

Preface

This book emerges from a decade-long study of materials from Dunhuang, China's most comprehensive and extensive Buddhist site, encompassing both wall paintings and manuscripts dating from the fifth to the eleventh centuries. Buddhist cave shrines were built near Dunhuang and other northwestern garrison towns established by the governments of the Han (206 B.C.E.–220 C.E.), Northern Liang (421–39 C.E.), Northern Wei (439–534 C.E.), Western Wei (535–56 C.E.), Northern Zhou (557–81 C.E.), Sui (581–681 C.E.), and Tang (618–907 C.E.) dynasties. The dry climate of Dunhuang and an extraordinary hidden library of 42,000 scrolls, artists' sketches, and paintings discovered there in 1900 account for the wealth of medieval material no longer available in other parts of China. A busy scholarly tradition has ensued since this discovery. Because the library's contents were scattered to European, Japanese, and Indian collections, the study of these materials has remarkably international dimensions. In the 1920s Chinese scholars focused on the relationship of Dunhuang's vernacular literature to long-held views about traditional classical Chinese literature. Identification of the subject matter in the murals located in the 492 decorated cave temples has occupied scholars at the site itself. More recently, Chinese historians have investigated the historical dimensions of the Silk Road and Dunhuang's role in a regional Central Asian culture with the Sogdians, Khotanese, and Uighurs. Japanese scholars, concerned with the origins of their own traditions, have excelled in iconographic analysis as well as detailed studies of Buddhist philosophy, the monastic tradition, and land tenure and contracts. French sinologists have been the most precise in their identification and discussion of individual manuscripts and paintings. They have explored all aspects of medieval cultural traditions, Buddhist practice, and the complex pantheons in ritual texts and paintings. British scholars have compiled catalogs of their Dunhuang holdings and identified the range of manuscripts once held by many monasteries. Sinologists in the United States, where Dunhuang studies are less pervasive, have explored aspects of popular religious festivals and have undertaken complete analyses of individual caves. My contribution to this vast literature is a comprehensive theoretic-

at this site, a subject with implications for art in temples and towns across the Chinese empire. I closely track the status of the artist's sketch in considering these broader themes and offer a new, distinct way of discussing the painter's preparatory materials and cognitive process.

This book is divided into two sections. The first addresses the history of the mural workshop and how art was produced there: the organization of labor, methods of compensation, modes of cognition, forms of expression and indices to medieval artistic concepts. The second concentrates on more abstract problems associated with performance, art, and oral culture. The ephemeral realm of freehand drawing and the role of the sketch link these two parts. Throughout, the book addresses bodily practices of oral culture evident in both extant preparatory sketches and in discursive traditions in ninth-century art histories. The painting of the late ninth and tenth centuries—falling at the end of the long Tang dynasty and continuing through the ensuing Five Dynasties (907–60), when China and Central Asia were divided into regional kingdoms—has often slipped unnoticed between the two cultural highpoints of the Tang and Northern Song (960–1127) dynasties. This book is the first comprehensive analysis of the art of this transitional period, which despite a lack of scholarly attention actually has a wealth of extant texts, paintings, and sketches. Yet the reader will not find a detailed iconographic analysis of painting or perhaps even a useful guide to works dating to this period. Instead, broader interpretive problems about visual and oral culture are addressed to resolve fundamental questions about the medieval professional painter.

This study was made possible through the extraordinary kindness and generosity of the curators of Dunhuang materials. Five played critical roles in allowing me to study at their institutions: Fan Jinshi, Director of the Dunhuang Research Academy; Monique Cohen, Director, Oriental Manuscripts Bibliothèque nationale de France; Frances Wood, Curator, China and India Office, British Library; Jacques Giès, Chief Curator, Musée national des arts asiatiques-Guimet; and Anne Farrer, former Assistant Keeper, Oriental Antiquities at the British Museum. All institutions made extraordinary efforts to provide photographic material; this book would not have been possible without the backing and commitment of their academic and technical staff. Countless other curators of sites and collections in China, Japan, the United States, and Europe provided much-needed access.

At the doctoral stage at the University of California, Berkeley, I was fortunate to have as mentors the two leading art historians in my field. From them I learned the art of research. James Cahill demonstrated the value of thinking broadly and asking comprehensive questions. His strong interest in the atel-

knowledge of Chinese painting collections opened doors around the globe. Joanna Williams, Professor of Indian Art, taught me the importance of fieldwork and of relying on my interests and instincts. Further, I was fortunate to take two seminars with her on narrative and folk art theory that shaped my thinking in fundamental ways. Several other scholars were instrumental in my formative work. Study with Michael Baxandall gave me tools to address problems of wall painting and the economics of art. Michel Strickmann introduced me to a catalog of the Dunhuang artist's sketches in the Bibliothèque nationale and heightened my interest in Buddhism. Su Bai, Professor Emeritus, Archaeology Department, Peking University, and Ma Shichang, also of the Archaeology Department at Peking University, shared their knowledge of Buddhist sites and readily lent their good offices to facilitate access to Chinese sites. At the Palace Museum, Beijing, I received guidance in my research into the history of Chinese sketches from curator Shan Guoqiang and training in calligraphy from Dong Zhenghe. Akio Donohashi and his graduate students in residence at Kobe University during my year of doctoral research there in 1990–91 shared the broad literature in Japanese on monochrome and Buddhist painting. Terukazu Akiyama, the preeminent specialist in the French collections of Dunhuang paintings, guided me during this early stage as well.

I owe thanks to the scholars who carefully read my work and gave me venues to share versions of the manuscript. Jean-Pierre Drège, President of the *École française d'Extrême-Orient*, Paris, invited me to lecture frequently and also arranged for my appointment as *Directrice d'Études* at the *École Pratique des Hautes Études*, where I delivered the bulk of the book's themes in a series of workshops in May–June 2000. Richard Vinograd, Professor and former Chair, Art Department, Stanford University, gave me the opportunity to teach seminars on Dunhuang, which were critical in helping to consolidate my ideas. Benjamin Elman, Professor of Chinese History, UCLA, invited me to join a group at the Institute for Advanced Study in his capacity as Distinguished Visiting Mellon Professor in the fall of 1999 where I received critical feedback on drafts. Wu Hung, Professor of Chinese Art History, University of Chicago, arranged for my frequent lectures and workshops and with his graduate students focused on key issues in the manuscript. Brook Ziporyn, in Northwestern University's Religious Studies and Philosophy departments, guided me through readings in relevant Daoist literature. Lothar Ledderose, Professor, University of Heidelberg, provided early support in working out the complex problems associated with this study.

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Any problems that remain in this study are, of course, my own.

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