

**Archaeological Evidence
from the ‘Buddhist Period’ in the Longmen Area**

Situated 13 km S of Luoyang, the Longmen gorge (N 34°33' / E 112°28') is renowned for its large complex of Buddhist caves, hewn out of two limestone cliffs facing the Yi river 伊水 (pl. I) between the end of the 5th and the end of the 11th century. The river flows northward through the defile, from the southern Yichuan 伊川 plain and toward the Luoyang basin to the north. The gorge is located at the easternmost end of the Qinling 秦岭 range, which is the natural border of the Luoyang territory to the S – the Xishan 西山 (Western Mountain) or Longmenshan 龍門山 (Longmen Mountain) to the W (307.6 m asl) and the Dongshan 東山 (Eastern Mountain) or Xiangshan 香山 (Perfumed Mountain) to the E (371.8 m asl). Over the past decades, other sites have been discovered in this area, especially near the caves, but few of them have been the object of systematic investigation. A notable exception is the excavation of the Fengxiansi 奉先寺 Monastery, located at the southern feet of the Xishan, carried out by a Chinese-Italian team (pl. II).¹

This paper aims to present archaeological evidence from the monastic settlements of the Longmen area in a chronological order. Our discussion will be limited to evidence from the ‘Buddhist’ period, comprising the period from the 6th century to the Tang apogee of the 7th and 8th centuries and the slow decline of the 9th-11th centuries. Due to the fragmentary nature of materials,

¹ The project, directed by Giovanni Verardi and Liu Jinglong, was started in 1997 by Naples University ‘L’Orientale’ in collaboration with IsIAO (Rome), the Longmen Grottoes Academy and other archaeological institutions in Luoyang. The excavation project goes back to Antonio Forte, author of a far-sighted article on the history and importance of the Da Fengxiansi (Forte 1996). For the excavations’ preliminary results, cf. Verardi, Liu Jinglong (1998); Verardi (2001); Fengxiansi (2001); Forte (2003). The sculptures retrieved from the site were exhibited in Belgium (Van Alphen 2001) and Japan (Miho 2001), and have been published by Testa (2002). Visconti (2004) discussed the non-ceramic finds of the Fengxiansi in her PhD dissertation. The final excavation report will include the results of the two last excavation campaigns (2001 and 2002), of which a brief summary is given in Verardi (2005).

contrasting evidence in sources and considerable gaps in material evidence, only a limited discussion is possible at present.² An area of about 10 km in diameter, with the Fengxiansi at its centre, has been surveyed and studied (fig. 1). Beyond that area, evidence is more sporadic and the nature of structures and finds changes considerably.

The question of the famous ‘Ten Monasteries’ of Longmen has been summarized by Testa (1998), her paper being the starting point for our discussion.

1. Early Period (493-618)

The year 493, preceding the formal transfer of the Northern Wei’s capital from Datong 大同 to Luoyang, is usually considered the starting point for the creation of caves at Longmen (Watson 1981: 135, 563; Wen Yucheng 1991: 174).³ The large imperial caves and small niches of the Wei period, all grouped on the Xishan, make up a third of all cave temples. As we know from various sources, patronage of other Buddhist monuments, besides the caves, is documented under the Wei (*Henanfu zhi* 75.10b-11a; *Jiu Luo zhi*, as quoted in *Luoyangxian zhi* 22.13-14).⁴ Sources mention the existence of eight to ten monasteries (Testa 1998: 452, n. 6), but no material evidence has yet been found.⁵ No pre-Tang structures have been observed in the Fengxiansi either, but they may possibly lie below the excavated Tang-Song floor level.⁶

For the end of the Northern Dynasties, only two pieces of evidence have been found in the study area; these are stelae sculpted in high relief with Buddhist images, grouped into niches at various levels on the front and sides. The back is occupied by a dedication and a list of donors.

² This paper is the result of research based on fieldwork and on the examination of historical and epigraphic sources, as well as modern literature on the subject (Guglielminotti Trivel 2004; 2005). Fieldwork included a visit to the most prominent remains in the study area and was supported by aerial photographs, GPS survey and topographic mapping. The archaeological map presented here is the result of the author’s work, being possibly the first attempt to apply such scientific methods to the Longmen area. The work carried out by the author in his capacity as a member of the Chinese-Italian Archaeological Mission to Luoyang was particularly helpful in understanding contexts and materials.

³ There are still conflicting opinions on the precise date of the first sculptural activity at Longmen, varying from AD 478 to 498. In this paper I follow Longmen (1998: I, 71).

⁴ The unabridged edition of *Jiu Luo zhi* 舊洛志 [Ancient Chronicles of Luoyang], completed by Wu Panlong 武攀龍 in 1658, is lost.

⁵ The buildings were most probably made of wood, and the signs of their presence (pounded earth foundations, tiles, bricks, etc.) are sometimes too scant to be noticed by means of ground surface surveys only.

⁶ Due to Chinese regulations on archaeological practice, in the course of the excavation campaign it was impossible to investigate the stratigraphic sequence below the pavement.

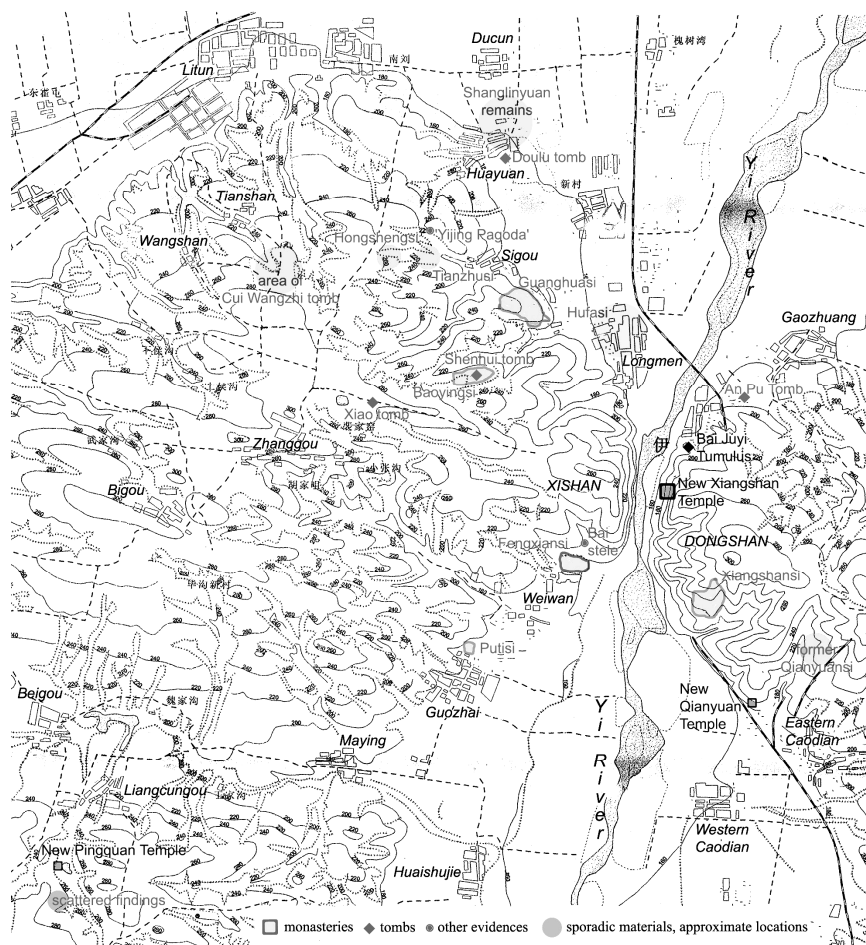


Fig. 1 – Archaeological map of the Longmen area.
(Drawing by the author on a topographic map 1:20000).

The first, known as Changyue 常岳 stele (104×85×22 cm), was found in Zhaiquan 翟泉, Mengjin County 孟津縣 (North of Luoyang),⁷ and is now kept in the Henan Provincial Museum in Zhengzhou.⁸ The content of its long inscription is the dedication by the Buddhist disciple Changyue, whose deed

⁷ The Cunge 存古閣 (Pavilion to Store the Antics), the first collection of antiquarian remains in the Luoyang area, was founded here in 1840 (Feng Wuxian 1994: 17). During the last century, the materials were scattered in various museums and institutions of Henan.

⁸ The stele is described in many texts, such as Luoyang (1984: 44, 52) and LYSZ (1995: 306-7). For a complete transcription, see Gong Dazhong (1996: 306). Rubbings are published in Luoyang (1984: figs. 1, 2) and photographs in Luoyang (1984: pl. IV, figs. 1, 21) and LYSZ (1995: fig. 31).

was supported by more than one hundred donors: «Following the left side of Yique 伊阙 [another name for the Longmen gorge], to the west of a steep ridge, they sculpted a holy image». The inscription is not dated, but the reliefs are attributable stylistically to the end of the Northern Wei. Since the text mentions the tumulus of Emperor Xiaoming 孝明 (d. 528), the stele must have been sculpted and engraved between 528 and 534 (Feng Wuxian 1994: 18).

The second (pl. IIIa), known as Zhao Qingzu 趙慶祖 stele (130×69×19 cm), is dated year 5 Tianbao 天寶 of the Northern Qi 北齊 (554). The site of its finding is unknown (Luoyang 1984: 47, 52; Luoyang 2000: 63).⁹ In 1980 it was brought to the Ancient Art Museum of Guanlin 關林, between Longmen and Luoyang. In this case, too, information about its original location is contained in the votive inscription, which, after the list of 172 donors and date, states that «in the [?]¹⁰ village of Longmen [they] erected a divine image». The two stelae must have come from a monastery compound, probably located – as suggested by the first inscription – on the Eastern Mountain of Longmen.

Even less is known of the Longmen area in the second half of the 6th century, during the restless years of war between the end of the Northern Dynasties and the Sui reunification. As is well known, Emperor Yangdi 煬帝 (r. 604-617) had a new Eastern Capital (Dongdu 東都) built in Luoyang at the beginning of his reign. A large part of the Outer City, unlike all preceding capitals, stretched south of the Luo River 洛河 (Cui Jingyi *et al.* 1985: pls. 56-60). Longmen was only 8 km away from the southern gates of the capital, a fact that was to change its history. Even though the urban centre was closer, sculptural activity was very limited initially, and we have no knowledge, either from written or material sources, of monastic establishments at the time.

The first burials found in the study area date from the end of the Sui dynasty.¹¹ I managed to trace two epitaphs, both dated AD 613 (Daye 大業 9). The first¹² is in memory of the military counsellor Wei Tong 衛侗, and was discovered in 2001 near the present-day Guanghua Temple 廣化寺 {about 2.3 km N};¹³ the second was set in the tomb of Lady Wang 王氏, wife of Ya 衙 an assistant to the Directorate for Constructions, and comes from an unknown

⁹ For a complete transcription, see Gong Dazhong (1996: 308-9); rubbing in Luoyang (1984: figs. 6-9); photographs in Luoyang (1984: pl. IV, fig. 4; 2000: 63).

¹⁰ The character is difficult to read: Feng Wuxian (1994: 72) transcribes it as *zhao* 趙.

¹¹ Tombs of the Western and Eastern Han (206 B.C.-AD 220), or slightly later, are documented (Guglielminotti Trivel 2004: 124), and two Han tombs were also excavated at the Fengxiansi by the Chinese-Italian team. From the end of the 3rd to the beginning of the 7th century, however, no other burials are reported.

¹² Unpublished; information by Zhao Zhenhua 趙振華, Director of the Guanlin Museum, 2004.

¹³ The approximate distance and position of the sites from the Fengxiansi is between braces.

place on the Xishan (Yu Fuwei and Zhang Jian 2002: 73).¹⁴ The deceased were both members of the middle-low class of civil servants.

