

THE BARAKAT GALLERY

Masterpieces of Chinese Art
Volume II
386 AD - 618 AD



6 Dynasties

Northern Qi Painted Pottery Bull with Medallions



DL.2079

Origin: Hebei Province

Circa: 550 AD to 577 AD

Dimensions:

12.89" (32.7cm) high x 13.58" (34.5cm) wide

Collection: Chinese

Medium: Terracotta

Condition: Extra Fine

Location: UAE

As implied by its short duration, the Northern Qi Dynasty was a turbulent time in the vast history of China. Locusts plagued the lands, ruining the crops. Hunger and ethnic feuding ravaged the population. Despite this unrest the arts continued to flourish, as witnessed by this extraordinary powerful representation of a bull. The animal's stance is assertive, with its four legs positioned firmly on the corners of the integral rectangular plinth. The head is raised, with the mouth slightly ajar, as if warning off a potential aggressor. The figurine is in excellent condition with considerable traces of the original red polychromy. The expertly modeled horns create a striking silhouette, contrasting with the sheer bulk of the bull's body. There is considerable attention to detail in the modelling. Particularly striking is the elaborate harness with medallions, used to shackle this powerful animal.

During this period sculptural effigies of domesticated animals were often interred in the tombs of the nobility and elite members of the social hierarchy. Created in all media, these sculptures accompanied the spirit of the deceased into the afterlife. This bull effigy has served its eternal purpose well. Today, it continues to nourish our souls with its beauty and grace. - (DL.2079)

Northern Qi Painted Pottery Bull



DL.2080

Origin: Hebei Province

Circa: 550 AD to 577 AD

Dimensions:

13.7" (34.8cm) high x 14.9" (37.8cm) wide

Collection: Chinese

Style: Qi

Medium: Terracotta

Condition: Extra Fine

Location: UAE

As implied by its short duration, the Northern Qi Dynasty was a turbulent time in the vast history of China. Locusts plagued the lands, ruining the crops. Hunger and ethnic feuding ravaged the population. Despite this unrest the arts continued to flourish, as witnessed by this extraordinary powerful representation of a bull. The animal's stance is assertive, with its four legs positioned firmly on the corners of the integral rectangular plinth. The head is raised, with the mouth slightly ajar, as if warning off a potential aggressor. The figurine is in excellent condition with traces of the original red polychromy in the mouth, nostrils and ears. The expertly modeled horns create a striking silhouette, contrasting with the sheer bulk of the bull's body. There is considerable attention to detail in the modelling, especially the incised lines which add to the texture of the tail.

During this period sculptural effigies of domesticated animals were often interred in the tombs of the nobility and elite members of the social hierarchy. Created in all media, these sculptures accompanied the spirit of the deceased into the afterlife. Thus, logically, as we require food to nourish our bodies on earth, so too will we require food to nourish our souls in the afterlife. This work is more than a mere sculpture; it is a gorgeous memorial to the religious and philosophical beliefs of its time. This bull effigy has served its eternal purpose well. Today, it continues to nourish our souls with its beauty and grace. - (DL.2080)

A Pair of Northern Qi Painted Pottery Officials



DK.113
Origin: China
Circa: 550 AD to 577 AD
Dimensions: 47" (119.4cm) high

Collection: Chinese
Medium: Terracotta
Condition: Very Fine
Location: UAE

Eastern Wei Painted Pottery
Warrior Carrying a Shield



DL.2076
Origin: Hebei Province
Circa: 534 AD to 550 AD
Dimensions: 30.31" (77.0cm) high

Collection: Chinese Art
Medium: Terracotta
Condition: Extra Fine
Location: UAE

This spectacular terracotta figure of a standing warrior belongs to a class of objects known as 'mingqi,' literally 'spirit goods.' These were items buried with the dead to ensure that all their social and material needs would be met in the afterlife. Originally mingqi were fashioned from expensive materials such as bronze or jade but from the third century BC burial sculptures of fired ceramic became more common. This was a trend that lasted until the demise of the Tang Dynasty when burial customs changed and offerings were burnt in the belief that the smoke would carry the essence of the goods to the next world. The production of ceramic grave goods created new opportunities for sculptors to produce increasingly naturalistic and detailed works of art.

This heavily armoured warrior was produced to guard the deceased for eternity. Standing on a plinth, he wears pointed boots and a helmet with protective neck and ear flaps. A shield, embellished with an animal mask and dancing creatures, is supported in his left hand. His right is positioned to hold a lance or spear that would have been fashioned from a perishable material such as wood. The facial features are striking, especially the thick eyebrows and upturned moustache. Modeled in the round, the detail of the armour is equally impressive on both sides.

Considerable traces of the original red pigment survive. Decorated with a technique known as 'cold painting', the warrior would have been embellished with mineral pigments after firing. These were applied over a white ground which is now partly visible. In contrast to glazing, this technique produced a more delicate and naturalistic effect and the range of colours available was more varied. The head of the warrior was made separately and is removable. Although never intended to be viewed by the living, this piece is a supreme example of the potter's skill during the Eastern Wei period.
(AM)

For a comparable example see, V. L. Bower, 'From Court to Caravan: Chinese Tomb Sculptures from the Collection of Anthony M. Solomon,' (New Haven and London, 2002), p. 93, no. 20. - (DL.2076)

Northern Wei Marble Sculpture of a Bodhisattva



LO.1310 (AM)
Origin: China
Circa: 386 AD to 534 AD
Dimensions: 11.5" (29.2cm) high

Collection: Chinese Art
Medium: Marble
Location: Great Britain

This marble stele depicts a bodhisattva carved in high relief against a leaf-shaped mandorla. It dates to a time of unprecedented artistic development that surrounded the period of China's unification in 439 AD, under the Northern Wei (or Tuoba Wei). The rulers of the dynasty seem to have originated from the Tuoba clan of the non-Han Xianbei tribe, and later renamed themselves the Yuans.

Standing on a lotus pedestal, the figure wears a tall headdress and a flowing outer robe which runs beneath the pedestal onto the rectangular plinth. In his right hand he holds a lotus bud and in his left a heart-shaped fan. These attributes are common amongst bodhisattvas of the Northern Wei period. The fan motif first appears in a similar context in Gandharan Buddhist art of the 1st century AD and was used to honour high-ranking persons. In Chinese examples it is always shown pointing downwards. Two sets of concentric curves have been carved in low relief to frame the bodhisattva. Delicate features are one of the hallmarks of Northern Wei figurative sculpture, reflected here in the slender arms and body. The face and clothing are likewise finely carved, with a long robe and tunic surmounted by a flamboyant piece of headwear that frames the face with two "wings".

Buddhism was first introduced to China from the Indian subcontinent along the trade routes of Central Asia during the early years of the Han dynasty. However it faced two powerful competing ideologies, Confucianism and Daoism, which initially impeded its progress. When the Northern Wei, a foreign nomadic people, conquered parts of China in the late fourth century Buddhism was flourishing. Bodhisattvas were often depicted in pairs around a central image of the Buddha. These enlightened beings choose to delay their entry into Nirvana in order to help others attain enlightenment. Although Buddhist texts do not specify their gender, Chinese examples are generally depicted as male until the end of the Song Dynasty (1279), when they begin to assume a feminine appearance. Bodhisattvas can usually be differentiated from Buddha figures on the basis of their decorative appearance; Buddhas are invariably depicted in plainer raiment that reflects their ascetic lifestyle.

The size of this piece suggests that it may have functioned in a domestic setting as an aid to devotional reflection. Although there is no remaining trace of colour, it was probably polychromed and gilded in its original state. At this early date bodhisattvas tended not to be venerated in isolation from images of the Buddha, so it is not inconceivable that this piece was once part of a group of free-standing sculptures. The choice of material is also worthy of mention: marble is uncommon, as the majority of Buddhist art that survives from this period is carved from limestone. The small, intimate scale of this piece and the delicacy of the carving make it a truly desirable object. (AM) - (LO.1310 (AM))

The Sui Dynasty

After almost four hundred years of civil war and division, Yang Jian succeeded in reunifying north and south under one authority, the Sui Dynasty. However, despite its brief duration, lasting for the rule of only two emperors, the Sui Dynasty paved the way for the cultural renaissance that would arise during the T'ang Dynasty. Reforms were introduced to wrest power out of the hands of the aristocracy, military, and Buddhist communities. The Confucianist system of selecting government officials from state schools, by means of rigorous examinations, was initiated. Perhaps their most significant program was the construction of the Great Canal, a project that facilitated the movement of people and goods across great distances, aiding in the reunification of China. However, the cost of the Canal bankrupted the empire and ultimately led to its dissolution, coupled with a failed campaign to conquer Korea. The rulers of the T'ang would capitalize on the infrastructure improvements of the Sui and establish one of the greatest empires in the history of China, following the footsteps of the Sui.

Sui Pair of Glazed Terracotta Military Officers



H.526

Origin: China

Circa: 581 AD to 618 AD

Dimensions: 18.5" (47.0cm) high

Catalogue: V17

Collection: Chinese

Medium: Glazed Terracott

Location: Great Britain

Sui Dynasty innovations ushered in the great flowering of tomb object, mingqi, production that lasted into the Tang Dynasty. With the reunification of the Chinese proper, Sui artisans were faced with an increased demand for elaborate pieces to furnish the interior compounds of a burial lay-out that began to look more like a landscape of surface society rather than a recreation of daily life which characterized the tombs of earlier periods.

Though guardian figurines became the hot product of the day, military figurines persisted to play an important role in the burial procession. These two figurines represent Sui military men, posed in a familiar stance with one arm cocked forward and the other drawn to the side grasping a weapon that no longer exists. Based on the sort of techniques and production methods available at the time, it is assumed that bright colors were applied onto a base of white-bodied ware. Detailed painted work can be seen on the trousers that appear to be blue and red decorative pads covering the knees. The soldiers are protected head to toe in armor consisting of pectoral plates, a headdress, and a shoulder cape. Their facial features are sculpted to the finest detail--their curved eyebrows and grimacing mouth express the tension of men ready to risk their life in battle.

