from: Life Along the Silk Road
by Susan Whitfield
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The Courtesan's Tale

Larishka, 839–890

Outside my door the dog barks,
I know what it is, my lover's here.
Off with my stockings, down the perfumed stairs,
My good-for-nothing lover is drunk tonight.
I help him into my silk-curtained bed.
Will he take off his silk gown? oh no, not he.
My lord is drunk tonight, and drunk let him be.
Better that than sleeping alone.

Lyrics by anonymous poetess to the tune 'The Drunken Young Lord', 10th century

LARISHKA'S MAIDSERVANT FOUND her sitting in front of the mirror, her hand raised but arrested in action, a small pekinese dog at her feet. The girl chided her mistress: her guests had already arrived and were expecting her. Larishka dipped a brush into a tiny pot of yellow orpiment pigment and carefully painted a crescent moon on her forehead to cover a scar. She was no longer young, but her thick make-up made it difficult to tell her age. The maidservant checked her mistress's hair ornaments and helped her finish dressing. Then Larishka took her lute from its case and carefully removed the silk wrapping. She fingered the strings and warmed her hands at a brazier before leaving the room to entertain her guests.

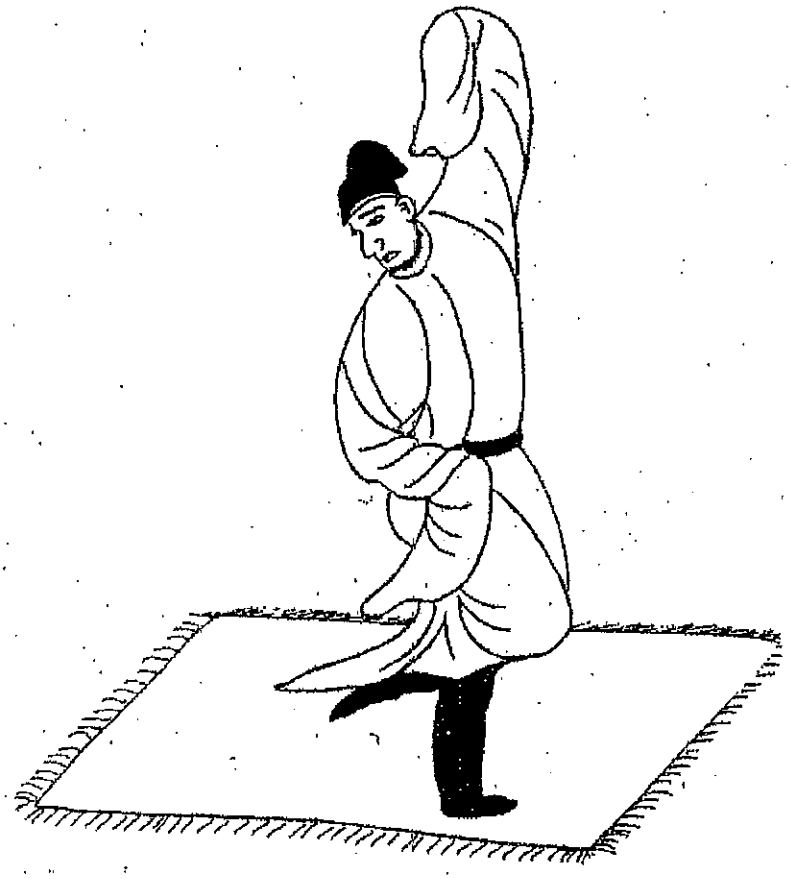
It was a domestic scene but in fact there was little in Larishka's life that could be called domestic. She had no husband or children; she knew little of housework or cooking; and only twice in her life had she had a place she considered her home. The first was her grandmother's house, and the second the place in which, in 890,

she now lived. Both were in the city of Kucha on the northern Silk Road.