2. The Apogee of Buddhism under the Tang

Six Tang emperors (seven, if we include Wu Zhao 武曩), ruling for more than forty years, made Luoyang the main capital of the empire (Cui Jingyi *et al.* 1985: 65-67). Patronage at Longmen became increasingly important, reaching its peak. The cave complex grew almost to the size and richness we admire today. The surrounding area grew accordingly, with patronage of monasteries and burial sites, and became one of the most important Buddhist centres of Northeast Asia.

2.1 The Early Tang (618-684)

At least two statues in the round, reportedly from the study area, seem to belong to the early Tang period. Their original location is unknown, and we do not know whether they were part of the iconographic programme of a cave or were placed in a temple. Both sculptures are very similar in posture and drapery: they represent the Buddha sitting cross-legged, right hand in *abhaya-mudrā* and left hand on left knee, with garments falling in front of the seat in a triangular fold. One of the two statues, about 1 m high, is headless, and is kept in the Academy of the Grottoes of Longmen (LYSZ 1996: 327 no. 6; Longmen 1995: pl. 161). The other statue (pl. IIIb) is almost twice as large, not considering the missing support of the lotus seat, and is kept in the Guanlin Museum (Luoyang 2000: 65). Stylistically, the images are very close to the main Buddha in the Jingshansi 敬善寺 Cave, completed in 663-664, and can be dated to the reign of Gaozong 高宗 (650-684).

Jingshansi

The first Longmen monastery documented by epigraphic sources is the Jingshansi on the Dongshan, discussed by Testa (1998: 456).¹⁵ Wen Yucheng (1992: 230), on the basis of an inscription in the Laolong Cave 老龍窩, maintains that a monastery by that name was founded before 658, although the text is not clear: it may refer to a temple or to the cave by the same name on the other side of the river, whose works may have had started by that year. There are other inscriptions in the Longmen caves mentioning a 'Jingshansi', dated between 660 and 683, the last year of Gaozong's reign (Zhang Naizhu 1993:

¹⁴ Rubbing in Luoyangshi (1991: pl. 67).

¹⁵ We have no archaeological evidence on the Da Fengxiansi, founded in AD 679. The Longhuasi 龍花寺 probably corresponds with the Fengxiansi site excavated by the Chinese-Italian team.

86-87, 93, 96). The earliest inscription, in the Zhaokeshi 趙客師 Cave, is a memorial to Lady Xiao 蕭氏 by her devoted husband. She had died two months before «in the Jingshansi at Longmen». Since it is unlikely that a Buddhist devotee had died in a cave temple, the year 660 can be considered as the *terminus ante quem* for the foundation of the monastery. As can be deduced from a number of sources, some of the Longmen caves were under the direct administration of a nearby monastery, and sometimes took its very name (Li Yukun 1983: 70; McNair 1996: 332). This was the case of the Fengxiansi and the great Rocana cave (now still called Fengxiansi), and of the Jingshan monastery and cave as well.

The existence of the Jingshan monastery is also supported by an inscribed stone dated 665 (Linde 麟德 2), which is the oldest Tang epitaph retrieved in the study area (fig. 2). Lady Wang Shi 王師氏 «was buried on the Yuanzuo 元祚 Mountain, west of the Longmen Jingshansi».¹⁶ Although the original location of the tomb is unknown, and so is the name 'Yuanzuo Mountain', the inscription seems to refer to a monastery rather than a cave. The only reference to the location of the Jingshan temple is found in the epitaph of the tomb of General An Pu 安菩 and his wife, sealed in AD 709. The tomb, intact, was discovered in 1981 on the northern slopes of the Dongshan {about 2 km NE}, W of the Gaozhuang 郛莊 village (Luoyangshi 1982). According to the inscription, it was located «east of Jingshansi, at the feet of the mountain, two *li* 里 away from the Yi River».¹⁷ Besides this piece of evidence, I could not find any further mention of the Jingshansi in written sources until the 9th century, and its name disappears after the Tang.

These early tombs in Longmen show the close relationship between religious institutions and burial places. The information provided by the tomb of Wang Shi on the Jingshansi is significant, although we cannot take it as an example of burial *ad sanctos*. After AD 655, we could trace the existence of two, and perhaps six, more epitaphs written within a time-span of less than twenty years before the death of Gaozong, pointing to the existence of burials in the Longmen area: two are certainly from the surveyed area, while the other four are less sure (Guglielminotti Trivel 2004: 203-5).¹⁸ This is the very time when the first burials are documented in the Longmen caves. The focus of patronage now partly shifted from the excavation of new caves for worship to other types of monuments. On both sides of the Longmen cliff are undecorated caves used by monks as meditation retreats (Wang Qufei 1956: 58); these (and other)

¹⁶ For the complete transcription, see Zhou Shaoliang (1992: I, 424).

¹⁷ Rubbing in Luoyangshi (1991: pl. 444); complete transcription in Zhou Shaoliang (1992: I, 1104-5).

¹⁸ Evidences of this kind are the result of a tentative relocation of sporadic finds on the basis of a comparative study of place names found in the inscriptions, places where the materials have been reportedly found and present-day place names.

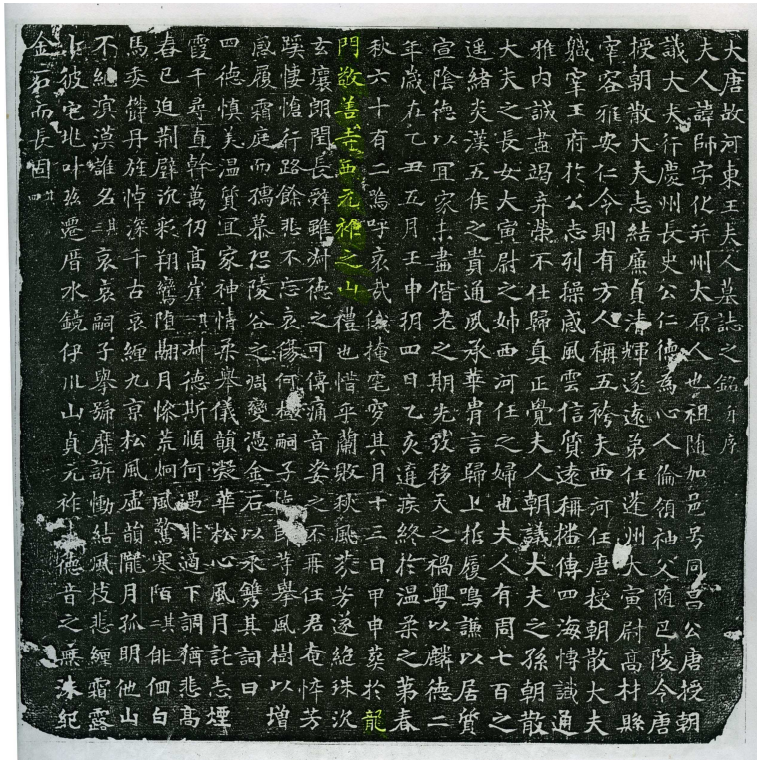


Fig. 2 – Rubbing of Wang Shi stone epitaph (665 A.D.), from the Longmen area.
(From Luoyangshi 1991: 278).

small grottoes were later used as sepulchres for both members of the *saṅgha* and lay followers.¹⁹ In Longmen, this practice seems to have been limited to the Tang period, the estimated number of cave tombs being one hundred (Li Wensheng, Yang Chaojie 1995). Only three are securely dated to the early years of the dynasty: the cave tomb of Lady Lou 姜氏, a Buddhist devotee, is the earliest (661; Zhang Naizhu 1991a: 160-61); the second has no inscription (*ibid.* 168); the third is dated AD 676-679 (Lü Jinsong, Yang Chaojie 1999).

2.2 The High Tang (684-756)

The years of Wu Zhao (r. 684-705) and Emperor Xuanzong 玄宗 (r. 712-756) mark the highest splendour – but also the beginning of decadence – for

¹⁹ This practice is attested since the 6th century in the Maijishan 麥積山 Caves (Gansu), and until the 13th-14th century at Dunhuang 敦煌 (Guglielminotti Trivel 1998: 77-79). It is worth noting that the burials discovered so far are of women only (Gong Dazhong 1981: 278, 280).

the Tang dynasty. During the Zhou 周 interregnum (690-705), Buddhism became the state religion. Even though Xuanzong favoured Taoism, the influence of Buddhism continued to grow in the first half of the 8th century. During his reign the most important masters of esoteric Buddhism, namely Śubhakarasiṃha (634?-735), Vajrabodhi (669-741) and Amoghavajra (705-774), arrived from India. This is also the period providing the bulk of archaeological evidence at Longmen.

Under Wu Zhao, new caves were opened on the Xishan, but the main sculptural activity shifted to the Dongshan. With the re-establishment of the Tang dynasty, other caves were excavated, but fewer in number. A considerable group of images sculpted in the round, some of which very large, attributable to this period on a stylistic basis, come from the study area:

1. Seated Buddha in *padmāsana* on a double-lotus seat, with *saṅghāṭi* covering both shoulders (h. 1.23 m; end of 680s). Retrieved in 1980 near the Jingshansi Cave (Zhongguo 1988: pl. 196; Van Alphen 2001: 120);
2. Seated Buddha in *padmāsana* on a double-lotus seat, with *saṅghāṭi* covering both shoulders and falling over the seat (h. 1.82 m; end of 7th century). Retrieved in 1980 near the Jingshansi Cave (Van Alphen 2001: 126, pl. 24);
3. Seated Buddha in *padmāsana* on a double-lotus seat, with *saṅghāṭi* covering both shoulders and falling over the seat (h. 4.01 m; Wu Zhao period; pl. IVa). Provenance unknown; now in the Kanjingsi Cave 看經寺 on the Dongshan (LYSZ 1996: 327 no. 4; Longmen 1995: fig. 160).²⁰ It is the largest of all statues in the round from Longmen;
4. Seated Buddha in *padmāsana* on a double-lotus seat, with *saṅghāṭi* covering both shoulders (h. 2.75 m, the head is a later remake; end of 7th – beginning of 8th century). Provenance unknown; now in Leigutai 擂鼓臺 Central Cave (LYSZ 1996: 327 no. 3; Luoyangshi 2000: 199 left);²¹
5. Seated Buddha in *padmāsana* on a double-lotus seat, with *saṅghāṭi* covering both shoulders (h. 2.15 m, headless; end of 7th – beginning of 8th century). Provenance unknown; now in Leigutai Central Cave (LYSZ 1996: 327 no. 5; Longmen 1995: fig. 157);²²
6. Seated Buddha in *padmāsana* on a double-lotus seat, with *saṅghāṭi* covering both shoulders and falling over the seat (h. 2.60 m; beginning of the 8th century). Now in the Leigutai Central Cave.²³ Behind the left arm is an in-

²⁰ Further photographs in Zhongguo (1988: pl. 193); Luoyangshi (2000: 198 right); Zhongguo (2001: pl. 229).

²¹ Sirén (1926: pl. 462) still shows the statue with (possibly) its original head, to the left when looking out from the entrance of the cave.

²² Sirén (1926: pl. 462) still shows the statue with (possibly) its original head, to the right when looking from the entrance of the cave.