In a realistic representation, these two military figurines exemplify the transformation of tomb objects, reflecting the strength, vigor, and wealth of the unified Sui Empire. Tomb figurines once again claim their superior position among Chinese classical sculptural forms. - (H.526)

Sui Glazed Terracotta Sculpture of a Horse



H.530

Origin: China

Circa: 581 AD to 618 AD

Dimensions: 13.5" (34.3cm) high

Catalogue: V17

Collection: Chinese

Medium: Glazed Terracotta

Location: United States

An emblem of speed and perseverance, the horse has always served a special role in Chinese life. This Sui representation attests to horse as a symbol of wealth and status among the aristocratic classes. Its long slender legs, hogged mane, streamline body and decorative saddle and bridle give it an air of prestige and elegance unsurpassed by earlier representations which emphasized brute force through a blockish body line. Its powerfully rounded neck, muscular throat-latch, and tuft of hair reaching between its standing ears enhance its confidence and serene composure. The details of its gear--studded bridle and leather straps of imperial regalia--indicate its use in ceremonial processions. After the unification of the empire under the Sui, tomb figurines came to reflect the sophisticated world of wealthy nobles from the north, accustomed to foreign contact, travel, and a luxurious lifestyle in the capital city as the tomb became a powerful political instrument to reinforce the might of the central government. Thus the underlying theme became status and mobility. Replacing the ox cart as a means to transport the deceased to the other world, a saddled horse occupied a privilege position in close proximity to the coffin or tomb tablet. This figurine of a horse not only reflects the artistic sensibilities and beliefs of the early Chinese, but contains the energy of the horse whose honorable duty was to facilitate the journey into the other world. - (H.530)

Sui Glazed Terracotta Sculpture of a Camel



H.724
Origin: China
Circa: 581 AD to 618 AD
Dimensions: 13.5" (34.3cm) high

Collection: Chinese
Medium: Glazed Terracotta
Location: Great Britain

The camel is an unusual domestic animal; it carries a saddle of flesh on its back; swiftly it dashes over the shifting sands; it manifests its merit in dangerous places; it has a secret understanding of springs and sources, subtle indeed is its knowledge.

--Guo Pu, 3rd Century AD

Camels symbolized commerce and its associated wealth, largely concentrated on profits through trading on the Silk Road. Trade across this extensive network of trails brought prosperity, foreign merchants, and exotic merchandise into the heart of China. However, the dusty trails of the Silk Road were an arduous journey through the rugged mountains and harsh desert of Central Asia that could only be traversed by the two humped Bactrian camel. The government kept vast herds of these invaluable creatures, presided over by civil officials, for hauling their precious commodities across the Silk Road. Camels were a common sight in the cosmopolitan cities of China, carrying both traders and their goods directly into the markets. Likewise, artists began to create charming representations of these prized creatures as *mingqi* in order to symbolize wealth and prosperity in the afterlife. *Mingqi* were works of art created in an ancient Chinese custom specifically for interment in the tombs of elite individuals in order to provide for their needs in the afterlife. Some of the most beautiful works of Chinese art were excavated from such tombs, and this crème-glazed sculpture of a camel, loaded with a swollen bundle of goods, is a perfect example of the refined artistry dedicated to such works, despite the facts that they were not intended to be viewed by the living. Most remarkable, this work still retains some of its original painted pigment, including red highlights on his ears and mouth, which heighten the naturalism. This majestic sculpture reveals China's respect and admiration for this beast of burden, so essential to their prosperity. - (H.724)

Set of Four Sui Crème-Glazed
Horses and Riders



H.759
Origin: China
Circa: 581 AD to 618 AD
Dimensions: 8.5" (21.6cm) high

Collection: Chinese
Medium: Glazed Terracotta
Location: United States

This charming set of four horse and rider sculptures, covered in a crème glaze characteristic of the Sui Dynasty, depicts a procession of musicians and attendants. One rider bangs a drum that hangs off the side of his steed. Another blows on a long arching horn he carries in his hands. We can imagine the rhythmic tones of their music rising over the nose of the horses' hooves hitting the ground. The other two riders appear to be attendants or court officials. This procession might have been a joyous occasion to entertain the crowd of onlookers while simultaneously demonstrating the resplendent wealth and power of the court. It is also possible that this procession was more somber occasion, leading to the burial place of a fallen leader. Discovered inside a tomb, this set clearly served an important purpose in the afterlife. We can imagine the deceased individual awaking in the next world to the tones of the musicians and the welcome of his official attendants. This gorgeous set of sculptures gives us a glimpse into the past, into the blossoming period of one of the great golden ages of human civilization. - (H. 759)

Pair of Sui Glazed and Painted Terracotta
Spirit Guardians



H.948
Origin: China
Circa: 581 AD to 618 AD
Dimensions: 10.5" (26.7cm) high

Collection: Chinese
Medium: Glazed Terracotta
Location: Great Britain

Originating during the Six Dynasties period (222-589 A.D.), these types of figures are known as spirit guardians, for originally, a pair of such figures always stood guard at the tombs of Chinese rulers. Traditionally, both figures are mythological composite creatures, one always an amalgamation of various animals while the other a combination of human and animal traits. These guardians are a general type of Chinese art known as mingqi. Mingqi were any variety of objects specifically created for interment in the tombs of elite individuals in order to provide for their afterlife. These guardians were most likely interred in order to ward off potential tomb robbers or evil spirits in the next world that might try to infiltrate the tomb. This pair of spirit guardians have been decorated with an elegant crème glaze and then highlighted with red and black pigments. Both appear to have the bodies and hooved legs of horses while one bears a human visage and the other, the fanged head of a dragon. A large spiraling horn emerges from the head of the composite dragon beast in between his ears. Black stripes along their legs enhance the animal nature of these creatures. This pair, although intending to repel us, instead attracts our gaze with their reserved, yet charming, decorations. - (H.948)

Sui Dynasty Painted Pottery Horse
with Long Saddle



DL.2071
Origin: Shaanxi Province - 'Xi'an'
Circa: 581 AD to 618 AD
Dimensions:
9.8" (24.9cm) high x 10.6" (26.9cm) wide

Collection: Chinese Art
Medium: Terracotta
Condition: Extra Fine
Location: UAE

The important influence of the horse throughout the history of China cannot be underestimated. Considerable efforts were expended in importing faster, stronger breeds from Central Asia (as opposed to the local Mongol Pony), crucial to the survival of the empire. In sculpture, painting and literature, horses were frequently glorified as distant relatives of sacred, mythological dragons. The adoration of the horse is most evident in the burial art which adorned the tombs of wealthy members of the social elite. This charming example of a white painted pottery horse with red highlights probably represents the prized possession of a noble aristocrat. It is exceptional for the care lavished on the unusually long saddle and the ornaments which hang from its trappings. The large eyes and downcast head suggest that this is a gentle animal which served its owner loyally. Surely this horse, crafted with loving care and attention to detail, was admired as much in life as it is today in its sculptural form. - (DL.2071)

The Tang Dynasty

The Tang Dynasty was an era of unrivalled wealth and luxury. The country was successfully reunified and the borders were expanded, pushing Chinese influence into new lands. Confucianism became a semi-religious instrument of the state; yet Buddhism continued to flourish, spreading into Korea and Japan. The arts reached new levels of sophistication. Poetry and literature flourished under the enlightened rulers. The Silk Road brought fortunes into China. Precious treasures were imported on the backs of camels from far away lands and bartered for Chinese silk, medicinal herbs, and pungent spices. Tang China was a multicultural empire where foreign merchants from across Central Asia and the Middle East settled in the urban centers, foremost among them the thriving capital of Chang'an (modern X'ian), a bustling cosmopolitan center of over two million inhabitants. Foreign traders lived next to native artisans and both thrived. New ideas and exotic artistic forms followed alongside. The Tang Dynasty was a cultural renaissance where many of the forms and objects we now associate with China were first created. Moreover, this period represents one of the greatest cultural outpourings in human history.

During the Tang Dynasty, restrictions were placed on the number of objects that could be included in tombs, an amount determined by an individual's social rank. In spite of the limitations, a striking variety of tomb furnishings have been excavated. Entire retinues of ceramic figures - animals, entertainers, musicians, guardians - were buried with the dead. Many of the objects reflect Tang China's extraordinary amount of contact with foreigners, bringing into China influences that were then adapted and absorbed into its culture.

Tang Terracotta Sculpture of a Military Officer



H.553

Origin: China

Circa: 618 AD to 907 AD

Dimensions: 23" (58.4cm) high

Catalogue: V20

Collection: Chinese

Medium: Terracotta

Location: United States

Mingqi (spirit articles) were a prominent feature of Chinese mortuary pottery made for the nobility and distinguished men. Over time the subject matter changed to reflect current fashions, interests and concerns. Clay figures of military generals, included in tombs since the Western Han period, are particularly good illustrations of those permutations. Military successes ensured security and fostered expansiveness as maritime and overland trade routes, such as the Silk Road, extended the trading sphere from Japan to the Byzantine and Islamic empires, bringing foreign peoples to the capital. This cultural diversity is depicted in the costumes, facial features, occupations, and pastimes of mingqi figures that began to embrace realism in form and detail unusual in Chinese art.

This sculpture of a military officer captures the vitality of a gallant warrior as well as attests this flowering a cultural diversity. Foreigners were often depicted with more facial hair and prominent noses. This bearded warrior appears to combine Chinese and foreign attributes, accentuating the ferocity and tenacity of the soldier's spirit. The body is clad in heavy armor--the chest plates are divided into four sections with decorative motifs and the shoulder plates cover the upper arm which is protected by a second layer of clothing tied above the chain mail of the forearm. In typical T'ang fashion, the soft clothing and armor extend beyond the waist where it is cinched with a studded belt. The officer wears ballooned pants drawn at the ankles over leather boots and sports protective headgear that is characterized by a protuberance on the top of the helmet. His arms gesture as if he were grasping weapons in both hands as he stands in an attentive ready-to-strike position.

This sculpture is a magnificent example of the T'ang artisan's attempt to imbue the medium with the spirit and vitality of an actual person so that it could perform its duties to protect and guide the deceased in hospitable environments. - (H.553)

Tang Large Stone Sculpture
Depicting the Head of a Civic Official



PF.5475

Origin: China

Circa: 618 AD to 907 AD

Dimensions:

33" (83.8cm) high x 15.5" (39.4cm) wide

Catalogue: V26

Collection: Chinese

Medium: Stone

Location: Great Britain

This large fragment of a head was once part of a much larger sculpture of a civic official. We can assume from the stature of this work that it likely stood outside as part of the spiritual road leading up to a mausoleum. Picture a procession of monumental civic officials, carved from stone, greeting the emperor as he makes his way inside. Such processional entranceways are well known in China and occur in the architecture of other cultures and civilizations such as the Ancient Egyptians. While it might seem odd to immortalize a government bureaucrat in stone, especially on such a grand scale, when we consider the importance of such civil officials in the daily life of the empire, their significance becomes clear. With over two million inhabitants in greater Chang'an, the cosmopolitan capital of the Tang, the governance of just this city alone would have demanded an extensive network of civic servants, not to mention the numerous distant provinces of that comprised the greater Empire. In order to remove power from the hands of wealthy aristocrats and warlords, the Tang created a class of scholar officials to govern their lands, enacting the will of the Imperial Court throughout China. Rigorous examinations ensured that only the most qualified individuals were able to serve this crucial position. The official wears a tall cap with a chinstrap that marks his status. Today, this monumental fragment is a stunning testament to the wealth and luxury of the Tang Dynasty, a golden age of Chinese culture made possible through the work of such officials. - (PF.5475)

Tang Dynasty Gold Wine Cup



FJ.6845
Origin: China
Circa: 618 AD to 906 AD
Dimensions: 2.5" (6.4cm) high

Collection: Chinese
Medium: Gold
Location: UAE

See the waters of the Yellow River leap down from Heaven,
Roll away to the deep sea and never turn again!
See at the mirror in the High Hall, Aged men bewailing white locks
In the morning, threads of silk, In the evening flakes of snow.
Snatch the joys of life as they come and use them to the fullest
Do not leave your gold cup idly glinting at the moon,
The things that Heaven made Man was meant to use.