Like her grandmother and mother before her, Larishka had been trained as an entertainer. From late childhood, she had attended music, singing and dancing classes but, having shown great early promise, she was trained to specialize in the Kuchean lute, a four-stringed instrument with a bent neck. She could perform solo pieces but more often played in an orchestra. This had three sections: percussion, strings, and woodwind, including flute and oboe. Most compositions were in three parts, with the mode of the piece established by the pitch of the woodwind in the prelude and developed in the second and third parts.

Kuchean music was famed along the Silk Road, from Samarkand to Chang'an. Chinese music at this time comprised twenty-eight modes, based largely on the tuning of the Kuchean lute. Skill on the small Kuchean drum, which rested on a stand, became *de rigueur* among emperors and noblemen in China. One of its practitioners was the eighth-century Chinese Tang dynasty emperor Xuanzong who, in addition to his six famous dancing horses, housed thirty thousand musicians and dancers in the imperial palace, many of them from Kucha or playing in a Kuchean style. Kuchean orchestras also accompanied singers in musical dramas. The titles of the songs they played reveal the wide geographical and cultural milieu from which they were drawn: 'The Three Platforms of the Turks', 'South India', 'Music of Kucha', 'Music for Releasing Goshawks' and 'Watching the Moon in Brahman Land'. Kuchean singers could sing in many languages, including Sanskrit, although scholars mocked their pronunciation.

Many of the musical dramas had originated in India, but as they were passed along the Silk Road they absorbed new elements and were adapted to suit local culture. From China they were passed on to Korea and Japan, where some are still performed today. They varied from traditional Indian legends and stories of the gods – the Hindu god Śiva featured in several – to depictions of everyday life, such as preparation for a polo game. Many were little more than burlesques: 'Sprinkling the Barbarians with Water' was accompanied by drums, lutes and harp, and was performed outside during the winter solstice by youths dressed only in masks In it the



Sogdian dancer, from a mural in a Chinese Tang dynasty tomb near Chang'an

dancers splashed cold water on each other and on unwary members of the audience.

Kuchean dancers were as renowned as their fellow musicians for their skill and were sent by the Kuchean court to Samarkand and Chang'an as representatives of the best of its culture. Kuchean dance was not unlike Indian dance, with its emphasis on hip movements, changes of gesture and expressive eyes, but it also adapted dance forms from other places, such as the famous Sodgian 'whirling' dance, performed by both men and women. Music, song and dance were Silk Road commodities, bought and sold like silver and jade. Itinerant dance troops from India, Burma, Cambodia and Sogdiana performed at both the royal court and the public marketplace in every Silk Road town, and their 'wares' were absorbed into the Silk Road repertoire.

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The walled city of Kucha lay on the northern Silk Road about half-way between Kashgar and Kocho, with the mighty peaks of the Tianshan rising to its north. Its circumference was about six miles, but its king ruled territory which extended 300 miles from east to west and 200 miles north to south and included rich mineral deposits of gold, copper, iron, lead and tin. Kucha itself was something of a maverick kingdom. Its people and language were Indo-European, and it maintained a loyalty to Hīnayāna Buddhism, even though Mahāyāna Buddhism was ubiquitous elsewhere in the Tarim basin. Kucha had many famous sons, among them one of the most prolific and respected translators of Buddhist sutras from Sanskrit into Chinese, the fourth-century monk Kumārajīva, and one of the most successful Chinese generals of the mid-eighth century, Koso Khan. He was actually Turkic rather than Kuchean but, like all Silk Road towns, Kucha had a cosmopolitan population.