²³ This and other sculptures were probably brought to Liujing 劉井, Yanshi County 偃師縣, in order to be destroyed during the Cultural Revolution, but the exact location of their discovery is unknown (information by Li Wensheng 李文生 2004).

scription: «In the 3rd Xianping 咸平 year of the Song [1000], Wang Yuan 王元 of this village gave the land for the foundation». The inscription is probably a later addition, possibly related to the construction of a new temple, when this old statue was brought into its precincts (Zhongguo 1988: pl. 195; Longmen 1995: fig. 158; LYSZ 1996: 327 no. 8; Luoyangshi 2000: 198 left; Zhongguo 2001: pl. 228);

7. Seated Mahāvairocana in *padmāsana* on a *Sumeru* seat; *kāṣāya* falling from the left shoulder, leaving the torso bare on the right. He wears a high crown on the head, a sculpted crewneck plaque and an armband-like jewel (*keyūra*) on the right (h. 3.26 m; first half of the 8th century; pl. IVb). Provenance unknown; now in the Leigutai South Cave (Luoyangshi 2000: 200 right);²⁴

8. Seated Mahāvairocana in *padmāsana* on a *Sumeru* seat; *kāṣāya* falling from the left shoulder, leaving bared torso on the right. Half the crown is missing, while the other jewels are similar to the preceding statue (h. 2.39-2.96 m, according to Longmen 1995: fig. 155 and LYSZ 1996: 326; first half of 8th century).²⁵ Previously in the courtyard outside the Leigutai Caves, it was recovered around 1969 from the Liuqing village, Yanshi County (Luoyangshi 2000: 199 centre; Zhongguo 2001: pl. 227);

9. Seated Mahāvairocana in *padmāsana* on a *Sumeru* seat; *kāṣāya* falling from the left shoulder, leaving the torso bare on the right. The crown is missing, while the other jewels are similar to those of the preceding images (h. 2.69-2.80 m, according to LYSZ 1996: 326-27 and Longmen 1995: fig. 156; first half of 8th century). Provenance unknown; now in the courtyard outside the Leigutai Caves;²⁶

10. Standing Buddha on a lotus pedestal, the upper garment falling from the shoulders and tied over the chest by a strip (h. 1.82-2.30 m;²⁷ end of 7th – first half of 8th century; pl. Va). Provenance unknown; now in the Longmen Grottoes Academy;²⁸

²⁴ Both Li Wensheng (1991: 61 and fig. 1) and Longmen (1995: fig. 150) report that the statue was moved to Leigutai at the end of Qing dynasty (1644-1911) from some temple around Longmen, but this claim is not well supported.

²⁵ According to Li Wensheng (1991: 63 and fig. 5), it is a late Tang or even Song sculpture, but I do not agree with this late dating.

²⁶ According to Li Wensheng (1991: 63 and fig. 4) and Longmen (1995: fig. 156) it comes from some temple around Longmen. LYSZ (1996: 326) says it was retrieved in Liuqing in 1969: this statement is puzzling, since Sirén (1926: pl. 462) shows that the statue was in the centre of the Leigutai Central Cave earlier.

²⁷ The height varies according to sources. It seems that the present base is not the original one, and it is possible that some reported measures do not include the base. See Hong Baoju (1958: 83, fig. 2) vs Van Alphen (2001: 130, pl. 28). I could not see the statue.

²⁸ According to Hong Baoju (1958: 83), it was recovered in 1954 from the Peicun 裴村 village {4.2-4.3 km NE}. According to Van Alphen (2001: 130), it comes from the Dongshan.

11. Standing Buddha on a lotus base, with *saṅghāṭi* covering both shoulders (h. 1.96-2.14 m, according to LYSZ 1996: 327 no. 7 and Van Alphen 2001: 135 pl. 33; first half of 8th century). Retrieved during construction works South of the Leigutai South Cave in 1982; now in the Longmen Grottoes Academy (Zhongguo 1988: pl. 192; Longmen 1995: fig. 162; Liu Jinglong 1996: pl. 172; Zhongguo 2001: pls. 230-31; Caterina, Verardi 2005: fig. 77).

Photographs of a few more fragments (two Buddha heads and a bust) have been published by Hong Baoju (1958: 83 and fig. 3), but their quality is too poor to suggest a precise chronology. Finally, in the courtyard in front of the Leigutai Caves, there is a lotus-base, apparently from the Tang period, whose provenance is unknown.

These brief descriptions reveal the limited use of modern scholarship as a source of information: there is no agreement on the sculptures' dating, their provenance, or even their size. Despite these limitations, it is possible to make a few remarks.

All the statues appear to be carved out of the grey limestone with pinkish shading typical of the Longmen caves. With the exception of nos. 1 and 2 (from the Xishan), all are colossal in size, being more than 2 m tall. Some of them have a reddish-brown patina, probably due to a long permanence underground; therefore, their present location may not be the original one.²⁹ A specific study would be necessary to distinguish between the sculptures made for rock-cut caves and those destined for monasteries. The three Mahāvairocana Buddhas (nos. 7, 8, 9) are very similar to one another in both style and posture, and may be considered early examples of esoteric Buddhist sculpture. This iconographic trend is documented in the Longmen Caves from the end of the reign of Gaozong, as is shown, for example, by the niche below the Liutian 劉天 Cave and the main image of the Leigutai North Cave (Longmen 1995: figs. 145-146). The first, dated 680-691, is one of the earliest esoteric sculptures in China. The three large Mahāvairocana images confirm the hypothesis that esoteric Buddhism was present in Longmen before the arrival in Luoyang of the Tantric masters Śubhakarasiṃha, Vajrabodhi and Amoghavajra in 723-724, and before the translation into Chinese of the main texts of the Vajrayāna School between 716 and 735 (Ch'en 1964: 334-36; Strickmann 1996: 215).³⁰

Fengxiansi (I)

There exists a further Tang image from our study area, which, according to Van Alphen (2001: 119, pl. 19), is from the Fengxiansi. It is a Buddha in *padmāsana* on a double-lotus seat, with upper garment open on the chest (h

²⁹ This statement is based on the close examination of statue no. 9, and on the observation from a distance of nos. 3, 4, 5 and 6, which are locked inside the caves. I could not examine the other ones, because during my visits they were either on display abroad or kept in the Academy's storehouse.

³⁰ For further information about Tantric sculpture in Longmen, see Li Wensheng (1991: 64).

101.5 cm), stylistically attributable to the end of the 7th or beginning of the 8th century (pl. Vb). It was discovered in 1958, but the context of its finding is not clear. As has been suggested for the majority of the sculptures excavated in the Fengxiansi, it may have belonged to the former Longhuasi, which was renamed Fengxiansi after the flood of 722 (Testa 1998: 457-58; 2002: 128). It is also possible that the statues belong to the Da Fengxiansi founded in 679: some smaller sculptures were probably moved to the Longhuasi at the time of the disastrous flood.

The following are further sporadic finds from the Fengxiansi attributable to the post-flood phase.

The stone door of a tomb was discovered in 1981 during cabling works along the Luo-Yi 洛伊 Road, 220-230 m NW of the *stūpa* (Testa 1998: 458).³¹ The style of its engraved decoration belongs to the High Tang period and, according to Wen Yucheng (1986: 28; 1992: 224), the tomb may be that of an important monk, possibly the Northern Chan 禪 Master Yifu 義福 (658-735), mentioned in sources (Testa 1998: 458).³²

The epitaph of a monk, Jiang Yi 姜義, buried in 736 (Kaiyuan 開元 24) «on a plain west of Fengxiansi» should further be mentioned.³³ The original location of the tomb is unknown, but at the end of 1987 another epitaph was unearthed from a burial about 200 m N of the village of Weiwan 魏灣 (fig. 3). The inscription says that Zheng Deyao 鄭德曜 was buried in 740 (Kaiyuan 28) «to the right of the Soul Pagoda [*Lingta* 靈塔], west of the mountain of Longmen, Yishui District, Henan County» (Zhu Liang and Zhao Zhenhua 1991: figs. 1-2; Zhang Naizhu 1991b: 245-49). Zheng Deyao was a Buddhist devotee, the wife of a Tang high official,³⁴ whose tomb was located near to the funerary pagoda of some important monk of the Fengxiansi. Zhang Naizhu (*ibid.*: 248-49) thinks the 'Lingta' mentioned here can be identified with the tomb of Yifu, buried in 736 «on the north hill of the Fengxiansi at Longmen» (*Jinshi cuibian* 81.28a).³⁵

³¹ A low-quality photo is published in Wen Yucheng (1986: 28, fig. 3); details in *Id.* (1992: 224, fig. 8.3, 225 fig. 8.4).

³² Other important masters were buried in the Fengxiansi. The most prominent one was Vajrabodhi (Jingangzhi 金剛智), one of the Three Vajrayāna Masters mentioned above, whose pagoda was erected in 743 (*Zhenyuan Shijiao lu* 14.877). Zhang Naizhu (1991b: 248) suggests that his tomb may be identified with the *stūpa* remains on the site.

³³ Rubbing in Luoyang (1991: X, pl. 122).

³⁴ Her husband, Lu Congyuan 盧從愿 (d. 737), had been Head of the Board of Civil Office (*Libu shangshu* 吏部尚書), and among his titles he also had *Shangzhuguo* 上柱國 (2nd meritorious degree). His biography is recorded in the *Jiu Tang shu* 100.

³⁵ According to *Baqiongshi jinshi buzhen* 55.28b, the Yifu pagoda was set up «in the western court of the Fengxiansi».

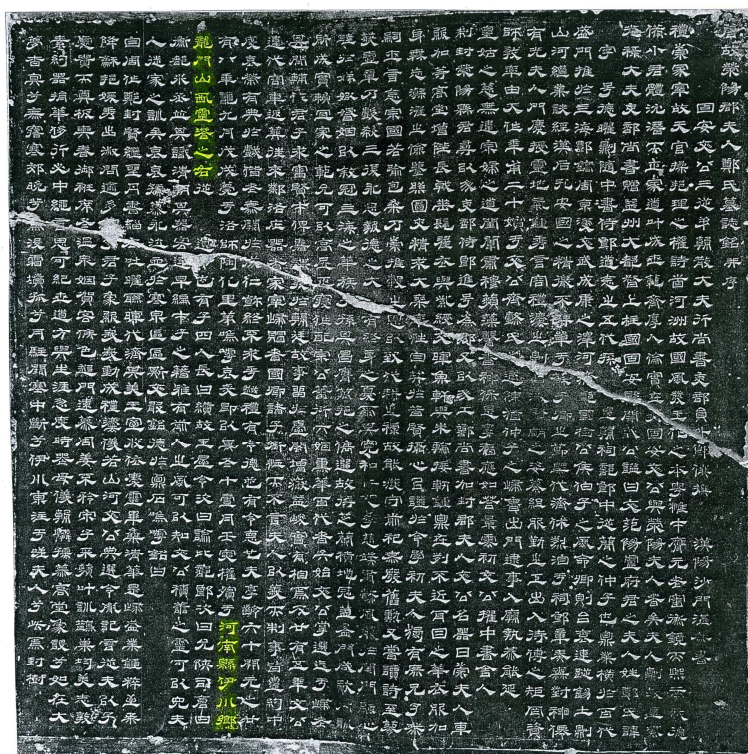


Fig. 3 – Rubbing of Zheng Deyao stone epitaph (740 A.D.), from the Fengxiansi site.
(From Luoyangshi 1991: 522).

In any case, both written sources and archaeological evidence confirm the fact that the Fengxiansi and the nearby area were, from the beginning, an important burial site. Not only monks, but also lay followers, found their resting place there.

Xiangshansi (I)

Another famous Tang monastery in Longmen, besides the Fengxiansi, was the Xiangshansi 香山寺, which has been identified with an extensive site on the southern slopes of the Dongshan (pl. VI), just opposite the Fengxiansi, on the other side of the river {1.1–1.2 km E-SE}. Sources state that it was established during the Zhou dynasty as an extension of the burial site of the famous monk Divākara (Dipoheluo 地婆訶羅, d. 688).³⁶ During the construction of a nursery home for the Ball-bearing Factory of Luoyang in March-May 1965, the Longmen Relics Protection Office had a trial-trench excavated

³⁶ For the history of the monastery, see Forte (1974: 145) and Testa (1998: 453-54).

