



THE LOST BUDDHAS

CHINESE BUDDHIST SCULPTURE FROM QINGZHOU

佛像遺珍：青州出土佛教石刻造像

EDMUND CAPON • LIU YANG

ART
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SPONSORS MESSAGE

In sponsoring *The lost Buddhas* exhibition, we are pleased that we have helped bring such a majestic array of sculpture from China to Sydney, but also feel a keen realisation of how little we in Australia know about the religious and artistic traditions of Asia. Most Australians schooled in the 1960s and 1970s were taught, and possibly can recall, that the year 1066 was important because Harold – then King of England – was shot in the eye by a Norman archer and died at the Battle of Hastings. The Norman conquest of England was effectively complete. Whilst this was undoubtedly an important historical event, we never learnt whether any similarly dramatic event occurred in Song dynasty China. Nor were we taught when, or how, Buddhism spread eastwards from India to China, Korea and Japan, let alone the extent of the artistic representation of the image of Buddha in those countries. No doubt the teaching of history deals more with Asia nowadays, but we are proud to make a small contribution by working with the Art Gallery of New South Wales to host this exhibition.

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TAIWAN

MACAU

HONG KONG

HAINAN



LONGXING TEMPLE AND THE DISCOVERY OF THE QINGZHOU SCULPTURE HOARD

Lukas Nickel

The town of Qingzhou in Shandong province is located in what was once the state of Qi, not far from its capital, Linzi. The large expanse of flat land to the north-west of the town is still strewn with numerous tomb mounds from the 1st millennium BCE, testifying to the former wealth and importance of the region. The fertile land around the town is traversed by a set of rivers, which rise in the almost barren mountains to the south and the west. Only five kilometres from the edge of the town, these highlands contain the Buddhist cave temples of Yunmenshan and Tuoshan as well as the quarries that supplied the limestone for the sculptures in the temples in Qingzhou and its surroundings.

Buddhism first flourished in Shandong in the late 5th and 6th centuries. For many years our knowledge of the local monastic communities and the piety of lay believers was drawn largely from a few passages in documents and scattered votive inscriptions; wooden temple buildings vanished long ago, while wall paintings and images made of wood, clay and other perishable materials are now lost. Since the 1970s archaeological excavations have unearthed numerous Buddhist sculptures in Shandong, yet not until the discovery of the sculpture hoard at Qingzhou did scholars begin to concern themselves seriously with these material remains which illustrate the first steps of Buddhist culture in the region.

In October 1996 construction workers levelling the sports field of the Shefan primary school in Qingzhou discovered a pit filled to the brim with broken Buddhist sculptures. The proximity of the school to the local museum saved the sculptures from illegal excavation and theft. The staff of Qingzhou Municipal Museum had the site protected and immediately set about salvaging the statues. Within ten days, all the figures had been removed to a room in the museum. Although regrettable from an archaeological point of view, this haste was not unfounded for in recent years many figures from comparable sites in the area have found their way onto the international art market and into Chinese and foreign collections, divorced from their historical context.

Apart from the outstanding artistic quality of its contents, the value of the Qingzhou hoard lies in the wealth of information these sculptures yield about their original purpose, their destruction and the circumstances of their burial. The pit in which they were discovered, measuring approximately 9 x 7 metres in area and 2 metres in depth, lay only 1.5 metres below the surface. Roughly in the middle of the south wall, halfway up, was a small earth ramp, which presumably facilitated the

STELE WITH A BUDDHA & TWO BODHISATTVAS

貼金彩繪石雕佛三尊立像

Eastern Wei (534–50)
limestone, 310 x 180 x 35 cm

The Buddhist stelae excavated from the Longxing Temple hoard are diverse not only in style and iconography but also in scale. In contrast to the smallest stela, which is only about 50cm high, this example is monumental in concept. Compared to the bodhisattvas, the Buddha appears massive. His face is subtly modelled with divine reverence; his hands, now missing, were likely to have been in *abhaya mudra* (the gesture of dispelling fear) and *varada mudra* (the gesture of munificence).

Stylistically, the figures show a transitional character. The full faces, solid torsos and robes with minimal linear folds suggest a new interest in the body, but the triadic arrangement, dragon/lotus pedestals and *apsaras* edging the boundary of the mandorla are still caught in the Northern Wei formula.

The serenity of the triad forms a sharp contrast with the vigorous dragons writhing at the bottom, whose scaleless bodies are magnificently embellished with a spiral-pattern relief. The briskly fluttering ribbons around the soaring *apsaras* combine with the pointed mandorla to create a rushing sensation as though an earthly breeze was sweeping everything towards heaven.