- Excerpt from "Chiang Chin Chiu," by Li Pu

Li Pu, who lived and wrote during the T'ang Dynasty, is one of the great masters of Chinese poetry. A prolific writer, he composed in a romantic, lyrical style, concerning the glories of this brief life: nature, love, friends, solitude, and wine. He frequently mentions gold wine cups, presumably very similar to this one, as symbols of both wine induced happiness and luxury. Holding this cup in our hands, we are connected to the beauty of life Li Pu memorialized in his poetry. Although life is fleeting and beauty transient, mankind alone is able to transcend the ravages of time by creating artistic works of eternal beauty. The poetry of Li Pu is one such example; this gold wine cup is another. Both are distinct reflections of the culture and period in which they were made. Both reveal a sense of joy and longing, for even as the wine cup is full, we know it will soon be empty. This gold wine cup is more than an example of the extravagant wealth of the T'ang Dynasty, it is an eternal symbol of love, friends, and happiness, all too fleeting, as elegantly described in the works of Li Pu. - (FJ.6845)

Tang Sancai-Glazed Horse



H.677

Origin: China

Circa: 618 AD to 906 AD

Dimensions: 18.75" (47.6cm) high

Collection: Chinese

Medium: Sancai Terracotta

Location: UAE

The great influence of the horse throughout the history of China cannot be underestimated. In fact, the ancient expansion of the Chinese Empire was due in large part to the horse. The rapid mobility of horses allowed for quick communication between far away provinces. Likewise, the military role of horses aided in the defense of the borders from nomadic invaders as well as the conquest and submission of distant lands. The need to import stronger, faster steeds from Central Asia (as opposed to the local Mongol pony) led to the creation of the Silk Road. The importance of the horse in the history and culture of China can be viewed, in part, through the artistic legacy of this great civilization. In sculpture, painting, and literature, horses were glorified and revered. Furthermore, horses were believed to be relatives of the mythological dragon, reflecting their sacred status within society. This gorgeous brown horse is a splendid example of the T'ang Sancai glazed horse, one of the most beloved types of Chinese art. The horse is elegantly modeled and decorated with a painted orange saddle and spotted numnah and splendid green-glazed reigns and headstall, reflecting the luxurious regalia that horses were honored with. Overall, this sculpture is a testament to the revered status of the horse in Chinese culture, a love that reached new heights of expression during the T'ang Dynasty. - (H.677)

Tang Sancai-Glazed Tomb Guardian



H.680
Origin: China
Circa: 618 AD to 906 AD
Dimensions: 33" (83.8cm) high

Collection: Chinese
Medium: Glazed Terracotta
Location: UAE

Originating during the Six Dynasties period (222-589 A.D.), this type of figure is known as a tomb guardian, for originally, a pair of such figures always stood guard at the tombs of Chinese rulers. Traditionally, both figures in the pair are mythological composite creatures, one always an amalgamation of various animals while the other combined of human and animal traits. These guardians are a general type of Chinese art known as mingqi. Mingqi were any of a variety of objects specifically created for interment in the tombs of elite individuals in order to provide for the afterlife. These guardians were most likely interred in order to ward off potential tomb robbers or perhaps evil spirits in the next world that might try to infiltrate the tomb. This mythological beast combines the body of an ox, complete with hooves, with the head of a human. Wings emerge from his shoulders and flames crown his head. Despite the snarling human features of his face, this figure is adorned with large animal ears that appear almost like fish fins. Furthermore, a spiraling horn emerges from the forehead of this beast, reinforcing his frightful appearance. Although these works are supposed to be frightful, the masterfully delicate sculpting of their flaming heads and the gorgeous colors of their Sancai glaze prove more attractive than repelling. - (H.680)

Tang Sancai-Glazed Tomb Guardian



H.681
Origin: China
Circa: 618 AD to 906 AD
Dimensions: 29.25" (74.3cm) high

Collection: Chinese
Medium: Glazed Terracotta
Location: UAE

Originating during the Six Dynasties period (222-589 A.D.), this type of figure is known as a tomb guardian, for originally, a pair of such figures always stood guard at the tombs of Chinese rulers. Traditionally, both figures in the pair are mythological composite creatures, one always an amalgamation of various animals while the other combined of human and animal traits. These guardians are a general type of Chinese art known as mingqi. Mingqi were any of a variety of objects specifically created for interment in the tombs of elite individuals in order to provide for the afterlife. These guardians were most likely interred in order to ward off potential tomb robbers or perhaps evil spirits in the next world that might try to infiltrate the tomb. This mythological beast combines the body of an ox, complete with hooves, with the head of a lion. Wings emerge from his shoulders and flames crown his head. Furthermore, a pair of antlers rises from his head, framing the crest of flames and adding to his hostile appearance. The work is covered in a gorgeous tri-colored Sancai glaze that partially imitates the spotted and striped coat of various exotic beasts. Although these works are supposed to be frightful, the masterfully delicate sculpting of their flaming heads and the gorgeous colors of their Sancai glaze prove more attractive than repelling. - (H. 681)

Tang Painted Terracotta Sculpture of a Horse and Female Rider



H.686
Origin: China
Circa: 600 AD to 700 AD
Dimensions: 19" (48.3cm) high

Collection: Chinese
Medium: Painted Terracotta
Location: Great Britain

The great influence of the horse throughout the history of China cannot be underestimated. In fact, the ancient expansion of the Chinese Empire was due in large part to the horse. The rapid mobility of horses allowed for quick communication between far away provinces. Likewise, the military role of horses aided in the defense of the borders from nomadic invaders as well as the conquest and submission of distant lands. The need to import stronger, faster steeds from Central Asia (as opposed to the local Mongol pony) led to the creation of the Silk Road. The importance of the horse in the history and culture of China can be viewed, in part, through the artistic legacy of this great civilization. In sculpture, painting, and literature, horses were glorified and revered. Furthermore, horses were believed to be relatives of the mythological dragon, reflecting their sacred status within society.

This general type of Chinese burial art is known as mingqi. Mingqi were any of a variety of objects specifically created for interment in the tombs of elite individuals in order to provide for the afterlife. This sculpture depicts a noble lady riding upon a fine steed, inscribed on its hind leg with the Chinese characters denoting, “official horse,” suggesting her and the horse’s elite status. Riding horses was a popular aristocratic tradition, as well as playing polo, illuminating the link between the upper crust of Tang society and horses. The early dating of this work is reflective of the stylization of the horses head and legs that were characteristic of the preceding Sui Dynasty. Overall, this sculpture is a testament to the revered status of the horse in Chinese culture, a love that reached new heights of expression during the Tang Dynasty. - (H.686)

Tang Painted Terracotta Sculpture of a Horse and Foreign Rider



H.687
Origin: China
Circa: 600 AD to 700 AD
Dimensions: 19.5" (49.5cm) high

Collection: Chinese
Medium: Terracotta
Location: Great Britain

This general type of Chinese burial art is known as mingqi. Mingqi were any of a variety of objects specifically created for interment in the tombs of elite individuals in order to provide for the afterlife. Many of these works reflect Chinese contact with a variety of foreigners including Jewish merchants, Persian traders, and various tribes from Central Asia who were essential for their supply of fine steeds. The great influence of the horse throughout the history of China cannot be underestimated. In fact, the ancient expansion of the Chinese Empire was due in large part to the horse. The rapid mobility of horses allowed for quick communication between far away provinces. Likewise, the military role of horses aided in the defense of the borders from nomadic invaders as well as the conquest and submission of distant lands. The need to import stronger, faster steeds from Central Asia (as opposed to the local Mongol pony) led to the creation of the Silk Road.

The importance of the horse in the history and culture of China can be viewed, in part, through the artistic legacy of this great civilization. In sculpture, painting, and literature, horses were glorified and revered. Furthermore, horses were believed to be relatives of the mythological dragon, reflecting their sacred status within society. This sculpture depicts a fat foreigner, his swollen belly popping out of his open tunic, riding horseback. His large, hooked nose and beard reveal his foreign status and he was probably a Jewish merchant from Central Asia working the Silk Road. The early dating of this work is reflective of the stylization of the horses head and legs that were characteristic of the preceding Sui Dynasty. Overall, this sculpture is a testament to the revered status of the horse in Chinese culture, a love that reached new heights of expression during the T'ang Dynasty. - (H.687)

Tang Sancai-Glazed Horse



H.676
Origin: China
Circa: 618 AD to 907 AD
Dimensions: 18.5" (47.0cm) high

Collection: Chinese
Medium: Glazed Terracotta
Location: UAE

The great influence of the horse throughout the history of China cannot be underestimated. In fact, the ancient expansion of the Chinese Empire was due in large part to the horse. The rapid mobility of horses allowed for quick communication between far away provinces. Likewise, the military role of horses aided in the defense of the borders from nomadic invaders as well as the conquest and submission of distant lands. The need to import stronger, faster steeds from Central Asia (as opposed to the native Mongol pony) led to the creation of the Silk Road. The importance of the horse in the history and culture of China can be viewed, in part, through the artistic legacy of this great civilization. In sculpture, painting, and literature, horses were glorified and revered. Furthermore, horses were believed to be relatives of the mythological dragon, reflecting their sacred status within society. This gorgeous white horse is a splendid example of the T'ang Sancai glazed horse, one of the most beloved types of Chinese art. The horse is elegantly modeled and decorated with a painted red saddle and stripped numnah and splendid green-glazed reigns and headstall, reflecting the luxurious regalia that horses were honored with. Overall, this sculpture is a testament to the revered status of the horse in Chinese culture, a love that reached new heights of expression during the T'ang Dynasty. - (H.676)

Tang Painted Terracotta Sculpture of a Foreign Groom



H.698
Origin: China
Circa: 618 AD to 906 AD
Dimensions: 17" (43.2cm) high

Collection: Chinese
Medium: Painted Terracotta
Location: United States

Horses were among the most revered creatures in ancient China. The speed and strength of these majestic creatures was vital to the protection and expansion of the Chinese empire. While the local Mongol Pony was native to the region, larger and faster breeds were imported from Central Asia, eventually leading to the establishment of the Silk Road. This large sculpture of a groom might just represent one of the foreigners who imported such horses. Elegantly dressed in a colored tunic held in place with a black sash tied at his waist, his stature reveals the wealth that these creatures provided their owners and trainers with. His distinctive plump, round face, broad, flat nose, and large eyes reveal his foreign status.