South of Building no. 1. Since it is the only stratigraphic excavation in the study area besides that of the Fengxiansi, we provide a summary of the digging (Wen Yucheng 1983: 31-32; 1992: 220-21; Luoyangshi 1986: 41-42).

An excavation area 10×10 m was opened at the beginning, and then it was enlarged to 12×15 m. Three layers were observed:

- Layer I (0.20-0.60 m high): yellow-brown ploughing soil, probably colluvial, with considerable intrusions of chipped pebbles, gravel and *loess* concretions. It yielded fragments of Tang bricks and tiles as well as Song and modern ceramic;

- Layer II (0.30-0.54 m high): hard soil, same colour as the preceding, with concoction lumps and a lower density of concretions. It yielded intact tiles and brickbats of the Tang period, some green glazed tile-ends with lotus flower pattern, a few potsherds of grey earthenware and glazed pottery, iron objects and bronze coins. The tiles have a grey body, plain on the outside and with a cloth pattern on the inner face; the largest measure 2×21×37 cm; the smaller, 2.5×14×33 cm; the joint is 2 cm long. Square and rectangular bricks also have a grey body, plain surface and a grooved pattern on the back to facilitate plaster adhesion; rectangular bricks measure 6×33×15 cm; size of square bricks not reported. Iron objects include sickles, knives, punches, strips, nails and fittings. Twenty coins were recovered: one is a *wuzhu* 五銖;³⁷ thirteen cover the time span from the Tang *Kaiyuan tongbao* 開元通寶 to the Song *Chongning chongbao* 崇寧重寶 (1102-1106). Coins and potsherds suggest a dating to the end of the Northern Song for this part of the deposit. In this layer, a portion of a road surface made with fragments of stone was also discovered: 2.25 m wide, 0.15-0.20 m thick, with a SW-NE direction. According to the excavation report, it is also attributable to the Song phase. Finally, a circular pit, 0.98 m in diameter and covered with bricks, was found west of the road;

- Layer III (0.20-0.50 m high): soft brown-reddish soil, mixed with a great quantity of brickbats and fragments of tiles, concoction, ashes, charcoal particles and burnt wood. The layer, marking the collapse of a wooden structure, covered the natural soil on one side and a floor on the other.

The building (fig. 4) was rectangular in plan, oriented W-NW (290°), and was provided with a ramp leading to the central entrance (no. 1); drains were found on all sides (no. 2). It was 11 m wide, while its length is not known because of the limits of the trench. The floor inside consisted of very hard, burned soil, 0.10-0.15 m thick. Walls (no. 4) were made of rammed earth, 0.45 m thick, preceded by a porch, 1.1 m wide, on the main entrance side (no. 3). Porch, entrance ramp and drains were all paved with bricks. Inside the building, bases of columns (no. 5), stone blocks (no. 6) and a lotus pedestal (no. 7), possibly that of a statue, still *in situ* along the central axis in front of the en-

³⁷ The last *wuzhu* coin was minted under the Sui and was circulating until 621, then it was replaced by the *Kaiyuan Tongbao* (Fan Zhen'an, Huo Hongwei 1999: 77, 104).

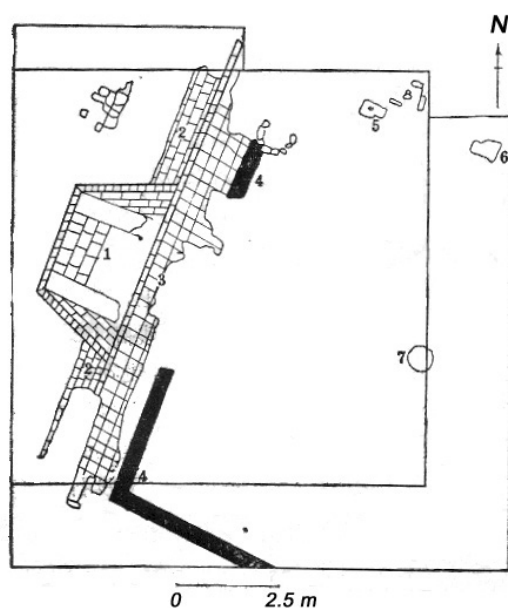


Fig. 4 – Plan of structures in trial trench no. 65LZLI:T, Xiangshansi excavation site.
(From Luoyangshi 1986: 42, fig. 3).

trance ramp, were found.³⁸ On the basis of the position of bricks in the pavement and the style of other finds, the structure was acknowledged as an original Tang building, part of a monastery destroyed by a fire at the beginning of the 12th century. On the basis of a comparison of the finds with textual evidence, it has been identified with the ‘Western Court’ of the Xiangshansi.

In April 1984, the Longmen Caves Institute, coordinated by Wen Yucheng and Zhang Naizhu, carried out a survey of the temple site. The results (Luoyangshi 1986: 40-41; Wen Yucheng 1992: 219-20) are summarized below, and accompanied by observations made on the site in March-April 2004.

The monastery (fig. 5) was built on a ridge on the southern end of the Dongshan, sloping from N to S, with steeper slopes to the E and W. The main axis of the Xiangshansi, therefore, followed a N-S direction, slightly shifting towards the W (15°). Its central part extended for about 250 m, and was built on three terraces. The lower one, partly occupied by the nursery home,³⁹ is about 115 m long and 50-70 m wide. To the west was the so-called ‘Western

³⁸ A sketchy excavation plan and a few low-quality pictures are published in Luoyangshi (1986: 43, fig. 4) and Wen Yucheng (1992: 220, fig. 3; 221, fig. 4).

³⁹ These buildings have now lost their function, and have become lodgings for common people.

Court', located on a slight slope that occupies an area of about 10,000 sqm. The overall plan of the monastery seems to have had a J shape. The 1965 excavation site is located on the lower terrace (about 200 m asl), West of the main axis (Luoyangshi 1986: 41, fig. 2).⁴⁰ A flight of uneven steps links the first terrace to the second. The latter is much smaller than the one below, and in the shape of a trapezium: it is 25 m deep and 25/50 m wide. In its northern

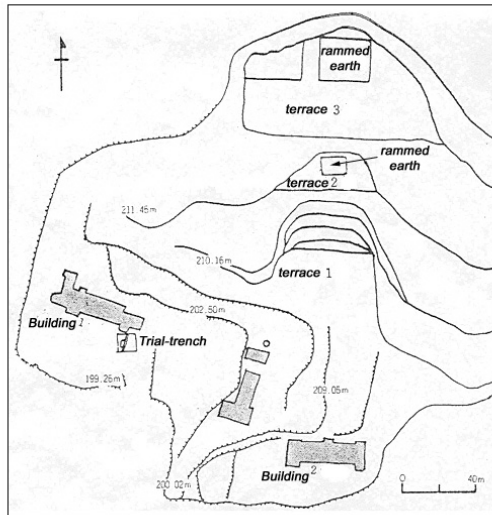


Fig. 5 – Plan of the Xiangshansi site on the Dongshan.
(From Wen Yucheng 1992: 220, fig. 2).

part are foundations of a building made of rammed earth, measuring 1.2-1.4×15×10 m.⁴¹ The third terrace (240 m asl) is 35 m long and 50-90 m wide: traces of a large foundation of rammed earth (about 1.2×27.5×22 m) were observed in its northern portion, on the same axis as the lower one. Building materials confirm its dating: the tiles are similar to those excavated in the Fengxiansi, the bricks have cross-shaped impressions on the back side, the tile-ends show lotus patterns, etc. To the E and W, the site is limited by the sudden sloping of the ridge towards the valleys below.

⁴⁰ North of Building no. 1, close to the trial-trench, the fragment of an animal statue was also discovered.

⁴¹ At present, this area is sometimes used as a military training field: newly dug ditches and trenches make it difficult to discern the contour of the foundations. Nevertheless, the level ground is still rich in surface materials: thick, dark-bodied tiles and bricks, apparently belonging to the Tang period (pl. VIIa).

A conjectural reconstruction of the original plan of the monastery, made with the aid of textual sources, may be found in Luoyangshi (1986: 42-43), but I do not fully agree with the proposed reconstruction. The monastery is likely to have extended northwards considerably above the third terrace, up to the height of 270 m asl and for a length of about 400 m. The presence of dressed stones, tiles and other building materials characterizes this upper area (pl. VIIb). Heaps of building materials, but with a smaller number of tiles and brickbats, are also observed on the NW side of the site, from where the sight opens up toward the Yi valley and the Fengxiansi. It is possible that the two upper terraces of the Xiangshansi were burial areas where the tombs of monks were located.

Putisi (I)

One of the Longmen monasteries set up at the beginning of the 8th century was the Putisi 菩提寺, possibly located by the present Huangjue Temple 皇覺寺 at Guozhai 郭寨 village {1.2 km SW}. According to Testa (1998: 456), who follows Wen Yucheng (1992: 228), the monastery is first mentioned in an epitaph dated 726 (Kaiyuan 14).⁴²

I can now propose an earlier *terminus ante quem* for the foundation of the temple on the basis of another piece of archaeological evidence. In the Guanlin Museum there is a figurative stele (pl. VIIc), of unknown provenance, carved out of limestone and dated «15th day, 9th month, 1st year Xiantian 先天 of the Tang [712]». It is carved only on the front side, in the shape of a niche with a depressed rounded arch, and its measures are 120×86×21 cm. The central sculpted image is Amitābha dressed in the ‘covering’ mode, seated cross-legged on a double-lotus seat. He is flanked by Avalokiteśvara to the left and Mahāsthāmaprapta to the right, each standing on a lotus base.⁴³ The dated votive inscription is engraved below the niche. The characters are very worn and difficult to read, but we can still obtain valuable information: «[?] in Longmen’s Putisi has been honoured as [?]; he/she solemnly dedicated an Amitābha statue with two Bodhisattvas». ⁴⁴ This is reliable evidence for the Putisi’s foundation before Xuanzong’s reign, at least 13 years earlier than the previously documented date.

On the site of the present-day Huangjuesi other Tang materials were recovered in the 80’s: Buddha statues, guardians’ heads, fragments of pillars, etc. (Gong Dazhong 1981: 262). Wen Yucheng (1992: 228) also mentions the

⁴² The inscription tells that *upāsikā* (lay Buddhist) Lady Pei 裴氏, wife of officer Xue 薛, was buried «on a hill behind the Putisi, Longmen Mountain». Rubbing in Luoyangshi (1991: 478); full text in *Tangwen shiyi* (19.10b-12a) and Zhou Shaoliang (1992: II, 1313).

⁴³ The same composition, though smaller, is found in the niche fragment brought to light during the Fengxiansi excavation (Testa 2002: 147-49 and pl. XX; Forte 2003: 130 and fig. 9; Caterina, Verardi 2005: fig. 82).

⁴⁴ Photo in Luoyang (2000: 66); full inscription in Luoyang (1984: 51-52 and fig. 20).

square base of a Buddhist statue (40×116×90 cm), carved in bas-relief with dragons playing with a pearl and a phoenix amidst clouds, but no tentative date is given (see also Longmen 1996: 204). After having been used as a primary school for some time, the Huangjuesi has recently been reconverted into a Buddhist temple and is presently inhabited by some nuns. I went there twice, in March 2003 and 2004. The present temple, which faces S, preserves in its elevation two small central halls of Qing date and some lateral structures of recent construction. A few meters SE of the main hall (pl. VIIIa) is a stone well, perhaps related to the one of Tang period mentioned by ancient sources on the Putisi (Gong Dazhong 1981: 305). The site of a previous settlement is not clearly identifiable in or around the Huangjuesi precincts, but pedestals and other stone elements attributable to pre-existing structures are found re-used in several parts of the complex. I was allowed to enter a room where the nuns were keeping some fragments of sculpture, retrieved in the course of modern repairs. I could then only gather scant information about some new and unpublished limestone carvings: the head of a Buddha (h. about 35 cm; pl. VIIIb), two torsos from Buddhist statues (h. about 70 and 55 cm; pls. IXa-b) and a lotus element, probably part of a stand (20×18 cm). In style, the fragments recall Tang sculpture from the half of the 7th to the beginning of the 8th century. Considering this new evidence, it is possible to confirm that on the site of the present Huangjuesi there already was a Buddhist monastery at that time.

