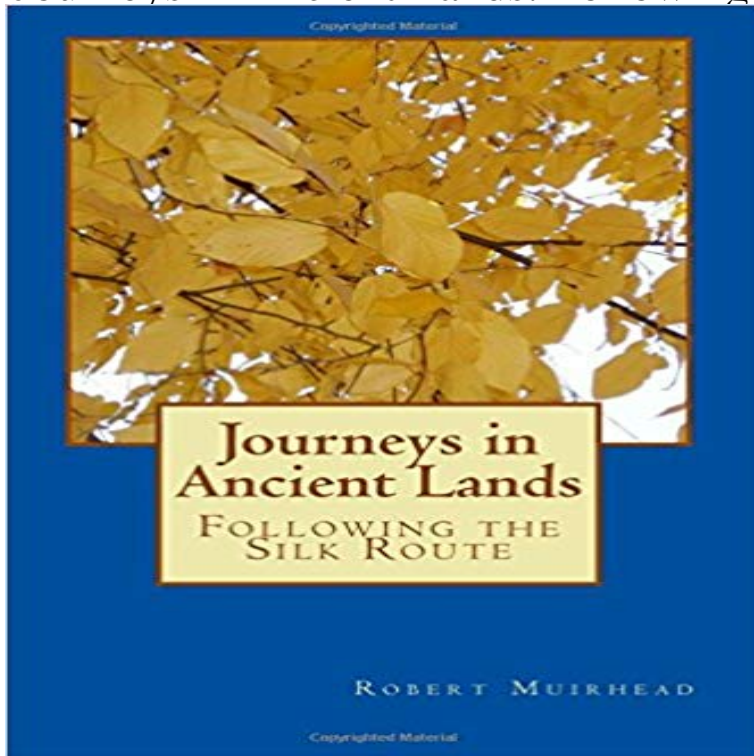


## Journeys in Ancient Lands: Following the Silk Route



Robert Muirhead travelled the ancient Silk Route through China to its many end-points in Iran, Lebanon, Syria, Egypt and the Arabian Peninsula. On these long journeys over a number of years he met peoples from diverse cultural and religious backgrounds struggling to maintain their traditional cultures and lifestyles. He saw the ruins and faded glories of the Roman Empire in many of those countries, and the rise of Islam and its enduring legacies. The mighty British Empire also exerted its own influence on the countries touched by the Silk Route and many of its legacies also remain, for good and ill. One of the lessons of history is that all things change. He saw graphic evidence of changing climate. In the empty desert of the Great Ubari Sand Sea in Libya he saw the remnants of once mighty lakes and striking cave paintings from times when the desert bloomed with life. Many of the major cities along the Silk Route are now choked with pollution. The once-great Aral Sea may disappear as the water that feeds it is diverted to other uses. We are wrecking our planet. Another lesson of history is that conflict and war have always existed between people and competing political and religious systems. War continues to wrack the Middle East. Minority ethnic and religious groups still face persecution. Robert Muirhead experienced security problems first-hand in Yemen. His final observation is a more hopeful one about the nature of people as individuals. Robert Muirhead encountered kindness and hospitality from people buffeted by great changes beyond their control. The goodness of ordinary people towards a stranger from another land is one of the more uplifting features of his remarkable journeys.

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