



Donors of Longmen: Faith, Politics, and Patronage in Medieval Chinese Buddhist Sculpture

Amy McNair

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"Donors of Longmen" is the first work in a Western language to re-create the history of the Longmen Grottoes, one of China's great stone sculpture treasure houses. Longmen, a UNESCO World Heritage site located near the old capital of Luoyang in modern Henan Province, consists of thousands of ancient cave chapels and shrines containing Buddhist icons of all sizes that were carved into the towering limestone cliffs from the fifth to the eighth centuries. Beyond its superb sculpture, Longmen also preserves thousands of engraved dedicatory inscriptions by its donors, who included emperors and empresses, aristocrats, court eunuchs, artisans, monks, nuns, lay societies, female palace officials, male civil and military officials, and ordinary lay believers. Based on wide reading of both Asian and Western-language scholarship and careful analysis of the architecture, epigraphy, and iconography of the site, Amy McNair provides a rich and detailed examination of the dynamics of faith, politics, and money at Longmen, beginning with the inception of the site at Guyang Grotto in 493 and concluding with the last major dated project, the forty-eight Amitabhas added to the Great Vairocana Image Shrine in 730. Through her sensitive and well-informed exploration of Longmen's huge repository of remarkable early sculpture, McNair gives voice to a wide array of medieval believers, many of them traditionally excluded from history. Hers will be the definitive work on Longmen for years to come.



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