At the top of the mandorla, supported by the *apsaras*, is a small domed *ta* 塔 or stupa, a reduced version of the venerated four-sided structures commonly built in Shandong during the Northern dynasties, which were used to store Buddhist relics and sacred writings.¹³ Their frequent appearance on Buddhist stelae may be linked to the popular Lotus sutra, a section of which, called the 'Vision of the Jewelled Pagoda', describes how Shakyamuni Buddha was

preaching the message of this sutra when a jewelled stupa belonging to Prabhutaratna Buddha, who had already entered parinirvana, rose up into the sky. Prabhutaratna himself was seated in it, and had returned to hear Shakyamuni explain the dharma. He invited Shakyamuni to join him, and they shared the same seat. The extreme popularity of the Lotus sutra gave rise to a new image of two Buddhas seated side by side, which is found in some other sculptures from the Longxing Temple hoard.¹⁴ A similar configuration is also seen on two fragmented mandorla from the late Northern Wei or early Eastern Wei, all from the Qingzhou area and now in the collection of the Poly Art Museum.¹⁵ There are more examples of such formulae found in Shandong. Two fragments from the top of stelae excavated from the Xingguo Temple site in Qingzhou each bear a four-sided stupa – two Buddhas are seated within niches in two sides of the stupa.¹⁶ One early sculpture in Fujii Yurinkan, Kyoto, a bronze altarpiece dated 522, bears a stupa with a pair of enshrined Buddhas. In imagery, the prototype of such design can be found in Buddhist caves of the Northern Wei period at Yungang and Longmen, adorning the niche head. However, a more direct influence may have come from the area around Ye (in modern Linzhang, Hebei province), the capital of Northern Qi in the neighbouring province of Hebei, where the twin Buddhas are seen in cave temples and on stelae.

Despite being damaged, this sculpture emits a pervasive sense of glory, making it one of the most powerful devotional images among all the works created during the Northern dynasties in Shandong.







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STANDING FIGURE OF A BUDDHA

貼金彩繪石雕佛立像

Northern Qi (550–77)
limestone, 115 x 30 x 23 cm

The most outstanding features of Qingzhou Buddhist images were their remarkable three-dimensional sculptural form and the distinctive rendering of their unlined garments. The visual impact of both was originally enhanced by coloured paint. Today, in most extant examples the pigment has flaked off or deteriorated to such a degree that the pieces appear unpainted. The well-preserved painting on this figure's garments makes it rare.

On the white priming a network of vertical and horizontal bands in green and gold defines oblong patches, which are filled with vermilion pigment. The bands themselves are bordered by thin gilt stripes. Although such patterns had already appeared on stele figures of the Northern and Eastern Wei periods, they are perfectly suited to the closely fitted, smoothly modelled style of garment that developed in the Northern Qi. The quality of the painting varies, yet in many examples, including this one, the patchwork follows the gentle curves of the thin, clinging garments in a convincing manner.

The design of such patchwork is not purely decorative; rather, it is rooted in Buddhist doctrine. It is a pictorial representation of the concept of *futian* 福田 or 'field of

merit' (*puṇa-kṣetra* in Sanskrit or *puñña-kkhetta* in Pali), where benefactors by offering gifts, hospitality, offerings and respect to a *sangha* 僧伽 or holy person can bring benefits to themselves. The patchwork monastic garment was therefore known as *futianyi* 福田衣 or 'garment of the field of merit': the patchwork pattern resembles a rice field; the benefactor is like a farmer who ploughs then gains a harvest.

Although this concept was part of Chinese Buddhist philosophy during the Northern dynasties, it was not common to see the patchwork 'field' pattern represented on monastic garments in religious art in many areas.

This standing Buddha was not from the Longxing Temple hoard – it was excavated in 1987 from another location in the same town, east of the Longxing Temple site – however, stylistically it belongs to the same group of Buddha images carved in this region, which share many parallels with the Sarnath school.

ICONOGRAPHY

The 32 physical signs of the Buddha

- 1 He has feet with level soles
- 2 He has the mark of a thousand-spoked wheel on the soles of his feet
- 3 His heels are broad, round and smooth
- 4 He has long fingers and toes
- 5 His hands and feet are soft-skinned
- 6 He has net-like lines on his palms and soles
- 7 He has high insteps
- 8 He has taut calf muscles like an antelope
- 9 He can touch his knees with the palms of his hands without bending
- 10 His sexual organs are retracted
- 11 His skin is the colour of gold
- 12 His skin is so fine that no dust can attach to it
- 13 His body hairs are separate, with one hair per pore
- 14 His body hair is blue-black
- 15 He has a firm and erect posture
- 16 He has the seven convexities of the flesh
- 17 He has an immense torso, like that of a lion
- 18 The furrow between his shoulders is filled in
- 19 The distance from hand-to-hand and head-to-toe is equal
- 20 His neck is round and smooth
- 21 He has sensitive tastebuds
- 22 His jaw is like a lion's
- 23 He has 40 teeth (humans generally have 32)
- 24 His teeth are evenly spaced
- 25 His teeth are without gaps in-between
- 26 His teeth are white
- 27 He has a large, long tongue
- 28 His voice is deep, resonant, pure and strong
- 29 His eyes are very (sapphire) blue
- 30 He has eyelashes like an ox
- 31 He has a soft white wisp of hair in the centre of his brow (the *urna*)
- 32 His head is like a royal turban (the *ushnisa*)

The 32 physical signs of the Buddha – along with a further 80 minor, or auspicious, features – are listed in various Buddhist texts or scriptures but vary considerably among sources

cat no 12



pagoda

apsara

musician apsara

devotee apsara

aureole (head nimbus)

ushnisha

lotus halo

hair clip

necklace

body nimbus

undergarment

abhaya mudra
(gesture of dispelling fear)

varada mudra
(gesture of munificence)

mantle

lower garment

dragon

lotus pedestal