Ever since Larishka could remember, Kucha had been under the jurisdiction of the Kocho Uighurs. The first Uighur refugees had arrived in Kocho to the east of Kucha when she was a baby, fleeing their capital, Karabalghasun, on the Orkhon river beyond the Tianshan as the Kirghiz armies approached. That was in the winter of 839–40. Over the following years many more Uighur refugees and soldiers fled from the Orkhon river south-east into China where they massed on the northern borders and decided to settle, much to the consternation of the Chinese government, who had long experience of the Uighurs' skill in warfare. Regarding the Uighurs as a threat to their security, the Chinese secretly prepared for war and, in 843, annihilated most of the Uighur army. Following this, at first hundreds and then thousands of Uighur refugee families crossed the Tianshan to join the existing refugee community in Kocho. Their numbers ensured their supremacy, although there were skirmishes with Tibetans and local soldiers loyal to China. Within a few years, they started to move westwards from Kocho, and the Uighur population in Kucha multiplied. By this time Larishka was a young girl and she remembered their arrival clearly. They travelled in huge convoys, with their traditional felt tents piled on camels and carriages, and everyone, young and ol ling small, shaggy ponies, their progress marked by a great clou of dust. The

Uighur soldiers were eager to carve out a new kingdom for themselves after losing their former lands to the Kirghiz, and they soon asserted control over a large area around Kocho and Kucha.

Kucha was used to garrisons of foreign soldiers. The Tibetans had been the most recent, and before that the city had been one of China's four western garrisons. The Kuchean royal family, who lived in a splendid palace faced with gold and jade, continued to rule even while offering allegiance to these foreign empires, and both Tibetan and Chinese families had made their homes in the city. A century before, it had been besieged by troops of the Abbasid Caliphate and Kuchean storytellers still recounted how the king sent an urgent request to China for military aid to save the city. The Chinese emperor, it was said, asked the advice of a famous Zen Buddhist monk: 'It is 4,000 miles from the capital. The troops will have to travel for eight months. How can I help them?' The monk replied that he should request the aid of the troops of Vaiśravaṇa, Heavenly King of the North, through the intercession of a foreign monk then resident in the capital. The foreign monk was duly summoned and he and the emperor prayed together. At the very same moment, or so it was said, enormous demons descended in a great fog on Kucha and the Arabs were driven away.

The story symbolized the traditional twin reliance of Kucha on Buddhism and foreign troops. Great statues of the Buddha, 90 feet high, flanking the western gate, and the numerous monasteries and stupas in the city itself, were a reminder of its debt to Buddhism. And while Chinese forces were stationed in the city, the Kuchean king was diligent in paying tribute to the emperor. He sent fabulous presents such as dragon horses, the offspring of mares and dragons who lived in one of the city's pools, and a stone dream-making pillow – all those sleeping on it would dream of incredible journeys over land and sea. Kucha was also a major supplier of sal ammoniac, an ingredient in many Chinese prescriptions for relieving congestion and used by metal smiths as a flux for soldering the gold mined in the Tianshan. Among the gifts of good were fresh fruits which grew profusely in Kucha's temperate climate – grapes, pomegranates, pears, peaches, plums and apricots. Kuchean almonds, too, were highly prized.

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Soldiers had been responsible for most of Larishka's travels and much of her livelihood in one way or another. They were the cause of her departure from Kucha, when she was little more than a girl. It was the start of the lunar new year which was marked by a great festival. Larishka and her troupe were to perform at a banquet that evening, but in the morning they went out on to the streets to be entertained themselves. The performers were as various as the goods traded on the Silk Road. Apart from watching musicians, dancers and singers – in whom Larishka had a professional interest – she could choose to be diverted in any number of ways. Child acrobats somersaulted between camels. Ex-soldiers made a living as strongmen. Monks performed illusions of self-disembowelment. There were puppet shows, storytellers, conjurers, tightrope walkers, performing midgets, jugglers, contortionists, and fire-eaters. But the big event of the day was held outside the city walls. It was traditional at the new year festival to select stallions, oxen and bull camels to fight one another, and the outcome of each encounter was thought to indicate the state of the respective herds over the following year. That evening, performing at court to assembled chiefs and local nobles, Larishka was noticed by a general from the Uighur headquarters in Kocho, several hundred miles to the east. Much taken with the girl, he demanded that she accompany him on his return to Kocho to entertain his guests. She had no choice but to go.