During the T'ang Dynasty, it was not uncommon for foreigners to reside in the larger cosmopolitan centers of the empire. While this groom might have accompanied a prized steed on the long and arduous journey from Central Asia to its new owner inside China, it is just as likely that this expert groom lived and resided in China, tending to the needs of a royal stable of stallions. Clearly, this groom is no meager peasant, but a refined and respected foreigner who was memorialized in this sculpture. He holds his right arm in the air, as if reaching for the reins. We can easily picture him lovingly combing a horse and brushing its mane. This groom is no mere worker, but a talented and respected artist who brought out the full beauty of these revered creatures. - (H. 698)

Tang Terracotta Sculpture of a Horse with a Painted Saddle



H.694
Origin: China
Circa: 618 AD to 906 AD
Dimensions: 24" (61.0cm) high

Collection: Chinese
Medium: Painted Terracotta
Location: United States

The great influence of the horse throughout the history of China cannot be underestimated. In fact, the ancient expansion of the Chinese Empire was due in large part to the horse. The rapid mobility of horse allowed for quick communication between far away provinces. Likewise, the military role of horses aided in the conquest and submission of distant lands. The need to import stronger, faster steeds from Central Asia (as opposed to the local Mongol pony) led to the creation of the Silk Road. The importance of the horse in the history and culture of China can be viewed, in part, through the artistic legacy of this great civilization. In sculpture, painting, and literature, horses were glorified and revered. Horses were believed to be related to mythological dragons, reflecting their sacred status within society. During the T'ang Dynasty, the adoration of the horse can be seen through their burial art. Horse models excavated from mausoleums of the period are among the most splendid and easily recognizable works of Chinese art.

This impressive, large sculpture of a horse still retains much of its original white pigment in tact. However, even more impressive, is the superb condition of the polychrome painted saddle blanket, featuring a delightful floral pattern painted in red, green, and black hues. The remarkable preservation of this saddle blanket reveals the love and admiration the Chinese had for these majestic creatures, embellishing them with the finest regalia to enhance their natural beauty. This horse steps forward, the muscles of the legs carefully defined. Both the proportions of this horse and its non-removable saddle suggest its origin near Xian (the modern name for the ancient T'ang capital known as Chang'an). This gorgeous sculpture is a testament to the admiration and adoration the Chinese had for this marvelous creatures. Although they were an integral part in the expansion and defense of the empire, they were equally regarded for their beauty and grace as revealed by this sculpture. - (H.694)

T'ang Glazed Terracotta Sculpture
of a Foreign Groom Featuring a Turquoise Lapel



H.697
Origin: China
Circa: 618 AD to 906 AD
Dimensions: 17" (43.2cm) high

Collection: Chinese
Medium: Terracotta
Location: UAE

Horses were among the most revered creatures in ancient China. The speed and strength of these majestic creatures was vital to the protection and expansion of the Chinese empire. While the local Mongol Pony was native to the region, larger and faster breeds were imported from Central Asia, eventually leading to the establishment of the Silk Road. This sculpture of a groom might just represent one of the foreigners who imported or cared for such horses. Dressed in an elegantly glazed green coat featuring a turquoise lapel, this groom features an expressive and emotive face that reveals his foreign origins. While his mouth, held slightly ajar, is painted red and his distinctive hat is black, it is the turquoise lapel that is most unique. The rarest of all the colored glazes, turquoise is known to appear on a mere half a dozen sculptures during the T'ang era, this splendid example being one of them.

While this groom might have accompanied a prized steed on the long and arduous journey from Central Asia to its new owner inside China, it is just as likely that this expert groom lived and resided in China, tending to the needs of a royal stable of stallions. During the T'ang Dynasty, it was not uncommon for foreigners to reside in the larger cosmopolitan centers of the empire. Clearly, this groom is no meager peasant, but a refined and respected foreigner who was memorialized in this sculpture. He holds his arms aloft in the air, as if reaching for the reins to lead a horse. We can easily picture him lovingly combing a horse and brushing its mane. This groom is no mere worker, but a talented and respected artist who brought out the full beauty of these revered creatures. - (H.697)

T'ang Large Sancai-Glazed Terracotta Sculpture of a Lokapala



H.701
Origin: China
Circa: 618 AD to 906 AD
Dimensions: 56" (142.2cm) high

Collection: Chinese
Medium: Glazed Terracotta
Location: Great Britain

Known as Lokapala and as the Devaraja, or Celestial King, this guardian figure is a more general type of Chinese art known as mingqi. Mingqi were any of a variety of objects specifically created for interment in the tombs of elite individuals in order to provide for the afterlife. This guardian was most likely interred, always in pairs with a companion, in order to ward off potential tomb robbers or perhaps evil spirits in the next world that might try to infiltrate the tomb. Traditionally, this fierce, armored guardian stands upon a recumbent ox, symbolic of the Celestial King's authority; however, in this example, the guardian tramples on a fully modeled demon, complete with webbed feet and hands, who bites on the guardian's foot. Originally, this type of figure had its origins in Buddhist philosophy; however, over the ages, as society became more secularized, they began to fulfill the more generic role of tomb guardians. As society evolved, these figures lost their religious significance and became symbolic of the military might that protected the wealth of the T'ang from the nomadic barbarian invaders of the North.

Clearly, this imposing figure warded away the forces of evil and protected the deceased throughout eternity. Although this work was never meant to be viewed by the living, its refined artistry and sophisticated beauty amazes us. Especially pleasing is the delicate modeling of the spectacular bird headdress that crowns his head. With spread wings (bearing traces of green paint) and undulating neck, this gorgeous headdress is a fine example of the masterful artistry of T'ang sculptors. Also impressive is the stylized zoomorphic armor that decorated his shoulders. Appearing like some exotic elephant with arched trunk and tusks, the guardian's arms seems to emerge from the mouths of these creatures. While this Celestial King is supposed to frighten us with his stern glare and aggressive posture, originally he would have brandished a wooden spear or sword that has vanished over the ages, we are instead drawn to his overwhelming beauty and history. - (H.701)

T'ang Large Sancai-Glazed Terracotta Sculpture of a Lokapala



H.702
Origin: China
Circa: 618 AD to 906 AD
Dimensions: 51" (129.5cm) high

Collection: Chinese
Style: T'ang Dynasty
Medium: Glazed Terracotta
Location: Great Britain

Known as Lokapala and as the Devaraja, or Celestial King, this guardian figure is a more general type of Chinese art known as mingqi. Mingqi were any of a variety of objects specifically created for interment in the tombs of elite individuals in order to provide for the afterlife. This guardian was most likely interred, always in pairs with a companion, in order to ward off potential tomb robbers or perhaps evil spirits in the next world that might try to infiltrate the tomb. Traditionally, this fierce, armored guardian stands upon a recumbent ox, symbolic of the Celestial King's authority; however, in this example, the guardian tramples on a fully modeled demon, complete with webbed feet and hands, who bites on the guardian's foot. Originally, this type of figure had its origins in Buddhist philosophy; however, over the ages, as society became more secularized, they began to fulfill the more generic role of tomb guardians. As society evolved, these figures lost their religious significance and became symbolic of the military might that protected the wealth of the T'ang from the nomadic barbarian invaders of the North.

Clearly, this imposing figure warded away the forces of evil and protected the deceased throughout eternity. Although this work was never meant to be viewed by the living, its refined artistry and sophisticated beauty amazes us. His face is finely modeled. Red paint highlights his lips while remnants of black lines detailing his beard are visible as well. Especially pleasing is the delicate modeling of the stylized zoomorphic armor that decorated his shoulders. Appearing like some exotic sea creature with undulating ears and arched trunk, the guardian's arms seems to emerge from the mouths of these creatures. While this Celestial King is supposed to frighten us with his stern glare and aggressive posture, originally he would have brandished a wooden spear or sword that has vanished over the ages, we are instead drawn to his overwhelming beauty and history. - (H.702)

T'ang Sancai-Glazed Terracotta Sculpture of a Caparisoned Horse



H.705
Origin: China
Circa: 618 AD to 906 AD
Dimensions: 20" (50.8cm) high

Collection: Chinese
Medium: Glazed Terracotta
Location: UAE

The great influence of the horse throughout the history of China cannot be underestimated. In fact, the ancient expansion of the Chinese Empire was due in large part to the horse. The rapid mobility of horse allowed for quick communication between far away provinces. Likewise, the military role of horses aided in the conquest and submission of distant lands. The need to import stronger, faster steeds from Central Asia (as opposed to the local Mongol pony) led to the creation of the Silk Road. The importance of the horse in the history and culture of China can be viewed, in part, through the artistic legacy of this great civilization. In sculpture, painting, and literature, horses were glorified and revered. Horses were believed to be related to mythological dragons, reflecting their sacred status within society.

During the T'ang Dynasty, the adoration of the horse can be seen through their burial art. Horse models excavated from mausoleums of the period are among the most splendid and easily recognizable works of Chinese art. This gorgeous horse, caparisoned in a stunning array of elegant onion-shaped ornaments along his upper torso and head (including one resting on his nose) and a stunning saddle blanket, all painted in a three colored, or Sancai, glaze. The Sancai glazing technique was first introduced around this time, making this sculpture even more impressive for the early refinement of such a complex technique. Furthermore, the slightly turned posture of the horse's head and the open mouth are both features highly desired by collectors. Together, all these features combine to produce a work of art of stunning beauty and grace that successfully captures the admiration the T'ang Dynasty felt for this majestic creature. - (H.705)

T'ang Sancai-Glazed Terracotta Sculpture of a Caparisoned Horse



H.704
Origin: China
Circa: 618 AD to 906 AD
Dimensions: 20" (50.8cm) high

Collection: Chinese
Medium: Glazed Terracotta
Location: UAE

The great influence of the horse throughout the history of China cannot be underestimated. In fact, the ancient expansion of the Chinese Empire was due in large part to the horse. The rapid mobility of horse allowed for quick communication between far away provinces. Likewise, the military role of horses aided in the conquest and submission of distant lands. The need to import stronger, faster steeds from Central Asia (as opposed to the local Mongol pony) led to the creation of the Silk Road. The importance of the horse in the history and culture of China can be viewed, in part, through the artistic legacy of this great civilization. In sculpture, painting, and literature, horses were glorified and revered. Horses were believed to be related to mythological dragons, reflecting their sacred status within society.

