and alert at your age?" "It is all very simple. I have spent a large part of my life among the high mountains of Asia and in their pure fresh air, and in the limitless deserts, where no microbes find their way. I have lived for years in tents both winter and summer, and I have ridden thousands of miles, which is the finest exercise you can have. If I ever felt tired I have

*Sven Hedin with two Mongolian postmen on an expedition to the region, c.1934*



*Sven Hedin travelling  
down river at Konche  
Darya, c.1937*

rested for a day and I have never – except for a matter of life or death – over-exerted myself. In Asia I never drank alcohol, and under civilised conditions only with the utmost moderation. I used to tire very quickly of tinned foods and preferred to live on the native fare and whatever the country had to offer. In the lowlands I preferred milk, eggs and rice, in Tibet I always took adequate supplies of flour and rice with me and had freshly-baked bread every morning. My rifleman kept the caravan supplied with game: antelopes, gazelle and birds, especially wild geese, wild ducks and partridge. But my staple diet in Tibet was always the thick yellow sour milk, and also the delicious sweet milk of the yak cows.” Hitler: “Yes, yogurt and sour milk is the best of all foods, healthy and good to eat. Anyone who has made yogurt his staple diet for twenty years will be as strong as a bear and live longer than other people.” ’

Hitler the vegetarian asked Hedin about the organisation of his expeditions and his map-making but ‘returned once more to the subject of diet, which evidently interested him particularly. He asked, “But a people that lives at such a terrific height and in such a hard, cold climate must surely eat a great deal of meat and fat?”

‘ “Yes, the rich nomads who own large flocks of sheep eat a great

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deal of meat: but they mix their diet with milk in various forms, and grain which they get from the Himalayan people in exchange for salt. In Central Tibet there are small tribes of huntsmen who hunt wild yak and trap antelopes. They live almost exclusively on meat. Even the horses are fed meat in districts where there is no grazing for them.”

‘“Are these tribes not liable to certain diseases brought on by their constant meat diet?”

‘“No, these huntsmen are strong and hardy and can stand up with ease to both the cold and the snowstorms. Of course I too ate meat in Tibet, though I preferred sour yak’s milk and bread. Here in Berlin I have a special predilection for *die fleischlosen Tage* [meatless days].”

‘He laughed at this remark. But by now I was beginning to fear that the reason he was digging his teeth so firmly into the Tibetan diet was to keep me off the subject of Finland.’<sup>22</sup>

Hedin’s open friendship with Nazi leaders, maintained despite his part-Jewish ancestry,<sup>23</sup> and his anti-British outbursts which dated back half a century, meant that he was stripped of the honours that had been piled upon him for his pioneering survey and map-making work: he lost a knighthood, honorary doctorates from Oxford and Cambridge universities and two gold medals awarded by the Royal Geographical Society in London. He died in 1952. His maps and surveys were still valued, for he had filled in much of the blank areas of Central Asia and formed a solid scientific contribution to the understanding of the lands and cultures crossed by the Silk Roads.



# The Silk Road

TWO THOUSAND YEARS  
IN THE HEART OF ASIA

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