Larishka's journey to Kocho marked the beginning of her itinerant life. She now joined hundreds of other men and women, many of them captured in war and enslaved, who travelled in the soldiers' wake and carried out a variety of services for them. Inevitably, a large number of the women fell or were forced into prostitution. Larishka was recognized as a professional musician and joined the large band of entertainers who were called upon to perform at various celebrations, festivals and private events, but the general soon made it clear that he expected other services from her. He was the first of several such 'patrons'. In return for her services, musical and sexual, Larishka was kept in some comfort. She had a maidservant and ample supplies of fine cosmetics, silks and jewellery, and she rode about the town of Kocho on a richly caparisoned horse.

Only months after her arrival at Kocho she was on the move again. The general's division had been ordered east as reinforcements. Uighur troops quartered at Lapchuk, east of Kocho, were wont to raid the nearby city of Hami, seizing the inhabitants, their belongings and livestock. Hami was not the only city to suffer from such depredations. Farms around Dunhuang, further south, were frequently beset by Aza nomads from Koko-nor, who were allies of the Uighurs. Now Zhang Yizhao, a Chinese general, was preparing to retaliate. In 848, after raising a local army, General Zhang had driven the Tibetans from the city of Dunhuang and then from other towns to the west. Since their last emperor had been murdered by a Buddhist hermit in 842, Tibet had been in disarray and its soldiers retreated from the Silk Road garrisons into the safety of the Kunlun, there to fight on behalf of the various contenders for the Tibetan throne. Following his victories, General Zhang sent an envoy to the Chinese Tang emperor declaring his loyalty and in return he was honoured with the title of military governor to the 'Returning to Allegiance Army District'. It was now 856, and Uighur and Aza spies reported that General Zhang was preparing to march north to confront the Uighurs of Lapchuk.

Lapchuck lay three hundred and fifty miles north of Dunhuang but the Chinese loyalists under General Zhang made the journey in only a few days, surprising the combined Uighur and Aza forces outside the city, driving them back into the walled town and capturing vast herds of livestock. Larishka's patron was killed in the battle, but she did not have to fend for herself for long before she was claimed by an Aza chief. A few months later, when the Chinese troops had withdrawn south, Larishka started out for Koko-nor with the Aza, but near Dunhuang they were surprised by an armed posse of soldiers and men from the town. In the confusion that followed, Larishka was separated from the Aza and forced to return with the Chinese to Dunhuang.

In Dunhuang her music was greatly appreciated and she soon found a new patron among the Chinese general's commanders. She also often played her lute for other officers and one among them transcribed several of her works. She did not want for luxuries and was free to attend Buddhist services with her maidservant.

Chinese women's hairstyles, Tang dynasty (618–907)

She had always suffered from bad period pains but found a Kashmiri monk named Chudda in the town who was able to prescribe an effective herbal remedy, obtained on his recent pilgrimage to Wutai mountain. Both were strangers to Dunhuang, and they often exchanged stories about their homelands when her patron was away on one of General Zhang's many campaigns against the Tibetan forces still holding eastern Silk Road towns. She also heard that a local artist had used her as a model for his commissions at the cave temples outside the city where many murals depicted orchestras and dancers. At this time she wore her hair in the Chinese style then fashionable in Dunhuang, gathered into a long bun which fell in a lopsided fashion on the top of her head.

Her patron had quite a collection of textbooks on sex and erotic prints and often read her passages or showed her pictures describing new techniques and positions. One of his favourite books, *The Poetical Essay on Supreme Joy*, was written by the brother of a famous Chinese poet of the time and describe how the newly married couple would choose a romantic setting at a pagoda in the

moonlight or the library window in early spring – and sit together to examine the illustrations in a sexual handbook. A couch was prepared for them, surrounded by screens, and there follows a lengthy and explicit description of their foreplay, until 'the woman's expression changes, her voice falters, her hairpins fall out and her chignon is in disorder, tresses falling down at the side over her languid eyes. Her hair comb loosens and hangs down over her shoulder like a sickle moon.' The section ends: 'The joys of such moments shall not be forgotten until the end of their days.'