During the T'ang Dynasty, the adoration of the horse can be seen through their burial art. Horse models excavated from mausoleums of the period are among the most splendid and easily recognizable works of Chinese art. This gorgeous horse, caparisoned in a stunning array of elegant molded medallions along his upper torso and head and a stunning saddle blanket, all painted in a three colored, or Sancai, glaze. The Sancai glazing technique was first introduced around this time, making this sculpture even more impressive for the early refinement of such a complex technique.

Furthermore, the slightly turned posture of the horse's head and the open mouth are both features highly desired by collectors. Together, all these features combine to produce a work of art of stunning beauty and grace that successfully captures the admiration the T'ang Dynasty felt for this majestic creature. - (H.704)

Tang Painted Terracotta Sculpture of a Civic Official



H.715
Origin: China
Circa: 618 AD to 906 AD
Dimensions: 38" (96.5cm) high

Collection: Chinese
Medium: Painted Terracotta
Location: Great Britain

This general type of Chinese burial art is known as mingqi. Mingqi were any of a variety of objects specifically created for interment in the tombs of elite individuals in order to provide for the afterlife. This statue represents a civic official from the vast governmental bureaucracy of the Tang Empire. With over two million inhabitants in greater Chang'an, the cosmopolitan capital of the T'ang, the governance of just this city alone would have demanded an extensive network of civic servants, not to mention the numerous distant provinces of that comprised the greater Empire. In order to remove power from the hands of wealthy aristocrats and warlords, the Tang created a class of scholar officials to govern their lands, enacting the will of the Imperial Court throughout China. Rigorous examinations ensured that only the most qualified individuals were able to serve this crucial position.

Depicted with a stern, uncompromising expression, this civic official represents the role of the government in the life of the citizens, as significant to their well being as military might. The facial features of this figure, including his aquiline nose and serene expression, reveal his intellectual wisdom and calm restraint. Remnants of the original, brightly colored pigment that once covered this work are still visible, mostly along the lower section of his robe and the base and in his black hair. The most unique element of this sculpture is the remarkable tapering sleeves of his tunic that fan outwards like the fins of a fish. Buried underground, this official was interred in order to welcome the deceased into the afterlife and to ensure his comfort in the great beyond. - (H.715)

T'ang Painted Terracotta Sculpture of a Civic Official



H.716
Origin: China
Circa: 618 AD to 906 AD
Dimensions: 38" (96.5cm) high

Collection: Chinese
Medium: Painted Terracotta
Location: Great Britain

This general type of Chinese burial art is known as mingqi. Mingqi were any of a variety of objects specifically created for interment in the tombs of elite individuals in order to provide for the afterlife. This statue represents a civic official from the vast governmental bureaucracy of the T'ang Empire. With over two million inhabitants in greater Chang'an, the cosmopolitan capital of the T'ang, the governance of just this city alone would have demanded an extensive network of civic servants, not to mention the numerous distant provinces of that comprised the greater Empire. In order to remove power from the hands of wealthy aristocrats and warlords, the T'ang created a class of scholar officials to govern their lands, enacting the will of the Imperial Court throughout China. Rigorous examinations ensured that only the most qualified individuals were able to serve this crucial position.

Depicted with a stern, uncompromising expression, this civic official represents the role of the government in the life of the citizens, as significant to their well being as military might. The facial features of this figure, including his furled brow and piercing eyes, are quite similar to those of the guardian figures and no doubt likewise reveals his extraordinary powers. Remnants of the original pigment that once covered this work are still visible, mostly along the lower section of his robe. By far, the most spectacular element of this sculpture is his headdress that is decorated with a bird. Might this unique headdress be modeled after a real life counterpart? If so, it is possible that this sculpture, although idealized, might represent a specific individual official who served in the government bureaucracy of the province where this work was interred. Buried underground, this official was interred in order to welcome the deceased into the afterlife and to ensure his comfort in the great beyond. - (H.716)

T'ang Large Terracotta Sculpture of a Camel



H.714
Origin: China
Circa: 618 AD to 906 AD
Dimensions: 35.5" (90.2cm) high

Collection: Chinese
Medium: Terracotta
Location: United States

During the T'ang Dynasty, the beloved status of the camel ranked second only to the revered horse. Camels symbolized commerce and its associated wealth, largely concentrated on profits through trading on the Silk Road. Trade across this extensive network of paths and trails brought prosperity, foreign merchants, and exotic merchandise into China. However, the dusty trails of the Silk Road were an arduous journey through the rugged mountains and harsh desert of Central Asia that could only be traversed by the two humped Bactrian camel. This remarkable beast was able to withstand the scorching heat of the desert and to maintain its own nutrients, surviving for months without fresh supplies of water. The government kept vast herds of these invaluable creatures, presided over by civil officials, for hauling their precious commodities across the Silk Road. These exotic creatures were a common sight in the cosmopolitan cities of T'ang China, carrying both traders and their goods directly into the markets.

Likewise, T'ang artists began to create charming representations of these prized creatures as mingqi in order to symbolize wealth and prosperity in the afterlife. Mingqi were works of art specifically created in an ancient Chinese custom for interment in the tombs of elite individuals in order to provide for their afterlife. Some of the most beautiful works of Chinese art were excavated from such tombs, and this large sculpture of a camel is a perfect example of the refined artistry dedicated to such works even though they were never meant to be seen by the living. Standing with his head raised in the air and his mouth wide open, this camel is covered in thick tufts of furry hair along his head, neck, knees, and humps. Most remarkable, it features a removable saddle that may have even once supported an accompanying rider. This majestic sculpture reveals the T'ang Dynasty's respect and admiration for this beast of burden, so essential to the prosperity of ancient China. - (H.714)

T'ang Terracotta Sculpture
of a Horse with a Detachable Saddle



H.713
Origin: China
Circa: 618 AD to 906 AD
Dimensions: 26.25" (66.7cm) high

Collection: Chinese
Medium: Painted Terracotta
Location: United States

The great influence of the horse throughout the history of China cannot be underestimated. In fact, the ancient unification of the Chinese Empire was due in large part to the horse. Their rapid mobility allowed for quick communication between far away provinces. Likewise, the military role of horses aided in the conquest and submission of distant lands. The need to import stronger, faster steeds from Central Asia (as opposed to the native Mongol pony) led to the creation of the Silk Road. The importance of the horse in the history and culture of China can be viewed, in part, through the artistic legacy of this great civilization. In sculpture, painting, and literature, horses were glorified and revered, believed to be relatives of dragons, a theory reflecting their sacred status within society. During the T'ang Dynasty, the adoration of the horse can be seen through their burial art. Horse models excavated from mausoleums of the period are among the most splendid and easily recognizable works of Chinese art.

This impressive, large sculpture of a horse still retains much of its original white pigment in tact. However, even more impressive, is the removable saddle that graces his back. Painted in bright orange, this textured saddle may have once supported a rider who is now lost to us. A hole in the rear would have once presumably been filled with real horsehair. Traces of polychrome are also visible inside the nose and along the mouth. The horse raises one leg in the air, his head is turned to the side and his mouth is slightly ajar. All these features are sought after by collectors. When one imagines this horse as it might have originally appeared, with vibrant hues, a similarly modeled rider, and tail of real horsehair, the illusion would have been uncanny. This gorgeous sculpture is a testament to the admiration and adoration the Chinese had for this marvelous creatures. Although they were an integral part in the expansion and defense of the empire, they were equally regarded for their beauty and grace as revealed by this sculpture. - (H.713)

Pair of T'ang Painted and Gilt Terracotta Warriors



H.736
Origin: China
Circa: 618 AD to 906 AD
Dimensions: 35.75" (90.8cm) high

Collection: Chinese
Style: T'ang Dynasty
Medium: Terracotta
Location: Great Britain

This pair of warriors bears a striking resemblance to the Buddhist warrior deities known as Lokapalas that have their origins as protectors of Buddhist temples but assumed a mortuary role in China. However, this pair of warrior does not stand in the traditional stance of the Lokapala, subduing a demon or triumphing over a recumbent beast. Although this pair is slightly different, we can assume their role in the afterlife would have been the same. These warriors are also striking for their lithe, elongated physiques. Perhaps the most important feature of these guardians is their remarkable state of preservation with an impressive amount of the original polychrome still in tact and, even more impressive, remnants of gilding.

According to one Chinese tradition explaining their origin, the emperor Taizong when ill was threatened by ghosts outside of his room screeching and throwing bricks and tiles. When his general Jin Shubao (Chin Shu-pao) and a fellow officer came to stand guard the activity of the ghosts ceased. The grateful emperor had portraits of the two men hung on either side of his palace gates, and thereafter their images became widespread as door-gods. Originally, they would have brandished weapons in their hands. Perhaps swords, these weapons were likely fabricated in a material such as wood that deteriorated over the centuries. - (H.736)

Tang Painted Terracotta Sculpture
of a Camel with Removable Foreign Rider



H.740
Origin: China
Circa: 618 AD to 906 AD
Dimensions: 19.5" (49.5cm) high

Collection: Chinese
Medium: Painted Terracotta
Location: Great Britain

The camel is an unusual domestic animal; it carries a saddle of flesh on its back; swiftly it dashes over the shifting sands; it manifests its merit in dangerous places; it has a secret understanding of springs and sources, subtle indeed is its knowledge.

--Guo Pu, 3rd Century AD

For the Chinese, camels symbolized commerce and its associated wealth, largely concentrated on profits through trading on the Silk Road. Trade across this extensive network of paths and trails brought prosperity, foreign merchants, and exotic merchandise into China. However, the dusty trails of the Silk Road were an arduous journey through the rugged mountains and harsh desert of Central Asia that could only be traversed by the two humped Bactrian camel. This remarkable beast was able to withstand the scorching heat of the desert and maintain its own nutrients, surviving for months without fresh supplies of water. The government kept vast herds of these invaluable creatures, presided over by civil officials, for hauling their precious commodities across the Silk Road. These exotic creatures were a common sight in the cosmopolitan cities of Tang China, carrying both traders and their goods directly into the markets. Likewise, Tang artists began to create charming representations of these prized creatures as *mingqi* in order to symbolize wealth and prosperity in the afterlife.