Tianzhusi (I)

According to the sources, as summarized by Testa (1998: 455), a temple named Tianzhu 天竺寺 («Indian») was founded on the Longmen's Dongshan in 711 by the Vajrāyana master Manicintana (Baosiwei 寶思惟). He died in that very temple in 721, and a funerary pagoda was then erected (*Song gaoseng zhuan* 3.720; *Wenyuan yinghua* 856.1a-3b). The next year, the flood of the Yi River that destroyed the Da Fengxiansi also erased any trace of this first Tianzhusi (*Jiu Tang shu* 37.1357). The site of a second Tianzhusi, or 'Western Tianzhusi', located at Sigou 寺溝, is therefore related to a monastery reconstructed on the other side of the river after the flood. Sources narrate that the Western Tianzhusi was founded in the first year of Daizong 代宗 (r. 762-779) by a community of Indian Buddhist monks. It would thus seem that forty years elapsed between the destruction of the first monastery and the creation of the second, but an epigraphic source comes in to complicate this picture. Sima Yuanli 司馬元禮, a high civil servant of the Tang, was buried in 743 (Tianbao 天寶 2) «in the eastern valley of the Tianzhusi, Longmen Mountain». ⁴⁵ The inscription does not help us with any hint as to the nature and the position of this Tianzhusi in 743, and the discovery context of the epitaph is – as usual – unknown. Was it the new Western one (then founded well before 762), the old Eastern one (referred to as a ruin) or a third, unidentified,

⁴⁵ Rubbing in Luoyang (1991: XI, pl. 56).

Tianzhushi? Due to the absence of documents on the monastery in those forty years, is impossible at present to advance any hypothesis.

Besides the above-mentioned tomb of An Pu (709), other important tombs of the High Tang were discovered in the area. We shall only note here the rich burial of Governor Xiao [Xiao Cishi 蕭刺史] (735)⁴⁶ and the large painted tomb of Lady Doulu 豆盧氏 (740; Luoyangshi 1995: 37-50).⁴⁷ Seven more epitaphs and one stele (certain), nine epitaphs and one pillar (probable), three epitaphs and one stone pagoda (dubious) of this period have been traced (Guglielminotti Trivel 2004: 206-16, 232-35).

Zhang Naizhu once led me to a seemingly round-plan foundation of a building on high ground between Sigou and Huayuan 花園 {3.2 km N-NW}, a site locally known as 'Yijing Pagoda' 義淨塔. Although the *Song gaoseng zhuan* (1.711a) relates that the famous monk Yijing (634-712) was buried on a high hill north of Longmen in 713, there is not, as yet, enough evidence to identify this site with his funerary pagoda.

Besides these independent and *ad sanctos* burials, at least ten cave-tombs in the Longmen Grottoes date back to the same period (Zhang Naizhu 1991a: 168; Li Wensheng, Yang Chaojie 1995). This is the case with the Huideng 惠燈 and Lingjue 靈覺 Caves, carved out on the Xishan in 735 and 738 to hold the remains of two Buddhist nuns (Wang Qufei 1955: 120-22; Guglielminotti Trivel 1998: 79). Both nuns were linked to Wu Zetian 武則天 and her family. Wu Zetian herself was probably the founder of Shanglinyuan 上林苑, an imperial park between the city of Luoyang and the Longmen gorge, whose supposed remains were reported by Zhang Naizhu (1996: 101-2) near Huayuan. Unfortunately, more recent visits in the area, undertaken with Zhang himself, could not trace these scanty ruins anymore (Guglielminotti Trivel 2004: 118-19).

2.3 The Middle Tang (756-824)

According to traditional historiography, Luoyang's splendours began to decline after the An Lushan 安祿山 and Shi Siming 史思明 rebellions between 755 and 762. Apart from being considered a hiatus in the history of China, these upheavals wrought havoc in the city of Luoyang and its environs. With the slow decadence of the Tang dynasty, the phase of great sculptural production at Longmen also came to an end. However, our research demonstrates that, on the contrary, the monasteries built around the Grottoes continued to flourish, and new, important ones were even founded *ex-novo*.

⁴⁶ {about 2 km W-NW}. To my knowledge, only one brief notice of the discovery has been published, in a local newspaper (Zhang Yawu 2002).

⁴⁷ {about 3.6 km W-NW}. Doulu was an imperial concubine of Ruizong 睿宗 (r. 710-712).

Putisi (II) and Fengxiansi (II)

From the Putisi/Huangjuesi site comes the fragment of an octagonal *chuang* 幢⁴⁸ pillar, 47 cm high (Wen Yucheng 1992: 228),⁴⁹ already mentioned by Testa (1998: 456, n. 22). The inscription is truncated and worn, but still partially readable: «on the 20th day, 9th month, 3rd year Jianzhong 建中 [782], the nun named [??],⁵⁰ *bhikṣuṇī* of the Da Anguo Monastery 大安國寺,⁵¹ ... ». Another octagonal pillar comes from the Fengxiansi, and had been used by the people of Weiwan as a support for a well's pulley. I still saw it in place in 1997, but lately it was moved to the Grottoes Academy. This pillar too, like the preceding one, is incomplete and the inscription cannot be read in full. It was a monk's funerary *chuang*, erected «in the area of the pagodas of the Fengxiansi at Longmen» in 802 (Zhenyuan 貞元 18).⁵² Both these pillars are tangible evidence for the survival of the two monastic institutions in the second half of the 8th century.

Qianyuansi

Some monasteries formally inaugurated in this period were probably already established as minor institutions in the first half of the century. This seems to be the case with the Qianyuansi 乾元寺, founded in 759 on a pre-existing temple (Testa 1998: 454). The first secure clue about the monastery is an epitaph dedicated to Yiwan 義琬, master of the Northern Chan School, who died in 731 (fig. 6). According to the inscription, in 759 the famous general Guo Ziyi 郭子儀 (697-781) named Qianyuansi the temple where the master used to live. In 768, a pagoda for his ashes was built in this place and the epitaph engraved (Wen Yucheng 1983: 50).

The caption of the rubbing in Luoyangshi (1991: 578)⁵³ states that the stone was «discovered on the eastern side of the Qianyuansi at Longmen». This is indeed a puzzling statement, since, as already pointed out (Testa 1998: 455), the site of this monastery has not yet been localized.

⁴⁸ The *chuang* pillars are column-like stone elements, generally octagonal or hexagonal (seldom square) in section, provided with a stone base and a 'head'. Normally, on the body of the pillar are engraved *sūtra*, magic syllables (*dharanī*) and dedications. They are object of Buddhist devotion, whose appearance in China is mainly linked to the diffusion of exoteric cults and texts. At Longmen, they are found as early as the beginning of the 8th century. Although many *chuang* were to be found within the temples, others were adopted as tombstone or simply erected at the roadsides (Chen Mingda 1960; Chen Chang'an 1993).

⁴⁹ According to Longmen (1996: 203), 77 cm.

⁵⁰ The two characters are not clear. Zhang Naizhu (1989: 31) reads them as Chaoyi 超意.

⁵¹ Nunnery situated in the city of Luoyang (Chen Chang'an 1993: 537).

⁵² Transcript, analysis and partial rubbing of the pillar, in Zhang Naizhu (1999: 23-25).

⁵³ See also the complete transcript in Zhou Shaoliang (1992: II, 1764-65).

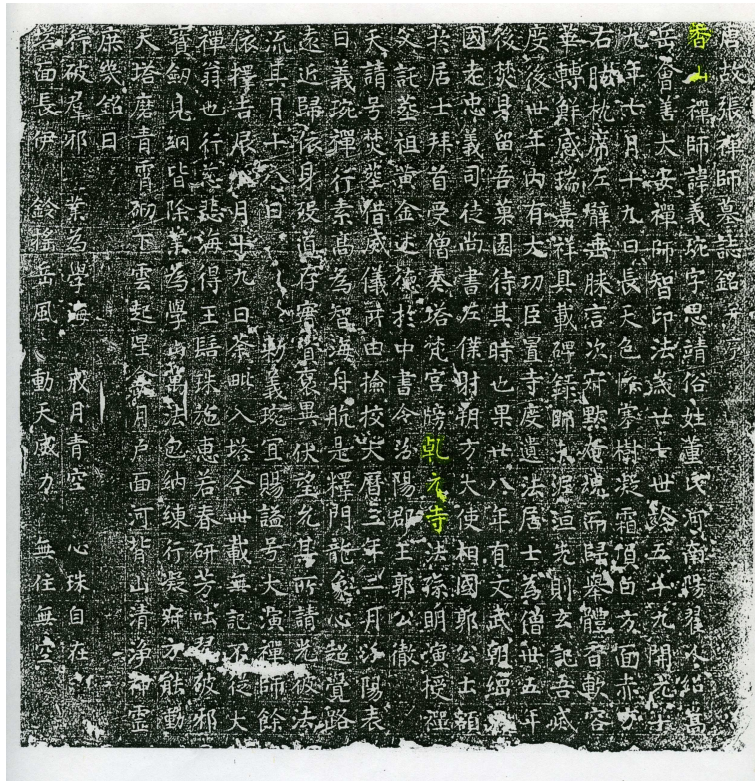


Fig. 6 – Rubbing of Master Yiwan stone epitaph (768 A.D.), from the Qianyuansi.
(From Luoyangshi 1991: 578).

The historical sources agree on its location east of the river, and Wen Yucheng (1983: 50) thinks that the Qianyuansi of Tang date was on the site of the present-day Xiangshansi, the new temple built at the beginning of the 18th century halfway up the Dongshan {1 km NE}. Other scholars have different views: Gong Dazhong (1981: 257-58), for example, suggests a location NW of the Caodian 草甸 village, on the northern side of the Longmen Concrete Factory {1.9 km SE}. Before the 30's, according to the accounts of elderly residents, a few of the temple's structures were still visible there, including a sanctuary dedicated to a local deity (Ku Nainai 苦奶奶) and a 'Yama Hall'. The buildings were reportedly destroyed by the Japanese occupation forces in 1944. In 1968, a railway track was laid down right across the site, splitting it into two halves, E and W. During construction work, a number of materials were discovered: tortoise-shaped bases for stelae, floor bricks, fragments of tiles, etc. (Xu Jinxing, Huang Minglan 1985: 181). At the beginning of the

80's, there still were a few cavities dug out in the *loess* cliff behind the former main hall of the temple. Today, the structures have been arbitrarily reconstructed and renamed Qianyuansi. It is clear that the caption of the rubbing mentioned above could only refer to this new temple.

The materials excavated in 1968 are not well described in the texts, and we have no hint as to their dating. No information is given about the Yiwan epitaph either – hence, it is not possible to ascribe a Tang date to the site, or to say that it was the Qianyuansi where the Master's pagoda was built. We know from historical sources that in 1560 the monastery was moved down from its original high spot on the mountain to the southern slopes of the Dongshan (Testa 1998: 454-55). The site of the rebuilt temple may well be this Qianyuansi of the Ming dynasty (1368-1644), but then how can the Yiwan epitaph possibly come from its «eastern side»? I think the stone slab must have been discovered on the mountains east of the Qianyuansi in a general sense, where the Tang temple was probably located, and not literally on its «eastern side». I am afraid the caption only reports confused information about a sporadic discovery, unless we imagine the monks of the 16th century bringing along, while moving downhill, the epitaph of a Chan Master who had died more than eight centuries before.