Despite her prayers to the bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara, who was supposed to help all those who cried out to him, Larishka was not fated to have a settled life. In 867 General Zhang, having finally driven the Tibetans from the city of Liangzhou, east of Dunhuang, decided to abdicate in favour of his nephew and retire home to China. He was accompanied by a retinue of hundreds, including Larishka, with a division of soldiers to guard them against raiders on the long journey east. In China Larishka's patron announced that he no longer required her services. Women were often passed on as gifts from one man to another, but Larishka's patron decided instead to sell her as a courtesan to a 'stepmother'. He had papers confirming that she was a prisoner-of-war, so there were no problems with the authorities. Larishka was still young and her skills as a musician ensured a good price. Thus her life changed yet again.

The city of Chang'an covered thirty square miles and had a population of nearly two million, but it was several years before Larishka saw much beyond the courtesan quarter, which lay just south-east of the imperial city, abutting on the Eastern Market. On the other side of the market lay an exclusive district containing the villas of high officials, luxurious hotels, Daoist and Confucian temples, and the palaces of provincial representatives. The stepmothers who ran the courtesan houses were themselves mostly former courtesans. Both the houses and the women in them were registered with the local authorities and paid taxes, receiving government protection in return. They were graded according to the services they offered and by the accomplishments of their girls.

At the lowest end of the scale were government-run brothels where the girls were prisoners-of-war, convicted criminals, or the wives and daughters of criminals. Clients visited them for sex and nothing more, although they sometimes came away with gonorrhoea or other sexually transmitted diseases (syphilis was not to appear in China for several centuries).

At the other end of the scale were houses offering the services of girls trained for several years to be 'mistresses of the table'. Apart from musical skills, they were well-versed in drinking songs and games, and were excellent conversationalists. They were hired as companions for banquets, and were expected to drink along with their patrons, although they had been taught ploys to avoid getting drunk themselves. Chewing cloves was supposed to be particularly effective. The girls came from all backgrounds, but most had been sold by impoverished parents or kidnapped as children. After entering the house they went through several years of rigorous training. The best were adept at composing poetry and were paid for their cultural rather than their sexual skills: the going rate was 16,000 cash per evening.

Stories abounded about legendary girls. One was so proficient in the art of perfuming herself, it was said, that when she went out of doors, 'bees and butterflies followed her, in love with her fragrance'. Another girl had been fed with perfumes as a child and by the time she was grown her body was saturated with a natural fragrance. This story reminded Larishka of the gecko lizards, so-called 'palace warders'. Her stepmother told her of the geckoes that were bred at the imperial palace and fed on cinnabar until its redness permeated their bodies. They were then killed, and their bodies were pounded into a paste which was used to mark the emperor's concubines. The marks of the gecko, tradition said, only disappeared when the concubine had sex.

Larishka was no more free than the palace concubines. Her stepmother was her warden, without whom she was not initially allowed out unless accompanied by a servant. She was too old to be trained in the refined and subtle arts of the hostess and drinking companion, and started to be sold almost immediately on the basis of her musical skills. But it was impossible to refuse the advances of the most assiduous and generous patrons: this would

have displeased her stepmother and made her position in the house uncomfortable. Larishka had no money of her own and relied on her stepmother for everything: food, clothes, cosmetics, perfumes and musical instruments. Some women found men to redeem them and set them up as concubines, but hardly any achieved a position as principal wife and most were discarded when they grew old.