Mingqi were works of art specifically created in an ancient Chinese custom for interment in the tombs of elite individuals in order to provide for their afterlife. Some of the most beautiful works of Chinese art were excavated from such tombs, and this sculpture of a camel and detachable rider is a perfect example of the refined artistry dedicated to such works despite the fact that they were never meant to be seen by the living. The distinct physiognomy of the rider reveals that he is of foreign descent, most likely a Turkic merchant from Central Asia. We can imagine him guiding a caravan of camel into the cities of T'ang China, carrying his precious goods directly into the market. Both the camel and rider are elegantly painted in polychrome hues. Most charming are the individual hairs along the camel's neck and detailed eyes. The rider also wears red boots and sports a full beard. This sculpture reveals the T'ang Dynasty's respect and admiration for this beast of burden, so essential to the prosperity of ancient China. - (H.740)

Pair of T'ang Sancai-Glazed
Terracotta Civic Officials



H.745
Origin: China
Circa: 618 AD to 906 AD
Dimensions: 27.5" (69.9cm) high

Collection: Chinese
Medium: Glazed Terracotta
Location: UAE

I spend the morning going through Government papers, I spend the evening going through Government papers.

--Bai Juyi, poet and official, writing while governor of Suzhou, 825 AD

This general type of Chinese burial art is known as mingqi. Mingqi were any of a variety of objects specifically created for interment in the tombs of elite individuals in order to provide for the afterlife. This statue represents a civic official from the vast governmental bureaucracy of the T'ang Empire. With over two million inhabitants in greater Chang'an, the cosmopolitan capital of the T'ang, the governance of just this city alone would have demanded an extensive network of civic servants, not to mention the numerous distant provinces of that comprised the greater Empire. In order to remove power from the hands of wealthy aristocrats and warlords, the T'ang created a class of scholar officials to govern their lands, enacting the will of the Imperial Court throughout China. Rigorous examinations ensured that only the most qualified individuals were able to serve this crucial position.

These civic officials represented the role of the government in the life of the citizens, as significant to their well being as military might. The facial features of these figures, including their aquiline noses and serene expressions, reveal their intellectual wisdom and calm restraint. The gorgeous Sancai glaze covers their robes, and even parts of their faces. Buried underground, these officials were interred in order to welcome the deceased into the afterlife and to ensure his comfort in the great beyond. - (H.745)

T'ang Painted Terracotta Procession Set
Composed of Ten Horses and Riders



H.773
Origin: China
Circa: 618 AD to 906 AD
Dimensions: 14.5" (36.8cm) high

Collection: Chinese
Medium: Painted Terracotta
Location: United States

This general type of Chinese burial art is known as mingqi. Mingqi were any of a variety of objects specifically created for interment in the tombs of elite individuals in order to provide for the afterlife. Here, we are witness to an elaborate procession. Perhaps even the funeral procession that carried the deceased into his tomb, where these painted terracotta figures were unearthed centuries later. Most likely, these works were dedicated to a member of the royal elite and we can imagine masses of citizenry lining up to catch a glimpse of this procession. Musicians play music, banging on drums and blowing flutes and horns (although there is no rider carrying a horn, one of them holds his hands in a posture indicating he once held this instrument). Other riders appear to be government officials, and still others, entertainers or family. One rider is accompanied by a monkey seated on the back of his horse. Another female rider holds a small bird in her hand. Perhaps the most charming rider gently carries a bundled baby in his arms. Both the horses themselves and the riders are colorfully painted in bright polychrome hues. While parades such as represented by this set were certainly not unknown in T'ang China, they must have been special occasions reserved for religious ceremonies or other such special circumstances. While this procession set may memorialize an event from jovial than funeral rites, their discovery inside a tomb reveals their connection with the afterlife. Perhaps this set was interred in order to welcome the deceased into the world beyond, where entertainers and musicians would greet him. - (H.773)

T'ang Painted Terracotta Sculpture of a Lokapala



H.754
Origin: China
Circa: 618 AD to 906 AD
Dimensions: 17.75" (45.1cm) high

Collection: Chinese
Medium: Painted Terracotta
Location: United States

One of these influences is apparent in this figure that corresponds to Buddhist warrior deities that assume a mortuary role in China but also serve as protectors of Buddhist temples. Known as "Protector of the Burial Vault" or "Protector of the Burial Ground," the fierce, this guardian stands atop a grotesque demon. This stance symbolizes the heavenly king's authority and responsibility as protector of the tomb. He wears a suit of armor that retains a remarkable amount of its original orange and white pigment.

According to one Chinese tradition explaining their origin, the emperor Taizong when ill was threatened by ghosts outside of his room screeching and throwing bricks and tiles. When his general Jin Shubao (Chin Shu-pao) and a fellow officer came to stand guard the activity of the ghosts ceased. The grateful emperor had portraits of the two men hung on either side of his palace gates, and thereafter their images became widespread as door-gods. Originally, he would have brandished a weapon fabricated in a material such as wood that has deteriorated over the centuries. Looking unto his stern face and flaming hair and gazing into his fierce eyes, we understand why such works were intended to frighten away tomb robbers and evil spirits. Yet despite his intimidating nature, we are not repelled by him; instead, we are attracted to his artistic mastery and intriguing history. - (H.754)

T'ang Bronze Vase with Dragon Handles



H.856 (LSO)
Origin: China
Circa: 618 AD to 906 AD
Dimensions: 17.75" (45.1cm) high

Collection: Chinese
Medium: Bronze
Location: United States

This striking bronze vase was made during what many consider to be China's Golden Age, the T'ang Dynasty. It was at this point that China's outstanding technological and aesthetic achievements opened to external influences, resulting in the introduction of numerous new forms of self-expression, coupled with internal innovation and considerable social freedom. The T'ang dynasty also saw the birth of the printed novel, significant musical and theatrical heritage and many of China's best-known painters and artists.

The T'ang Dynasty was succeeded in 618 AD, when the Li family seized power from the last crumbling remnants of the preceding Sui Dynasty. This political and regal regime was long-lived, and lasted for almost 300 years. The imperial aspirations of the preceding periods and early T'ang leaders led to unprecedented wealth, resulting in considerable socioeconomic stability, the development of trade networks and vast urbanisation for China's exploding population (estimated at around 50 million people in the 8th century AD). The T'ang rulers took cues from earlier periods, maintaining many of their administrative structures and systems intact. Even when dynastic and governmental institutions withdrew from management of the empire towards the end of the period – their authority undermined by localised rebellions and regional governors known as *jiedushi* – the systems were so well-established that they continued to operate regardless.

The artworks created during this era are among China's greatest cultural achievements. It was the greatest age for Chinese poetry and painting, and sculpture also developed (although there was a notable decline in Buddhist sculptures following repression of the faith by pro-Taoism administrations later in the regime). It is disarming to note that the eventual decline of imperial power, followed by the official end of the dynasty on the 4th of June 907, hardly affected the great artistic turnover.

The current piece is a case in fact. While technically a utilitarian object, this vessel has been transformed into an artistic masterpiece by careful manipulation of the raw material combined with extravagantly imaginative design. The body of the vessel is cast in an amphoriform shape, with a plain flat base swelling gracefully to a globular midsection, nipped sharply in at the shoulders (where the second section is attached) and narrowing to a fine, constricted neck with an angular lipped rim. The handles are rendered as a pair of elongated, writhing dragons, their mouths biting the edge of the rim, arching their backs in a flurry of tails, crests and wings to re-attach themselves at the shoulders of the vessel. Their bodies are clad in tiny relief scales, with other details such as their talons also picked out in exquisite crispness. This is a perfect contrast of serenity and dynamism, which makes for a stirring and attractive composition.

The role of this vessel is uncertain. It was probably intended for wine, or just for decoration. As for its social status, the mode of construction and the decoration are in themselves indicative. Large bronze vessels were always prestige pieces, as they were difficult to make, and the raw materials were very expensive. The quality of the finish is also very high. The dragons, finally, imply a high level of importance for the vessel and – presumably – its intended owner, as these mythical beasts were the most important and prestigious symbol of imperial China. This is a truly outstanding piece of ancient Chinese art, a credit to any serious collection. - (H.856 (LSO))

T'ang Terracotta Sculpture of a Standing Ox



H.878
Origin: China
Circa: 618 AD to 906 AD
Dimensions: 8" (20.3cm) high

Collection: Chinese
Medium: Terracotta
Location: Great Britain

During the T'ang Dynasty, sculptural effigies of domesticated animals were often interred in the tombs of nobility and elite members of the social hierarchy. Created in all media, these sculptures accompanied the spirit of the deceased into the afterlife. While similar examples exist, most were found harnessed to wagons and carts and were meant to function as beasts of burden. However, this sculpture was discovered buried as part of a herd, contained inside a sculpted miniature pen with other domesticated animals, suggesting that this ox served as nourishment. Besides its function, this sculpture is also remarkable for its size and exquisite state of preservation, horns and ears intact. Some of the original red pigment that once decorated the animal is also visible on its nose and mouth, as well as its hooves. During the T'ang Dynasty, the Chinese believed that the afterlife was a continuation of our earthly existence. Thus, logically, as we require food to nourish our bodies on earth, so too will we require food to nourish our souls in the afterlife. Created to serve as food for the afterlife, this work is more than a mere sculpture; it is a gorgeous memorial to the religious and philosophical beliefs of the T'ang Dynasty. This cow effigy has served its eternal purpose well. Today, it continues to nourish our souls with its beauty and grace. - (H.878)

T'ang Painted Terracotta Sculpture of a Zebu Bull



H.945
Origin: China
Circa: 618 AD to 906 AD
Dimensions: 7.75" (19.7cm) high

Collection: Chinese
Medium: Painted Terracotta
Location: Great Britain

During the T'ang Dynasty, sculptural effigies of domesticated animals were often interred in the tombs of nobility and elite members of the social hierarchy. Created in all media, these sculptures accompanied the spirit of the deceased into the afterlife. While similar examples exist, most were found harnessed to wagons and carts and were meant to function as beasts of burden. However, this sculpture was discovered buried with other domesticated animals, suggesting that this zebu bull served as nourishment. Besides its function, this sculpture is also remarkable for its exquisite state of preservation with much of its original yellow pigment still intact. Such delicate decoration rarely survives the ravages of time and the stresses of excavation. Some of the original red pigment that also once adorned the animal is also visible on its nose. During the T'ang Dynasty, the Chinese believed that the afterlife was a continuation of our earthly existence. Thus, logically, as we require food to nourish our bodies on earth, so too will we require food to nourish our souls in the afterlife. Created to serve as food for the afterlife, this work is more than a mere sculpture; it is a gorgeous memorial to the religious and philosophical beliefs of the T'ang Dynasty. This bull effigy has served its eternal purpose well. Today, it continues to nourish our souls with its beauty and grace. - (H.945)

T'ang Gilt and Painted Terracotta Sculpture of a Lokapala



H.925
Origin: China
Circa: 618 AD to 906 AD
Dimensions: 23" (58.4cm) high

Collection: Chinese
Medium: Painted Terracotta
Location: United States

One of these influences is apparent in this figure that corresponds to Buddhist warrior deities that assume a mortuary role in China but also serve as protectors of Buddhist temples. Known as "Protector of the Burial Vault" or "Protector of the Burial Ground," the fierce, this armored guardian stands atop a grotesque demon. This stance symbolizes the heavenly king's authority and responsibility as protector of the tomb.