Guanghuasi (I)

While sources on the Qianyuansi are scant, another monastery with a somewhat similar background became very famous in the Middle Tang period. The Guanghuasi was actually founded as an enlargement of the site of the funerary pagoda of Śubhakarasiṃha (Shanwuwei 善無畏), the renowned Tantric master of Central India. In 758 Guo Ziyi – again – petitioned to the throne and obtained to name it Guanghuasi (Testa 1998: 457). The original site of the monastery has been identified with the present one (pl. Xa), situated on the top of a hill NW of the Longmen town {2.2-2.4 km N-NW}. Before the foundation of the People's Republic (1949), it was still an active Buddhist temple (Gong Dazhong 1981: 257). The Longmen Commune destroyed it in 1965, during an iconoclastic outburst anticipating the Cultural Revolution. Wen Yucheng (1983: 52) visited the site in that very year, after its destruction, and his brief survey also includes a sketchy plan of the temple ground (fig. 7).

The Guanghuasi was oriented on an E-W axis, approximately 400 m long, and consisted of four terraces sloping down from W to E. It seemed to be wider in plan toward the E (250 m) and narrower to the W (160 m), the perimeter consisting of an earthen enclosure. This wall was about 5.6 m wide at the base, and 5 to 6 m high. On the upper terrace to the W it was possible to distinguish the shape of a very solid surface, about 20-30 m, made from a cement-like conglomerate composed of soil and gravel, small pebbles and limestone chips. Scattered all about the site were fragments of figurative stelae and statue pedestals, decorative terracotta elements and a great amount of what

Wen Yucheng describes as «Tang and Song tiles». He took note of the size of some narrow tiles (15 cm wide, 2.5 cm thick, the joint 4 cm long), tile-ends stamped with animal masks (diameter 13 cm, the edge 1.3 cm thick and 2 cm wide), and brick fragments (4.5 cm thick). Besides these, there were lotus-stamped tile-ends⁵⁴ and triangular ones, ceramic shards of crimson colour and *celadon*. Finally, Wen Yucheng reports about six stelae, with dates comprised between the 11th and the beginning of the 18th century. The last one – dated 1705 – had been erected in commemoration of repair work carried on at the monastery at that time.

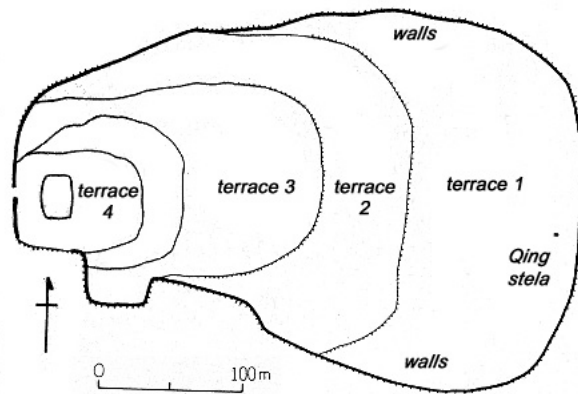


Fig. 7 – Plan of the Guanghuasi site at Longmen. (From Wen Yucheng 1992: 229, fig. 13).

At the beginning of the 80's only this stele remained, and the site was reduced to an expanse of cultivated fields (Gong Dazhong 1981: 255). Only recently has the Guanghuasi been reconstructed *ex-novo*, with fictitious structures, and is now a tourist attraction. I visited the place twice, in March 2003 and 2004, and found the Qing stele re-erected on the new temple grounds. The perimeter of the former monastery is still preserved, for a length of about 1 km.⁵⁵ The earthen wall (pl. Xb) is winding and very uneven, and follows a roughly ovoid shape pointed toward the SE corner. A slightly different situation from that of Wen Yucheng's survey is thus reported here, and the conjectural plan is also not entirely corresponding with his (fig. 8). The maximum length of the site is 456 m on the NW-SE axis, the maximum width 255 m from N to S. The new temple is surrounded by a brick enclosure wall running

⁵⁴ See a rubbing in Wen Yucheng (1992: fig. 14).

⁵⁵ Approximate distances have been calculated by walking around the walls with a GPS equipment. The walls present a gap of about 250 m in the NE section.

inside the earthen perimeter, and occupies approximately one half of the former area. From the eastern entrance to the western summit of the hill, the altitude rises from about 190 to 230 m, but the four original terraces are not clearly visible anymore. The cement-like conglomerate on the NW limit, already noticed by Wen, has been preserved – simply because it is situated in an unbuilt area. About 200 m SE of it, a similar layer about 0.35 m high, characterized by a strong presence of pebbles (pl. XIa), extends for a visible length of 15 m (202-206 m asl). I agree with Gong Dazhong (*ibidem*) in considering these large layers as the former foundations of high buildings or pagodas, but we have no clue about their dating. In some exposed earth sections around the new temple, horizontal layers of lime, alignments of bricks (pl. XIb) and accumulated brick-and-tiles are clearly visible. The form of the bricks seems to vary, but the average thickness is about 6 cm. Even if we lack the proof for a Tang dating of the flooring, all this evidence, together with a fair amount of very thick and dark tiles and the variety of ceramic shards scattered in the outlying areas of the temple, closely reflect the situation we found on the Fengxiansi site before excavation.

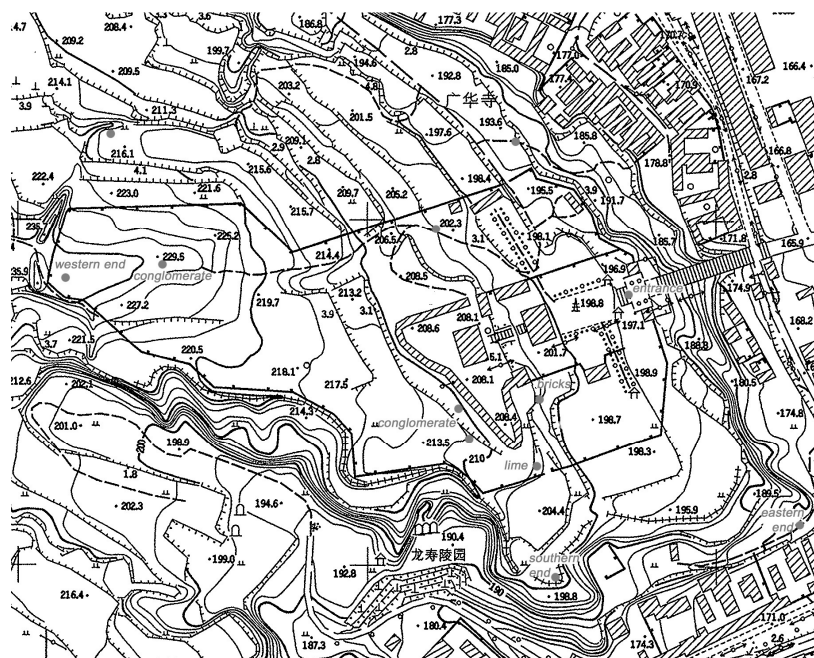


Fig. 8 – Map of the Guanghuasi site, Longmen. (Original map scale 1:2000, year 2002).

Tianzhusi (II) and Hongshengsi (I)

As I mentioned above, the Western Tianzhusi monastery in Longmen was probably founded in 762 after the An Lushan rebellion (Testa 1998: 455). A *chuang* pillar of 784, a *chuang* pagoda of 850 and a stele of 1084, all coming from the Sigou village, testify that its site must have been on the northern side of the valley West of the village itself {2.8-2.9 km NW}. The octagonal pillar dated 784 (Xingyuan 興元 1) is entitled: «Introduction to the inscription on the *chuang* of Zhenjian 真堅, once *Bhadanta* 'Lintan' 臨壇 of the Hongshengsi 弘聖寺 in the Eastern Capital under the Great Tang». It was dedicated to Zhenjian, an important master of his times in esoteric practices, who was «buried on the *yang* 陽 side of the depression south of the Western Tianzhusi» (Wen Yucheng 1983: 51).⁵⁶ The Hongshengsi mentioned in the inscription, where Zhenjian had lived since the Dali 大曆 era (766-779), may well be considered as another Longmen monastery. Zhang Naizhu (1989: 32) had tentatively located its ruins on the western side of the Sigou valley {2.8-2.9 km NW}, not far from the Western Tianzhusi. According to Zhang's visit in 1982, the temple plan was L-shaped, 310 m from W to E and 250 m from N to S. He reported many surface materials such as tiles, bricks and Tang architectonic elements, along with ceramic shards of all kinds. We take note of Zhang's account, but keeping in mind that the identification of this site with the Hongshengsi should be based upon further proof.⁵⁷ Today Sigou is a military zone: it was not possible to proceed to a new survey in order to verify the information reported about the two monasteries.

Baoyingsi

In December 1983, during the levelling works for the construction of the Longmen Granary on the ridge S of Ligou 李溝 valley {1.8-1.9 km N-NW}, an ancient tomb was discovered about 0.9 m below the ground. It was the burial chamber, sealed in 765 (Yongtai 永泰 1), of the renowned Seventh Patriarch of the Chan School, Shenhui 神會 (684-758; Testa 1998: 454). The small compartment, oriented along the cardinal axis, was almost cubic in shape (1.2×1.13×1.25 m), with the walls made up of thirteen stone slabs (Luoyangshi 1992; Wen Yucheng 1992: fig. 9; fig. 9). Evidently, it was the underground cavity built to host the Master's ashes, upon which a pagoda was at

⁵⁶ The full text of the inscription is reported and discussed by Zhang Naizhu (1989: 28) and, partially, by LYSZ (1996: 330). Only one photo of the pillar, of very poor quality, is published in Zhang Naizhu (1989: 27).

⁵⁷ In 1978 Gong Dazhong (1981: 257) obtained information from a Longmen inhabitant about a stele pertaining to a certain 'Hengshengsi 橫聖寺'. The old man had discovered the stone stele in his youth, but 'Hengsheng' was probably a misreading of 'Hongsheng'. The character *heng* 橫 («horizontal») does not suit a temple's name, and the occurrence of two similar names in the same area induces to believe that only the Hongshengsi had existed: at least, regarding the latter, we have some indirect archaeological evidence.

first erected. Inside the chamber, a limited but refined burial set was discovered: a pagoda-shaped container in gilded bronze and silver, a long-handled incense-burner in gilded bronze, a bronze *kuṇḍikā* bottle, three *pātra* bowls in lacquered earthenware, a small silver box, etc. (Luoyangshi 1992: figs. 4-6; pl. 7; Puyō 1998: 65, 82-83; Van Alphen 2001: 148-51; fig. 10). The epitaph, engraved on the inner face of one of the slabs of the chamber, is entitled: «Introduction to the inscription of the funerary pagoda built on the slopes of the Dragon's Hill at the Baoyingsi 寶應寺 in Longmen, dedicated to the late Bhaddanta, Seventh Patriarch and State Master of the Heze Monastery 荷澤寺 in the Eastern Capital under the Great Tang». ⁵⁸ The stone was a reused one: formerly engraved, then polished and re-engraved with the actual text. ⁵⁹

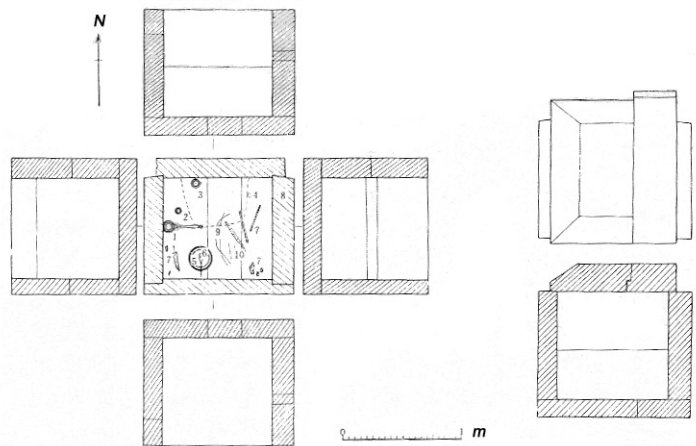


Fig. 9 – Drawing of the stone burial chamber of Master Shenhui (765 A.D.).
Baoyingsi excavation site. (From Luoyangshi 1992: 65, fig. 2).