While she was in Chang'an, Larishka heard the other girls talk of one of the most famous Chang'an courtesans. Originally from a poor family she was able to support herself, without a stepmother, on what her clients gave her for composing poetry. Then she moved out of the city to a lover's home, but his principal wife was jealous and there were frequent rows between the women. During their many subsequent separations, the courtesan composed sad and passionate poems for her lover:

The mountain road is steep, the stone path dangerous,
But it is not the road that pains me, but my love for you.
Hearing the tinkling of the breaking ice, I think of your lovely voice,
The snow on the far mountain peaks reminds me of your pale face.
Don't listen to vulgar songs, don't drink the spring wine.
Don't invite leisurely guests for long nights of chess.
Remember our sworn bond of love that should last for ever,
Even if our living together tarries to be restored.
Although I hate this lonely trek, alone on a winter's day,
My hope is at last to see you again when the full moon is in the sky.
Separated from you, what can I offer?
Only this one poem, stained with bright tears.

Eventually she had to leave her lover for good, and took up residence in a Daoist nunnery, although this did little to cramp her style. Her parties were renowned and all the most elegant young scholars and officials were invited, with the religious authorities, it was rumoured, getting rich on the profits of sales of wine and food to the guests. But when she was arrested on charges of beating her

maidservant to death, none came to her aid. Larishka never knew whether the charge was true. Some people said that the courtesan had been framed by resentful creditors. In any case, she was tried and convicted of murder, for which the penalty was execution. The sentence was carried out in 871.

Although Larishka stayed in Chang'an for nearly two decades, she never considered it her home, despite having her own suite of rooms, a maidservant and a pet lapdog. The house she lived in was the stepmother's: she was an employee. She tried to find a patron who would take her as his concubine and establish her in a separate residence, but such men were few. There were some who continued to appreciate her for her skill on the lute, but many more rejected her and she grew old in this house. Each year she had to spend longer over her make-up to hide the signs of age, for her green eyes and light hair alone were no longer sufficient to assure her attention. Larishka powdered her face, taking care to cover the fine wrinkles around her eyes and mouth. It was the fashion among high-class women to apply massicot, yellow lead, to the forehead, and courtesans followed their example. She used an indigo stick to paint her eyelids and make a small beauty mark on her cheek. Her eyebrows were plucked and she drew two marks, like the wings of a butterfly, high on her forehead with the indigo stick. Her lipstick was made from onycha, blended with wax and the ashes of fragrant fruits and flowers. Her nails were painted with an extract of balsam mixed with alum. Finally, she applied various scents to her body. Her clothes were perfumed with sweet basil, and a small, delicately embroidered silk-gauze bag which hung from her waist contained other fragrant herbs and flowers. Only after this was she ready to meet a client.

As her earning powers decreased, Larishka spent more and more time in the house training the younger girls and chatting to her stepmother, with the aim of being appointed as her successor. She was extremely fond of her pupils and one girl in particular showed unusual aptitude at the lute. Kuchean music was no longer so popular in China: like so much else imported from the Silk Road, it had become unfashionable as the Chinese sought to rediscover

and promote home-grown traditions in a time of political disintegration. Nevertheless, the taverns and restaurants were full of western girls:

> The western courtesan with features like a flower
> Stands by the wine warmer and laughs with the breath of spring.
> Dancing in a dress of sheer silk gauze, she asks
> 'You won't be going anywhere, sir, surely not before you are drunk?'

In the autumn of 880 rumours circulated in the city that a group of rebels were advancing towards the capital from the south. There had been periodic rebellions there for many years. All had either petered out or had eventually been suppressed by government troops, but each campaign had further drained the already depleted exchequer, and each subsequent increase in taxes compounded popular discontent. Farmers forced into bankruptcy had nothing to lose by joining rebel bands. However, the government had not been seriously threatened by a rebellion since that of Rokhshan a hundred years earlier.

The residents of Chang'an were used to stories about rebellions – this particular one had been rumbling on since 874 – but they believed that the army would not allow the rebels to enter the imperial city and so remained sanguine even when it was reported that they were just beyond the final pass leading to the city. Unfortunately, the army sent to halt their advance was of little use. The troops stationed in the capital were drawn from the sons of the wealthy, but more often than not their fathers bought their sons out of military service, paying anyone, including the sick, willing to take their place. Consequently, this motley army was routed by the rebels who then marched on the city.