A remarkable amount of this sculpture's original pigment has survived the ravages of time intact, perhaps most visible in the spectacular vibrant red, orange, and green floral decorations that adorn his armor. Traces of the gilding are also visible, attesting to the luxurious nature of this sculpture. According to one Chinese tradition explaining their origin, Emperor Taizong, when ill, was threatened by ghosts outside of his room screeching and throwing bricks and tiles. When his general Jin Shubao (Chin Shu-pao) and a fellow officer came to stand guard the activity of the ghosts ceased. The grateful emperor had portraits of the two men hung on either side of his palace gates, and thereafter their images became widespread as door-gods. Originally, he would have brandished a weapon fabricated in a material such as wood that has deteriorated over the centuries. Looking unto his stern face and flaming hair and gazing into his fierce eyes, we understand why such works were intended to frighten away tomb robbers and evil spirits. Yet despite his intimidating nature, he does not repel us; instead, we are attracted to his artistic mastery and intriguing history. - (H.925)

T'ang Painted Terracotta Sculpture of a Lady-in-Waiting



H.997
Origin: China
Circa: 618 AD to 906 AD
Dimensions: 20" (50.8cm) high

Collection: Chinese
Medium: Painted Terracotta
Location: UAE

During the Tang Dynasty, restrictions were placed on the number of objects that could be included in tombs, an amount determined by an individual's social rank. In spite of the limitations, a striking variety of tomb furnishings, known as mingqi, have been excavated. Entire retinues of ceramic figures - animals, entertainers, musicians, guardians - were buried with the dead in order to provide for the afterlife. Of the various types of mingqi, there is perhaps none more beautiful or charming than the sculptures of elegant female courtiers. These gorgeous sculptures represent the idealized woman of T'ang Dynasty China. This sculpture representing such a sophisticated lady is remarkable for its size, nearly twice as large as the standard type. She provided eternal companionship for her lord throughout the afterlife. We can imagine her gracefully dancing or singing a poetical song, two very popular customs for ladies during the T'ang Dynasty, considered a golden age of Chinese culture. Such courtiers are described in the numerous love poems written during this era, likely the greatest outpouring of poetry in Chinese history.

She wears her hair in an elegant coiffure featuring two buns that appears almost like the alert ears of a startled dog. This elaborate hairstyle is matched by her sumptuous orange robe. Much of the original pigment that once decorated this work remains intact, most noticeable in her dress, her vibrant red lips, and her soft, rosy cheeks. Such women may represent wives, princesses, or attendants. She carries what appears to be a flower-shaped loaf of bread or some pastry treat, pointing to it with her other hand as she proudly presents it to us. Their beauty inspires us as we are transported back to another time. This large terracotta effigy of an ancient courtier has been to the next world and returned to our modern era to tell us her tale. She speaks of the enormous wealth and sophisticated culture of the T'ang Dynasty, one of the greatest periods of artistic creation in human history. Although she speaks of the past, this lady in waiting continues to amaze us in the present with her unmatched beauty and sculptural refinement. - (H.997)

Tang Painted Terracotta Horse
with Removable Saddle and Lady Rider



H.1016
Origin: China
Circa: 618 AD to 906 AD
Dimensions: 17.75" (45.1cm) high

Collection: Chinese Art
Medium: Painted Terracotta
Location: United States

During the T'ang Dynasty, horses were revered, considered relatives of the mythical dragon. This veneration was well earned, for the speed and stamina of these majestic animals ensured the protection of the northern borders against barbarian invaders as well as enhancing communication capabilities between far away provinces, thereby aiding in the expansion of the empire. The need to import horses from Central Asia influenced the creation of the Silk Road. Thus, they were also prized for their rarity. Naturally then, horses became a status symbol for the aristocratic elite. Polo and other equestrian pastimes became popular. This sculpture, depicting a lady-in-waiting riding on the back of a horse, reveals this connection between nobility and the horse. Perhaps the most remarkable feature of this work is the removable saddle and rider that detach from the body of the horse in one piece. A striking amount of the original polychrome still remains intact, clearly visible in the lady's red dress and lips. We can imagine this lady prancing around on this horse, perhaps taking part in an important ceremony. She wears a long-sleeved dress, a type of which was used in a popular dance where the lady swirls the excess fabric around in the air. Discovered buried inside a tomb, this work was supposed to accompany the deceased throughout the afterlife. The striking beauty of this work is even more impressive, considering that it was created specifically for interment and was not supposed to be seen by the living. Today, we marvel in the beauty of this sculpture as much as its tremendous history and intriguing legacy. - (H. 1016)

Tang Terracotta Camel and Foreign Groom



H.981
Origin: China
Circa: 618 AD to 906 AD
Dimensions: 19" (48.3cm) high

Collection: Chinese Art
Style: Tang Dynasty
Medium: Terracotta
Location: United States

For the Chinese, camels symbolized commerce and its associated wealth, largely concentrated on profits through trading on the Silk Road. Trade across this extensive network of paths and trails brought prosperity, foreign merchants, and exotic merchandise into China. However, the dusty trails of the Silk Road were an arduous journey through the rugged mountains and harsh deserts of Central Asia that could only be traversed by the two humped Bactrian camel. This remarkable beast was able to withstand the scorching heat of the desert and maintain its own nutrients, surviving for months without fresh supplies of water. The government kept vast herds of these invaluable creatures, presided over by civil officials, for hauling their precious commodities across the Silk Road. These exotic creatures were a common sight in the cosmopolitan cities of T'ang China, carrying both traders and their goods directly into the markets. Likewise, T'ang artists began to create charming representations of these prized creatures as mingqi in order to symbolize wealth and prosperity in the afterlife.

Mingqi were works of art specifically created in an ancient Chinese custom for interment in the tombs of elite individuals in order to provide for their afterlife. Some of the most beautiful works of Chinese art were excavated from such tombs, and this sculpture of a camel and an accompanying groom is a perfect example of the refined artistry dedicated to such works despite the fact that they were never meant to be seen by the living. The distinct physiognomy of the groom, with deep-set eyes and a full beard, reveals that he is of foreign descent, most likely from Central Asia. We can imagine him tending to the vast herds of these invaluable beasts that were maintained by the government. He holds his arm in the air as if leading the camel; we can almost see the reins. Thick tufts of furry hair cover the camel along his head, neck, and knees. A removable saddle bulging with exotic goods and merchandise, including an easily discernable flask, has been placed between the two humps. This sculpture reveals the T'ang Dynasty's respect and admiration for this beast of burden, so essential to the prosperity of ancient China. - (H.981)

Tang Creme-Glazed Vase with Dragon Handles



H.1070

Origin: China

Circa: 618 AD to 906 AD

Dimensions:

16.75" (42.5cm) high x 8" (20.3cm) wide

Collection: Chinese Art

Medium: Terracotta

Location: United States

The legacy of the T'ang survives foremost in their tremendous artistic creations. This stunning terracotta vase is a testament to the artistic mastery of Chinese potters. The gently bulging body is refined in its smooth curves. Modeled after bronze examples, this vessel, covered in a delicate crème glaze, would have provided a more affordable alternative to its bronze counterparts. Although the body is unadorned, the handles take the form of stylized dragons. They bite down on the rim of the vase with their pointed mouths as if attempting to drink the precious contents of this container (most probably wine). This gorgeous vase reveals the refinement and luxury of the T'ang era, where sumptuous wines were enjoyed as much as the beautiful forms of the vessel that contained them. - (H.1070)

Cast Iron Recumbent Ox



X.0518

Origin: China

Circa: 618 AD to 1100 AD

Dimensions:

33" (83.8cm) high x 56" (142.2cm) wide

Collection: Chinese

Medium: Bronze

Location: Great Britain

Iron is a material that does not figure prominently in Chinese art, although it has always been considered a symbol of strength, determination and integrity and justice and widely used in military and agriculture. Iron was known and utilised since the beginning of the 1st millennium BCE in China, although the technique of casting was not mastered until the 5th century BCE. It was only later on, with the invention of double cylinders bellows furnaces by the 4th c. BCE, that the technique advanced and iron tools replaced stone, bone and wooden ones in agriculture.

But cast iron continued to be a brittle alloy of iron with a carbon content ranging from 1.5 to 5 per cent. Its melting point stood at about 1150 degrees centigrades which means that it could not be forged but only cast directly into the desired form. Yet its special qualities were hardness and resistance to corrosion.

Later on, during the Six Dynasties period, a sizeable number of cast-iron Buddhist images began to be produced. By the Tang and Song periods, large sized statues and bells were cast and placed mainly outdoors. The Jiu Tangshu (Old History of the Tang Dynasty) and the Xin Tangshu (New History of the Tang) both recorded the endeavour of Empress Wu Zetian, whose large metallurgical projects have not survived to this day, nevertheless attest the level of effort and time expenditure placed in the creation of iron structures.

The recumbent ox here illustrated is covered with a thin brown patina and the surface is rather coarse, with some cracks and small holes caused mainly by cold shuts. Prominent casting seams are evenly distributed over the whole body. In between the horizontal seams are vertical seams and they all would have originally been covered up with gesso and then painted or lacquered. The rectangular partitions outlined by the seams suggest that the outer clay mould of this iron ox was made out of rectangular tassels. The whole process of creation would have taken quite some time: first a model of the ox with all his details was made of clay over an armature of wood or metal. Once the model dried, another layer of clay was applied to make the outer mould. This outer mould was then cut up in sections with tenons and mortises, numbered and subsequently dried. Iron nails were driven then into the clay model and used as measure, while the model was trimmed down to create the desired space between the outer and inner mould. When the mould sections were reassembled for the casting process, these nails would have also functioned as spacers to hold the outer mould at an equal distance from the core. Due to the complexity of shape to be cast and the amount of melted iron to be used, the casting was done in several steps. First the outer mould was assembled from the legs to the belly; earth was then piled against it and wooden braces installed to stabilise the outer mould and maintain the temperature of the molten iron. Subsequently the mould sections were assembled and the statue cast layer by layer. Throughout the interior and exterior of the ox there are traces of cold shuts formed by molten iron poured by this open-casting method. When the time between two subsequent castings became too long, the molten iron started to solidify before the next pouring, hence causing cold shuts to appear.

