

Xi'an Beilin Museum, Xian



The Stele Forest, or Xi'an Beilin Museum (𠄎𠄎'æž—; pinyin: Bǎ'ílǎn), is a museum for steles and stone sculptures which is located in Xi'an, China. The museum is housed in a former Confucian Temple and it has housed a growing collection of Steles since 1087. By 1944 it was the principal museum for Shaanxi province. Due to the large number of steles, it was officially renamed as the Forest of Stone Steles in 1992. All together, there are 3,000 steles in the museum, which is divided into seven exhibitions halls, which mainly display works of calligraphy, painting and historical records.

The Stele Forest began with the Kaicheng Shi Jing Steles (𠄎𠄎'æž—; pinyin: Bǎ'ílǎn) and Shitai Xiao Jing Steles (𠄎𠄎'æž—; pinyin: Bǎ'ílǎn), two groups of steles both carved in the Tang dynasty and displayed in the temple to Confucius in Chang'an. In 904, a rebel army sacked Chang'an, and the two stele were evacuated to the inner city. In 962, they were again moved to the rebuilt temple to Confucius. In the Song Dynasty (1087), a special hall, with attached facilities, was built to house and display the two Stele groups. It was damaged in the 1556 Shaanxi earthquake during the Ming dynasty. In 1936, famous Chinese calligrapher Yu Youren donated his entire collection of more than three hundred rubbings from Stele to the Xian Forest of Stele Museum.[2] It became a Major Historical and Cultural Site Protected at the National Level in 1961 and thus survived the Cultural Revolution.

It houses nearly 3,000 steles and it is the biggest collection of steles in China. Most of its exhibits are steles of the Tang Dynasty. Ink rubbings of the steles are available for sale. Among the unusual examples is an 18th-century stele depicting a Yangtze River flood control project.

Another appears to be a bamboo forest, but on examination the leaves and branches form a poem. The famous Nestorian Stele was moved to the Stele Forest in 1907, after the local authorities learned that the Danish adventurer Frits Holm was in town, trying to "obtain" the ancient monument and take it out of the country