It was late afternoon when the advance guard arrived. The emperor and several of his wives had secretly fled the night before. Soldiers and residents alike now took the opportunity to loot the imperial treasuries and offered no resistance to the rebels. One of the ge[illegible]s even went out of the city gates to greet the rebel commande[illegible]e knew that this man might well become the next

emperor and it was therefore important to impress him. The rebel commander was magnanimous in victory, declaring that his objective in taking up arms had been to benefit the common people, and the inhabitants of Chang'an welcomed him and his soldiers. Nevertheless, many people stayed barricaded indoors. Their fears were not unfounded. Discipline could not be maintained and the rebel soldiers, jubilant at their victory, sacked the city. Larishka and her fellow courtesans escaped lightly, since the rebels were chiefly interested in the wealthy and the influential, but they did not dare go out on the streets. Three days later the rebel leader declared himself emperor of a new dynasty.

The rebel soldiers soon grew tried of plunder and their generals reasserted control. By May 881 things were almost back to normal, the courtesans being kept especially busy with all the soldiers in town. But just as they were starting to get used to the new regime, the soldiers withdrew. Imperial forces had regrouped and were advancing from the west. Once more the city was invaded by soldiers, and these were no more disciplined than their rebel counterparts. Again the residents barricaded themselves in their homes and waited for the worst.

Larishka would always remember the day the rebels marched back into the city to confront the imperial troops. When soldiers broke into the house she did not know which side they were on, such was the confusion. Only later did she learn that they were rebels. To her it made no difference. Having forced the imperial army out of the city, the rebels now declared war on the city's residents for having welcomed the imperial troops in the first place. The rebel commander ordered his forces to 'wash out the city', but it was washed with blood rather than water.

Larishka was with the other girls and servants in an upstairs room. The sound of metal drums, galloping hooves, shouts and screams grew louder. The women held each other, none daring to speak of what was happening. Men came bursting into the room, swords drawn and blood on their faces. The stepmother and older servants were killed immediately, while the soldiers dragged the girls from each other's grasp and raped them in turn on the matted floor. Larishka had told the youngest to hide in a cupboard, but one of the soldiers heard her screaming. When Larishka saw him

open the cupboard, she bit the man on top of her and, as he withdrew his hand in pain, she wriggled free and threw herself in front of the young girl. Enraged, the soldier raised his sword and struck her. When she regained consciousness, she saw the young girl lying beside her, her clothes torn off, her body slashed and her head severed. The soldiers had gone. The rest of her companions and her dog were also dead.

Larishka did not stop for anything. Even her lute was left behind. She ran from alley to alley, cowering in doorways when she heard the approach of soldiers, until she reached the western gate of the city. Her only concern was to get as far away as possible from the scene of carnage. She was in open countryside before she stopped. It was night, and when she looked back she could see only the flames of the burning city in the distance. It was her last view of Chang'an.

