

# Luohan



*Glazed stoneware, China, c2m high on c 1m wide plinth, Liao Dynasty (CE907-1125)*

*Photo ©The Trustees of the British Museum*

This is a somewhat larger than life sized figure, with a stern, implacable facial expression. The ears are quite elongated, the eyes are open and glazed with a black colour. The hair is green, the same hue as the inner robes of the figure. The robe is a plain green on the Luohan's right side with a brown, patterned over-robe on the left side and covering the crossed legs.

The figure is seated, squatting on the floor with its legs parallel to the floor. The forearms are resting on the legs with hands loosely touching/holding each other. A slight downturn to the mouth adds to the severe expression, but the pose and expression exudes calm and seriousness.

The plinth is interesting in that it almost looks like volcanic rock. It has a cobweb of irregular pillars and an abstract colouration to the sides and interior. It is almost as if the figure is floating above this.

The British Museum website<sup>1</sup> states that the figure "was made in the Liao dynasty, following the sculptural traditions developed in the Tang dynasty (AD 618-906)". It describes a Luohan as "a disciple of the Buddha" and that they had "magical powers and could stay alive indefinitely to preserve the Buddha's teachings". It also states of this particular figure "This example, with his calm, serious face, represents the aspiration of the educated man to attain enlightenment". It also explains the significance of the colours and of the robe "The figure is glazed in colours of the *sancai* (three-colour) palette of the Tang dynasty. The banding on the yellow robe represents the patchwork worn by monks as a sign of humility".

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.britishmuseum.org/explore/highlights/highlight\\_objects/asia/s/stoneware\\_luohan.aspx](http://www.britishmuseum.org/explore/highlights/highlight_objects/asia/s/stoneware_luohan.aspx)