

ELLORA

BUDDHIST, HINDU, AND JAIN SANCTUARIES

Ellora lies in the state of Maharashtra, in western central India. This pretty spot, surrounded by lush vegetation, is only a few kilometres from another place of great interest, the Ajanta caves.

Ellora has been a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1983 in recognition of its great importance as a repository of wonderful art and as a place of pilgrimage for followers of India's three great religions: Buddhism, Hinduism, and Jainism. Thirty-four places of worship (temples, monasteries, and shrines) were carved out of the rock between the fifth and tenth centuries over an area of around two square kilometres. All the sculpture at the site is testimony to the superb skill and sheer determination of the workforce involved, as well as being evidence of the religious harmony of the time. The monuments include all sorts of architectural and decorative features that display the utmost splendour and inventiveness: columns, staircases, reliefs, stuccos, and even surviving patches of painted decoration.

In the past, the extraordinary work at the site has unfortunately been eclipsed by the exceptional nature of its surroundings. The architecture and sculpture are often immersed in darkness and this has made it impossible to create the kind of photographic record that would give their stunning quality the visibility it deserves. But now Iago Corazza, with his ultra-sensitive photographic equipment, is able at last to give lovers of Indian art and enthusiasts the chance to fully appreciate this wonderful, indeed unique, group of rock-cut temples. The task of explaining the meaning and significance of these works as they emerge from the dark is entrusted to the expertise of Gilles Béguin.

Following the success of *Khajuraho*, readers have the chance to explore another treasure of Indian art accompanied by a distinguished guide, with the benefit of photos that at last do their marvellous subjects full justice.

Gilles Béguin, Conservateur Général Honoraire du Patrimoine, was head of the Nepalese and Tibetan Buddhism collections at the Musée national des arts asiatiques-Guimet from 1971 to 1994. He was then appointed director of Musée Cernuschi, musée des Arts de l'Asie de la Ville de Paris, where from 2001 to 2005 he organized numerous exhibitions and supervised the complete renovation of the museum. He is the author of several scholarly articles, exhibition catalogues, and art books, including: *Les Cimes de l'éveil : monastères bouddhiques du Ladakh* (1990); *Polonnaruwa : renaissance à Ceylan* (1991); *Les peintures du bouddhisme tibétain* (1995); *Nepal, Vision d'un art sacré* (1996); *L'Arte buddista. Un atlante storico* (2009).

Iago Corazza is a photographer and has provided numerous photographic features for National Geographic, White Star, and the magazine Oasis. He has also made documentaries for leading Italian and international broadcasters. Iago Corazza is a UNICEF collaborator.