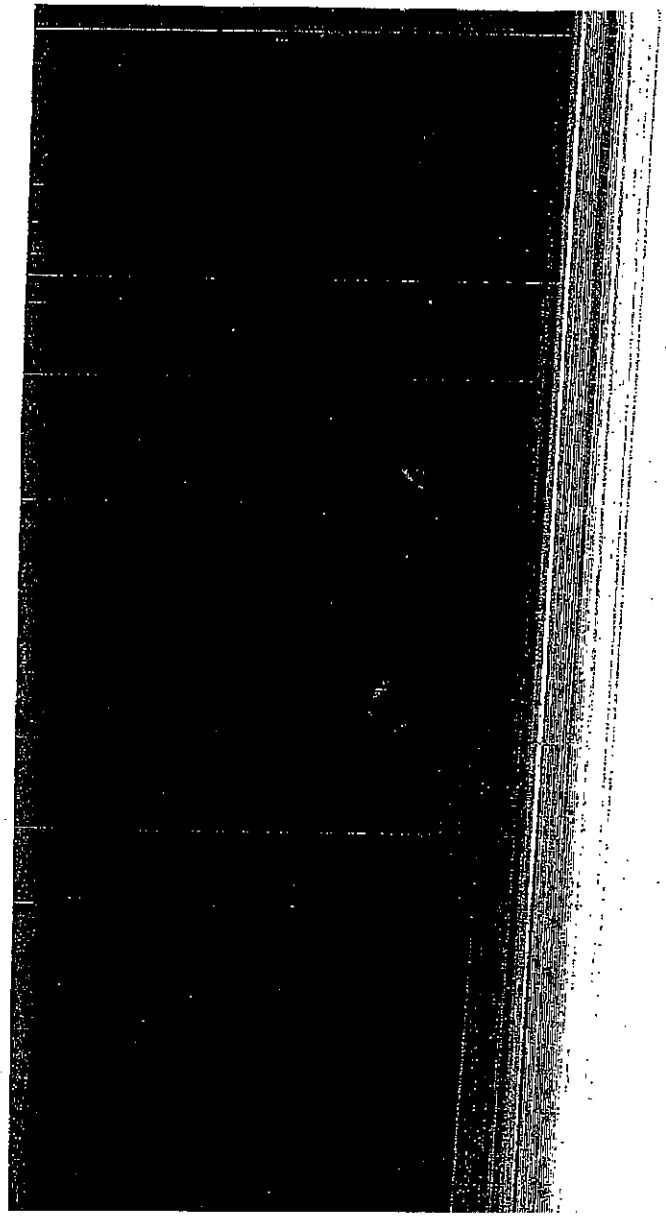
Larishka fled west, towards her old home in Kucha. There were many other refugees on the move and the guards at the Chinese border post on the edge of the desert did not try to stop them: their loyalty to the emperor was wearing thin. Most of them had in any case been recalled to help fight the rebels, leaving only a small force behind, but even so the emperor did not succeed in retaking Chang'an until he enlisted the help of the Shatou Turks. That was in 883, but the rebel leader was not cornered until the summer of the following year, far to the east, where he cut his own throat to evade capture. The Chinese emperor returned only briefly to Chang'an before fleeing again from another group of rebels, and during this time many of China's military governors took advantage of the lack of control at the centre to establish *de facto* autonomous fiefdoms. When some semblance of order was finally restored in 886, the capital lay in ruins. The emperor installed himself in a town to its west where he died, aged only twenty-seven, in 888. It was now only a matter of time before the Tang dynasty fell: what is surprising is that it survived until 907, after which the empire was once again divided into a number of kingdoms. It was only reunited in 960 with the advent of the Song dynasty.

Beyond the border Larishka joined a group of merchants who, hearing of the troubles, had decided not to proceed to China and

Musicians on a bullock cart, detail of a painting on silk from Dunhuang

were on their way back along the Silk Road. She had to beg for food and take whatever transport was offered, but after several months she reached Kucha safely. There she found family and friends to help her, and she established a house of her own. Larishka had left Kucha as a young woman in 855, twenty-six years before, and when she returned at the end of the century, it was to see even more signs of Uighur influence: in dress, art, religion, and culture, as well as in administration. By now the Uighur kaghan had established his summer capital at Kocho and a winter residence at Beshbaliq, north of the Tianshan. His jurisdiction extended even beyond Kucha. Previously Kuchean orchestras had always performed at regal and official ceremonies, but now Uighur military bands played loud, raucous music on their horns, drums and gongs.

Larishka's girls were popular with the Uighur soldiers, but Larishka herself was often called upon to play Kuchean songs by



older residents who preferred traditional music. She never spoke of the rebels, but she could not forget that night Chang'an. Unlike the scar on her forehead, her memories did not fade. Her maidservant often found her sitting lost in thought, tears rolling down her cheeks.