⁵⁸ For the whole transcript of the inscription, see Wen Yucheng (1984: 79), Zhang Naizhu, Ye Wansong (1991: 67). Rubbing in Luoyangshi (1991 : 576).

⁵⁹ Judging from the few characters still visible of the pre-existing inscription, it may have been the epitaph of another Buddhist monk. It seems strange that the epitaph of an important master like Shenhui was made by reusing an old funerary slab, and a clumsily polished one indeed. Wen Yucheng (1984: 78) explains this negligence with the unstable period that followed the An Lushan rebellion, and the consequent lack of means for a burial worthy of a patriarch.

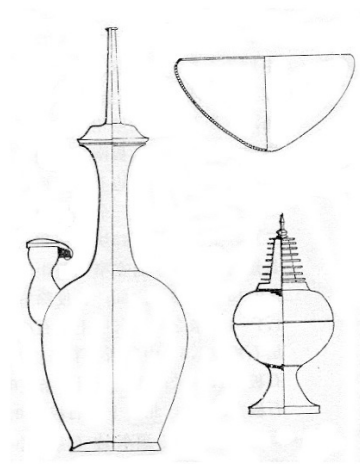


Fig. 10 – Drawing of bronze *kuṇḍikā* bottle, lacquered *pātra* bowl and silvered bronze container. (From Luoyangshi 1992: 65, fig. 4).

The discovery of Shenhui's tomb has therefore confirmed the position of the Baoying Monastery in Longmen: it is worth noting that, at present, only the Fengxiansi and the Baoyingsi sites have been localized with the certainty and precision of archaeological data. The epitaph itself is a precious source that has helped correct errors and inaccuracies about Shenhui's life, to confirm other facts and to clarify some aspects of his doctrine (Wen Yucheng 1984; Zhang Naizhu and Ye Wansong 1991; Luoyangshi 1992: 67, 75; LYSZ 1996: 335-36). According to the text, the Master died in the Jing Prefecture 荊府 (middle reaches of the Yangtze) and seven years later his remains were moved to Longmen. This step, carried out on the initiative of a member of the imperial court, Li Ju 李巨, was probably the starting point for the foundation of the Baoyingsi itself. Two of its main supporters are quoted, Gao Fucheng 高輔成 and Zhao Lingzhen 趙令珍, who petitioned to the throne and obtained a monastery to be built and monks to be ordained. The place was chosen according to geomantic criteria, and its position is reported by the inscription: «To the north it approaches Tianque 天闕,⁶⁰ to the south it rests on the Yi River [Yi-chuan]; Mount Song 嵩山 is on view to the east, [...] Mount Hua [Huayue 華岳] is near toward the west».

According to a survey by Wen Yucheng (1992: 225-26), the Baoyingsi stretched on a W-E axis 400 m long, with a varying width N-S of between 60 and 140 m (fig.11). Therefore, it occupied almost the whole ridge of the

⁶⁰ One of the ancient names of the Longmen gorge.

mountainous offshoot it was placed upon. It was built on three terraces sloping down from W to E, and Shenhui's tomb was at the centre of the eastern/lowest terrace. A stretch of brick floor was detected on a high-ground NW of the excavation spot: among the surface materials, round tile-ends with lotus decorations, square bricks stamped with network design (5.5×34×34 cm) and fragments of thicker bricks (6.5 cm) were reported (Wen Yucheng 1992: fig. 11).

Today, no trace of the Baoyingsi is visible on the surface: partly because of the construction of the Granary, and partly because the rest of the ridge has become part of a new thermal centre with a hotel and a restaurant. On the place where the Shenhui pagoda once stood, there now unfolds a tennis field. From E to W, as far as it can be followed before the Granary's off-limits zone, the former site of the monastery has an altitude comprised between 210 to 250 m asl (GPS data).

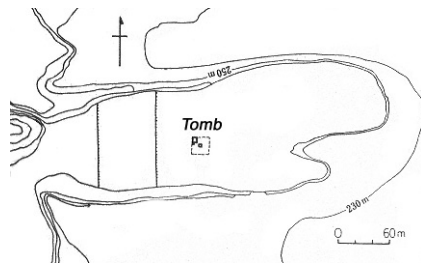


Fig. 11 – Plan of the Baoyingsi site on the Xishan. (From Wen Yucheng 1992: 226, fig. 10).

Hufasi (I)

The last Longmen monastery known from epigraphic evidence in the first quarter of the 9th century is the Hufasi 護法寺, already mentioned by Testa (1998: 459). In 1986, during the construction of a petrol station N of Longmen town, a funerary *chuang* dated 824 (Changqing 長慶 4)⁶¹ was discovered. The inscription tells that a nun named Dengcan 澄璨 of the Ningcha Temple 寧刹寺 at Luoyang, was buried in 814 (Yuanhe 元和 9) on a plain west of the Hufasi at Yumen 禹門 (Longmen). The monastery, built no later than the beginning of the century, should therefore be situated nearby present-day Longmen town {2-2.5 km N-NE}.⁶²

⁶¹ The date is not fully readable, but can be deduced by the contents of the text (Zhang Naizhu 1991b: 251).

⁶² For the complete transcript and the analysis of the inscription, see Zhang Naizhu (1991b: 249-51).

Besides the one of Shenhui, only one other excavated tomb from the Middle Tang period is reported in the Longmen area, and it is not well documented. The high civil officer Cui Wangzhi 崔望之 and his wife were buried in 778 (Luoyangshi 1995: 50-51); their looted tomb was discovered in 1992 S of the Tianshan 田山 and Wangshan 王山 villages {3.5-4 km NW}. However, the Longmen burials in this period are well known from other evidence: I have managed to trace thirteen epitaphs and one pillar (certain), five probable epitaphs plus one (dubious) in the area (Guglielminotti Trivel 2004: 216-26, 235-36). We also ought to point out that the documented cave-tombs amount to 23 (Zhang Naizhu 1991a: 168-69), and that is the highest number within the temporal divisions of the Tang dynasty we are adopting. This was mainly due to the end of new grotto openings by high donors and the consequent change in the nature of the cave-temple itself.

3. *Destructions and Reconstructions: the Slow Decline*

3.1 The Late Tang (824-907)

The Tang monasteries in Longmen continued to flourish in the second quarter of the 9th century, but no new institution is mentioned. There are many historical sources relating to Longmen temples in this period, and a large amount of references is due to the famous poet Bai Juyi 白居易 (772-846). Material evidence, on the other hand, is rather scanty.

Hongshengsi (II) and *Hufasi* (II)

Chen Chang'an (1993: 529) gives information about a funerary pillar dated year 4 Taihe 太和 (830), which was dedicated by Zhang Guoxin 張國信 to his deceased father. It was erected «S of the stream passing by the Hongsheng hamlet [*zhuang* 莊], on the plain N of the Longmen district». I believe that *zhuang* here is a misreading of *si* 寺 («temple»):⁶³ if my view is correct, the pillar could confirm the existence of the Hongshengsi in Longmen. The reference to another *ad sanctos* burial further confirms the existence of the Hufasi. A pillar dated 836 (Kaicheng 開成 1), whose retrieval context is unknown, is stored in the Grottoes Academy. The inscription says it was dedicated to the *sthavira* of the Jing'ai Temple 敬愛寺, and it was erected «behind the ablution hall to the eastern edge of the Hufa, besides the [funerary] pagoda of the Master».⁶⁴ This is the second and last indirect evidence about the Hufasi, whose short existence seems not to have extended beyond the mid-century.

⁶³ The two characters can be easily confused in worn-out inscriptions, but I could not see the pillar myself nor find other texts mentioning it.

⁶⁴ For a complete transcript and the analysis of the inscription, see Zhang Naizhu (1991b: 251-54).

The slow decline of Tang society developed into the third, harsh persecution of Chinese history against Buddhism and the other religions of foreign origin. In the years 843-45, Emperor Wuzong 武宗 (r. 841-846) declared it would be allowed to preserve only one temple in each major prefecture and four temples in both capital cities: all the others (tens of thousands) were to be destroyed, and the monks forced to secular life. The measure was not probably carried out to the letter, but the properties of several monasteries were doubtlessly confiscated and the sacred images destroyed. The fortunes of Luoyang, Longmen and Chinese Buddhism in general suffered a severe blow and never again rose to their former splendour. The last Tang emperors rehabilitated Buddhism, but the large-scale destruction of scriptures brought about the decadence of the schools that depended mostly on the exegesis of the texts (Reischauer 1955: 164-271).

Tianzhusi (III) and Hongshengsi (III)

I managed to trace only one – albeit significant – piece of evidence referring to the Buddhist monasteries in Longmen just after the 843-45 repression. It is a rather peculiar *chuang* pagoda dated 850 (Dazhong 大中 4), discovered in 1981 at Sigou and now kept in the Grottoes Academy (pl. XII). The object is a dome-shaped stone block, 60 cm high and 58 cm in diameter, which should have originally been provided with a base and a *chatravāli*-like upper section. The lower register is occupied by four niches, each with a Buddhist triad in high relief; one of them is also flanked by guardians. In the upper register, some *dharanī* and *mantra* formulas are engraved.⁶⁵ The dedication, composed by the *bhikṣu* Yichuan 義川, is entitled: «In memory of Huaize 懷則, monk Zhixing 志行 of the Shengshan Temple 聖善寺 in the Eastern Capital of the Tang; on a plain north-east of the abandoned Tianzhusi, a tomb was erected and a *chuang* pagoda was respectfully dedicated». The tomb mentioned here is of Huaize himself, an important monk of Luoyang buried not far from the vestiges of the Tianzhusi.⁶⁶ The location of the monastery is carefully described by the text: «Bordering Yuque 禹闕 [*i.e.* the Longmen gorge] to the south, while the Yi River flows in front; looking the Ding 鼎 outskirts [of Luoyang] to the north, while the Fengyuan 鳳苑 district stands on the rear». Clearly, this is the position of the Western Tianzhusi at Sigou. The inscription, following the anti-Buddhist persecution by a few years, is a precious proof that the abolition of monasteries was carried on at Longmen and did not spare important institutions like the Tianzhusi.

⁶⁵ Works of this kind, linking the shape of the *stūpa* to the meaning of the *chuang* pillars, are very rare.

⁶⁶ For a description of the pagoda, the transcript and the analysis of inscriptions, see Wen Yucheng (1988) and LYSZ (1996: 332). An English translation of the dedication is available in Van Alphen (2001: 139-40). Drawings of the sculptures are found in Longmen (1995: 194-95).

