

Nestorian Tablet of Sian-fu, undated

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Descriptive Summary

Title: Nestorian Tablet of Sian-fu, undated
Call Number: Manuscript Collection No. 195
Extent: 0.1 cubic ft. (1 oversize folder)
Abstract: Contains a wax rubbing of the tablet, done in sections on four different pieces of tissue paper.
Language: Materials entirely in Chinese.

Administrative Information

Restrictions on Access

Unrestricted access.

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Due to the fragile nature of the material, this rubbing may not be photocopied.

Citation

[after identification of item(s)], Nestorian Tablet of Sian-fu, Archives and Manuscript Dept., Pitts Theology Library, Emory University.

Processing

Processed by Karen L. Esterl, 1999.

Collection Description

Biographical Note

The term Nestorian is used to describe the followers of Nestorius, an Antiochene trained monk and bishop of Constantinople, who was born in 381 C.E. in Germanica in Syria Euphratensis. Nestorius broke with tradition by publicly disapproving of the term theotokos (“Mother of God”) as it was used to refer to Mary, the mother of Jesus. The great period of expansion of the Nestorian Church was from the 7th to the 10th century, with missions to China and India. The clearest evidence of these missionary efforts is the Nestorian tablet of Sian-fu, which was

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unearthed in 1623 or 1625. The monument, also called Ta-ch'in-ching-chiao-pei, is generally believed by scholars to have been erected in 781.

Scope and Content Note

This item consists of a wax rubbing of the tablet, done in sections on four different pieces of tissue paper. The inscription is primarily in Chinese, but there are several Syriac words; and there is a bilingual list of proper names in both languages.

The opening lines of the inscription summarize the doctrine of the Nestorian Christians in China. This section is followed by a description of various Nestorian practices.

In his article "The First Nestorian Mission to China," Robert Oppenheim describes the monument in great detail. As part of this description, he points out that the incised cross at the head of the monument stands above clouds and a lotus blossom, thus symbolically depicting the believed superiority of Christianity to Taoism (as represented by the clouds) and Buddhism (the lotus blossom). The rubbing may, accordingly, be of interest to scholars of Christianity's relations with other religious traditions.