This *chuang* pagoda provides useful information about the Hongsheng Temple as well. The text says that Huaize was appointed abbot of the Hongshengsi at the beginning of the Yuanhe era (806-820), and we deduce that the monastery was one (of the few?) spared by the Buddhist repression. Its abbot was buried close to the Tianzhusi, which, in its turn, knew quite a different fate. Since at least two funerary *chuang* linking monks of the Hongshengsi (Zhenjian in 784 and Huaize in 850) to the Western Tianzhusi were discovered at Sigou, it seems indeed probable that both temples were close to each other in the same valley.

Somewhat ironically, while destructions of monasteries took place to the N of the Longmen gorge, the residence of one of the main supporters of the persecution was flourishing to its S. The Pingquan 平泉 Villa of the Prime Minister Li Deyu 李德裕 (785-850) once stood at the limits of the survey area {4.5-5.4 km W-SW}, on the hills surrounding the present-day village of Liangcungou 梁村溝 (*Jiu Tang shu – Li Deyu zhuan*, juan 174; *Quan Tang shi* 475, 5397-415). Its precise location has not been determined, but sporadic findings throughout the neighborhood seem to confirm the information found in written sources (Li Jianren 1936: 272-75; Longmen 1996: 192).

We already mentioned the special relationship of Bai Juyi with the Longmen monasteries, and with the Xiangshansi in particular (Testa 1998: 453-54). At least one physical trace of his presence is still preserved and is found close to the Fengxiansi {about 200 m N-NE}, where a huge stele (about 500×165×57 cm), found in a place not far from there, has recently been re-erected (pl. XIII). It was dedicated in 831 by the poet himself to commemorate the place where he had symbolically buried the remains of the progenitor of the Bai surname, Bai Gongsheng 白公勝, who had lived in the State of Chu 楚 during the 5th century BC. The inscription is as yet unpublished (Guglielminotti Trivel 2004: 105-7).

It is known from written records that Bai Juyi himself was buried in the Xiangshansi (*Jiu Tang shu* 166.4358), but his real tomb has not been found. The tourist attraction called Bai Zhong (白冢) on top of the Qingshan 青山 {1.4 km NE}, N of the Dongshan, is not the original one but an arbitrary reconstruction from the beginning of the 18th century, related to the New Xiangshansi close to it (Gong Dazhong 1981: 271; Wen Yucheng 1983: 31). The tomb of another famous Tang poet, Jia Dao 賈島 (779-843), was reported on the Dongshan at the beginning of the last century (Yinzhuju 1918: 45; Li Jianren 1936: 320), but today no trace is left and its precise location is lost.

As the type of Longmen burial at the end of the dynasty seems to shift from religious personalities to lay celebrities, the number of burials themselves declined appreciably. I only traced one certain epitaph, one epitaph and one pillar (probable), and four dubious epitaphs (Guglielminotti Trivel 2004:

226-29, 236). Finally, the cave-tombs amount to five only, and after the Tang this kind of burial is no longer found (Zhang Naizhu 1991a: 169).

3.2 Five Dynasties and Northern Song (907-1126)

From the fall of the Tang to the rise of the Song dynasty, a series of short-lasting reigns competed for the control of China. The main capital was transferred eastward to Bianjing 汴京 (*i.e.* present Kaifeng), while Luoyang was principally considered as a second capital and renamed Xijing 西京, Western Capital. The destruction of many original buildings within the Longmen monasteries, already started with the 843-45 persecution, surely increased with the wars and the disorders of the Five Dynasties period (907-960). After the 10th century Luoyang was never again a capital city, and declined accordingly. Even if at the beginning Buddhism was held in esteem by the Song emperors, the selling of monks' certificates, official from 1068, definitively ratified the cultural and moral decadence of the Buddhist church, which survived and eventually developed from then on in more popular ways (Ch'en 1964: 389-408).

The Longmen Caves saw few additions, such as small niches and sculptures, in the 11th century: the last dated one goes back to 1079 (Wang Qufei 1956). The Song, on the other hand, undertook the first consistent reinforcement and restoration project of the Wei and Tang grottoes, together with the rebuilding of accesses and linking pathways. These works are attested by archaeological observation and by two Longmen inscriptions dated 1015 (Dazhong Xiangfu 大中祥符 8) and 1026 (Tiansheng 天聖 4; Gong Dazhong 1981: 299-300; Wen Yucheng 1987; Liu Mingshu 1993: 523). In the same century, or even before, a thermal spring in the Xishan, N of the present group of grottoes {1.1 km NE} was converted into an artificial pool. The structure of this original Yuwangchi 禹王池, with upper and lower basin, was probably similar to the one we see today (He Yong 1951: 76; Gong Dazhong 1981: 246-49; Longmen 1996: 184; pl. XIVa).

Guanghuasi (II), *Fengxiansi* (III), *Xiangshansi* (II), *Tianzhusi* (IV)

There is no dearth of Song written sources on the survival, at least in name if not in the original scale, of most Tang monasteries. Some archaeological evidence comes in to confirm and enrich this picture. Two of the stelae reported by Wen Yucheng (1992: 229) during his 1965 survey at the Guanghuasi are dated 1068-1077 (Xining 熙寧) and 1082 (Yuanfeng 元豐 5). The latter is inscribed with two poems about the Guanghuasi, from which we learn that the monastery's structure still existed, and monks lived in it.⁶⁷

Similar material was brought to light during the Fengxiansi excavation. The fragment of a stele was recognized by E. Forte (2003: 131-39; Caterina, Verardi 2005: fig. 85) as a text written by the well-known scholar and calligrapher Qian

⁶⁷ This stele is now lost, but Wen Yucheng (1992: 229-30, n. 56) had a rubbing of it: the transcript of the inscription is published in his text.

Yi 錢易 between 1004 and 1063. A stone slab (Caterina, Verardi 2005: fig. 86) engraved with a poem by Wen Yanbo 文彦博 (1006-1097), dated 1081 (Yuanfeng 4), provides the main epigraphic and archaeological evidence, confirming beyond any doubt that the excavated site is the Fengxiansi. In general, both the Fengxiansi excavation and the Xiangshansi trial-trench testify to the survival of the monastic structures until the 12th century.

The last Song epigraph from the area is the above-mentioned stele of 1084 (Yuanfeng 7) from the Tianzhusi, discovered in 1975 at the Sigou Commune (pl. XIVb). The inscription on the front («Memories of the restoration of the buildings of the Tianzhusi on the Longmen Mountain») gives an accurate description of the temple's history since its foundation in 762. On the back side are two short poems about «two temples on the Longmen Mountain», followed by a passage about a miraculous spring of the Western Tianzhusi. On the left side of the stele there is a further engraved line: «[?] Day, 2nd leap month, 4th year Shaosheng 紹聖 [1097]: in memory of the restoration of the Buddha Hall by Prior Yuanqing 愿清». Therefore, the temple was surely active as it was restructured twice in the last quarter of the 11th century alone.⁶⁸

From the scant archaeological evidence, it seems that under the Song the main construction activities aimed at the restoration of previous monastic structures or the building of new non-religious installations. Numerous finds are in fact related to personalities and settings less directly involved with Buddhism than previously attested. The burial practices at Longmen, though, did not come to an end with the fall of the Tang: two certain epitaphs, one epitaph and two pillars (dubious) are attested in the 10th century (Guglielminotti Trivel 2004: 229-31, 236-37). In 1957, during the construction of the Luo-Yi Road behind the Xishan, eleven tombs were discovered and five of them were excavated. Only some information about one burial, named 'Song tomb no. 1', has been published (Fu Yongkui 1958): on the basis of the brick structure and findings, it has been dated to the beginning of the Northern Song (end of 10th, beginning of the 11th century).

4. Conclusions

After the Northern Song, the invasions of the Nüzhen 女真 Jin (1115-1234) and Mongol Yuan (1271-1368) gave the splendours of Luoyang the final blow. In his travel notes at Longmen, written at the end of the Yuan period, Sa Tianxi 薩天錫 (1308-?) describes a scenery of desolation:

⁶⁸ The inscriptions are reported in part by Gong Dazhong (1981: 253-55) and in full by Wen Yucheng (1985: 100-1). See also LYSZ (1996: 315) and a partial rubbing in Wen Yucheng (1985: 98).

Formerly, on both banks of the Yique there were eight monasteries, but none of them is left today. Only on the eastern side there are two heaps of ruins and nothing more. Tens of stelae have collapsed and lie facedown, one or two alone are still standing. The inscriptions are all Buddha's words, but the characters are rubbed away and illegible (*Henanfu zhi* 84.51a).

Fengxiansi excavation apart, no other significant archaeological evidence of the Longmen monasteries between the 12th and the 14th century is reported.

In this brief presentation of the Longmen area from the point of view of archaeological and epigraphic findings, we have mentioned the most significant ones relating to the funerary sphere and the non-religious settlements (residences, parks, etc.). We have not taken into account the few infrastructures (streets, bridges, channels) reported in the area, and have reduced to the minimum the consistent amount of historical sources that would have enriched the overall outline. Keeping in mind that the Longmen landscape was not limited to grottoes, tombs and monasteries, within the scope of this paper it is possible to draw some further considerations about the last ones during the Tang.⁶⁹

1. Among the Ten Monasteries mentioned in the excavations' preliminary report (Testa 1998), the Fengxiansi and the Baoyingsi – and other four monastic settlements corresponding very probably to Xiangshansi, Tianzhusi, Putisi and Guanghuasi – are known with certainty from archaeological data. Indirect epigraphic evidence confirms the existence and approximate location of Qianyuansi and Jingshansi. Regarding the last two (Shengshansi 勝善寺 and Yuquansi 玉泉寺), as well as other temples not discussed in this paper, we still have to rely on historical sources only. Series of ten apart, some epigraphic material of secure provenance and highly significant in content made it possible to establish the existence of two more monasteries in the Longmen area, Hongshengsi and Hufasi.

2. Most of the sites of the Longmen monasteries are situated on the mountainous offshoots of Xishan and Dongshan, not far from the grottoes. They were built taking advantage of high ridges/hills and adapting to the terrain's morphology. Therefore, they may be classified as 'mountain temples', built in a dominant position upon the valleys below. Monasteries surrounded the Longmen pass like fortifications and watch-towers guarding the southern access to the capital: perhaps they were just built over military outposts of this kind and still had signalling functions from time to time during periods of war and unrest. On the eastern bank, beginning with the alleged Qianyuansi, we find a valley and then the Xiangshansi at the very entrance of the gorge, opposite the Jingshansi on the northern slopes of the Dongshan. On the western bank of the Yi, this alternation is more pronounced and definite. N of the Putisi, the Fengxiansi stands on the southern slopes of the Xishan – symmetrical to the Xiangshansi on the other side. Further N, surrounding the gorge, we

⁶⁹ For a deeper analysis, cfr. Guglielminotti Trivel (2004).

reach first the Baoyingsi, then the Guanghuasi on the next crest. Guanghuasi and Western Tianzhusi, again, are separated by one valley only.

3. Some of the monasteries were founded as an expansion of the burial site of a famous monk, then begun to attract more and more burials themselves. Necropoleis tend to gather around the sacred areas, whether monasteries or grottoes, and include both the Buddhist clergy and the lay believers. The *ad sanctos* burials are hence distinctive of the Longmen landscape, were the religious and funerary spheres are mingled and often difficult to distinguish.

4. Among the Buddhist trends involved with the Longmen monasteries, the best represented seem to be the Chan (Northern and Southern) and the esoteric ones. These two kinds of teachings well survived the fall of the Tang, and this may partly explain why most of the monasteries in Longmen continued to exist until late. Buddhist masters living and dying in these temples were prominent personalities within the Chinese religious panorama of their time. The foundation, patronage and support of monastic institutions were tightly linked, almost inseparable, from the imperial court and high state officials.

Marco Guglielminotti Trivel
Museo d'Arte Orientale
Via San Domenico 9
10122 Torino
trivelpark@tiscali.it

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