This was the casting method utilised throughout the Song period for the production of various outdoor statues, the few extant examples being mostly connected with temple architectures in Henan and Shanxi provinces. The iron oxen found at the site of Pujin bridge near Puzhou city, in Yongji county, Shanxi province, seemed to have served a different purpose, as they were used at the four sides of a bridge to secure the iron chains of the bridge. However, such figures were indeed cast in solid iron, to support the stress, while our ox was cast hollow.

Traditionally, Chinese believed that a statue contained the power to influence its surroundings, and by making a statue, one would be able to bring into existence not only the actual powers of the subject but also its symbolic powers. Faithful to this ideology, since earliest times, oxen were associated with water and came to symbolise water control. An ox (Chin. niu) was the most powerful beast at man's disposal; its strength was invaluable in maintaining clear the water canals system for irrigating and thus preventing floodings.

According to the legend, after the Great Yu controlled the waters, he set up an iron ox to tranquilize the waters and repel evil spirits. But these powers were enjoyed not only by oxen, but by all forms of niu – oxen, buffalo (Chin. shui niu) and rhinoceros (Chin. xi niu). Belief in the powers of these so-called “control-the-waters- oxen” (Chin. zhi shui niu) was strengthened by reference to the ancient Five Elements theory. Originally developed in the 4th-3rd c. BCE and refined during the Han period (206 BC-220 CE), this theory explained natural phenomena by the cyclical and mutual interaction of five natural elements. Within this theory, in the Mutual Production Order, metal produced and thus controlled water. This belief in the mutual interaction of water and iron encouraged the production of iron statues for controlling water.

Hence statues of oxen were placed on the banks of lakes and rivers to prevent floodings, or, as possibly in the case of our ox, on a pedestal in front of a Daoist temple associated with water deities. This tradition persisted throughout the centuries. A typical example is the hollow ox at Shanhua temple in Datong, Shanxi province. The inscription gives details of casting date and manufacturer, yet in the local histories it is referred to as one of the seven 'zhi shui niu' originally placed on the west bank of the Yu river.

Our outstanding iron ox stands now placidly recumbent with his tail bent on the right hindquarter, a long -now scrubbed off- inscription on one side, the horns projecting straight from a highly ornate head, reminding us of his past aura, his imposing figure imbued with great somberness, his supernatural symbolism still lingering all around us, searching for waters to placate.

For comparable examples see: Fan Wangli and Li Maolin, “Tang tie niu yu Pujin qiao”, *Kaogu yu Wenwu* 1991.1: 52-55.

Paludan, Ann, “ The Tang Dynasty Iron Oxen at Pujin Bridge”, *Oriental Art* 1994.5: 61-68.

Barry Till and Paula Swart, “Cast Iron Statuary in China”, *Oriental Art* 1993.8: 40-45.
- (X.0518)

Tang Dynasty Terracotta Fat Lady



LO.1413 (LSO)
Origin: China
Circa: 618 AD to 906 AD
Dimensions: 17.7" (45.0cm) high

Collection: Chinese Art
Medium: Terracotta
Location: Great Britain

This outstanding ceramic attendant was made during what many consider to be China's Golden Age, the T'ang Dynasty. It was at this point that China's outstanding technological and aesthetic achievements opened to external influences, resulting in the introduction of numerous new forms of self-expression, coupled with internal innovation and considerable social freedom. The T'ang dynasty also saw the birth of the printed novel, significant musical and theatrical heritage and many of China's best-known painters and artists.

The T'ang Dynasty took control in 618 AD, when the Li family seized power from the last crumbling remnants of the preceding Sui Dynasty. This political and regal regime was long-lived, and lasted for almost 300 years. The imperial aspirations of the preceding periods and early T'ang leaders led to unprecedented wealth, resulting in considerable socioeconomic stability, the development of trade networks and vast urbanisation for China's exploding population (estimated at around 50 million people in the 8th century AD). The T'ang rulers took cues from earlier periods, maintaining many of their administrative structures and systems intact. Even when dynastic and governmental institutions withdrew from management of the empire towards the end of the period – their authority undermined by localised rebellions and regional governors known as *jiedushi* – the systems were so well-established that they continued to operate regardless.

The artworks created during this era are among China's greatest cultural achievements. It was the greatest age for Chinese poetry and painting, and sculpture also developed (although there was a notable decline in Buddhist sculptures following repression of the faith by pro-Taoism administrations later in the regime).

During the Tang Dynasty, restrictions were placed on the number of objects that could be included in tombs, an amount determined by an individual's social rank. In spite of the limitations, a striking variety of tomb furnishings – known as mingqi – have been excavated. Entire retinues of ceramic figures – representing warriors, animals, entertainers, musicians, guardians and every other necessary category of assistant – were buried with the dead in order to provide for the afterlife. Warriors (lokapala) were put in place to defend the dead, while horses/ camels were provided for transport, and officials to run his estate in the hereafter. Of all the various types of mingqi, however, there are none more elegant or charming than the sculptures of sophisticated female courtiers, known – rather unfairly – as “fat ladies”. These wonderfully expressionistic sculptures represent the idealized beauty of T’ang Dynasty China, while also demonstrating sculptural mastery in exaggerating characteristics for effect, and for sheer elegance of execution.

The current sculpture is a perfect example of the genre. She stands, draped from neck to foot in a loose-fitting white dress and jacket (?), leaning her weight back slightly on one foot, while bringing the forefingers on her tiny hands together as if in awkward enquiry. The dress is rendered simply yet effectively, with creases incised around the hem and the waist, and a low-cut sash below the hips, and large, loose sleeves. Her skin tone is pale – a traditional measure of social elites, who did not expose themselves to the sun's rays – which contrasts strongly with her red lips, dark eyebrows and small, enquiring eyes and retrousse nose. She is undoubtedly well-nourished, another marker of social class, and her rounded jawline and cheeks run smoothly with the loose contours of her body. Her hair is gathered up into an ornate fan- like design with a tie, the bun carefully folded and manoeuvred into four distinct lozenges; this style, which is associated with aristocratic and court circles, is known from written, sculptural and painted sources. This piece offers a narrative of courtly life over a thousand years ago, in superbly delicate and carefully-rendered detail. This is a stunning piece of ancient art and a credit to any collection of Chinese masterpieces. - (LO.1413 (LSO))

Tang Dynasty Sancai Glazed Pottery Camel
with Ghost Mask Saddle



DL.999

Origin: China

Circa: 618 AD to 907 AD

Dimensions:

23.82" (60.5cm) high x 13.19" (33.5cm) wide

Collection: Chinese

Medium: Terra Cotta

Condition: Extra Fine

Location: UAE

During the Tang Dynasty the beloved status of the camel ranked second only to the revered horse. Camels symbolized commerce and its associated wealth, largely concentrated on profits through trading on the Silk Road. Trade across this extensive network of paths and trails brought prosperity, foreign merchants and exotic merchandise into China. However, this arduous journey through the jagged mountains and rugged deserts of Central Asia could only be undertaken by the two-humped Bactrian camel. The animal was able to withstand the scorching heat of the desert and to maintain its own nutrients, surviving for months without fresh supplies of water. The government kept vast herds of these invaluable creatures, presided over by civil officials, for hauling their precious silk supplies across the Silk Road. These exotic creatures were a common sight in the cosmopolitan cities of Tang China, carrying both traders and their goods directly into the markets. Likewise, Tang artists began to create charming representations of these prized creatures as mingqi in order to symbolize wealth and prosperity in the afterlife. Mingqi were works of art specifically created in an ancient Chinese custom for interment in the tombs of elite individuals in order to provide for their afterlife. Some of the most beautiful works of Chinese art were excavated from such tombs, and this Sancai glazed sculpture of a camel is a perfect example of the refined artistry dedicated to such works even though they were never meant to be seen by the living. Featuring a splendid saddle in the form of a stylized mask of a snarling creature, this gorgeous sculpture reveals the Tang Dynasty's respect and admiration for this magnificent creature. - (DL.999)

Tang Dynasty Painted Pottery Fat Lady



DL.2066
Origin: China
Circa: 618 AD to 907 AD
Dimensions: 15.5" (39.4cm) high

Collection: Chinese Art
Medium: Terracotta
Location: UAE

During the Tang Dynasty restrictions were placed on the number of objects that could be included in tombs, an amount determined by an individual's social rank. In spite of the limitations, a striking variety of tomb furnishings, known as mingqi, have been excavated. Entire retinues of ceramic figures - animals, entertainers, musicians, guardians - were buried with the dead in order to provide for the afterlife. Of the various types of mingqi, there is perhaps none more charming than the beautiful sculptures of elegant female courtiers, sometimes known as “Fat Ladies” for their fleshy faces. These gorgeous women reflect the appreciation of the female form during the Tang Dynasty.

This sophisticated woman provided eternal companionship for her lord throughout the afterlife. We can imagine her gracefully dancing or singing a poetical song, two popular customs for ladies during the Tang Dynasty. Such courtiers are described in the numerous love poems written during this era, considered a golden age of Chinese culture. This stunning lady wears her hair in an elegant coiffure arranged in a lopsided bun that crowns her head. Her sumptuous long sleeved dress equals the beauty of her sophisticated hairstyle. Traces of a floral motif that decorated her costume remain intact, as does the pigment on her red lips. Such women may represent wives, princesses, or attendants. Their beauty inspires us as we are transported back to another time. This gorgeous sculpture has been to the next world and returned to our modern era to tell us her tale. She speaks of the enormous wealth and sophisticated culture of the Tang Dynasty, one of the greatest periods of artistic creation in human history. - (DL.2066)

Tang Dynasty Painted Pottery Seated Camel with Detachable Rider



DL.2067
Origin: Shaanxi Province - 'Xi'an'
Circa: 618 AD to 907 AD
Dimensions:
19.5" (49.5cm) high x 23.6" (59.9cm) wide

Collection: Chinese Art
Medium: Terracotta
Condition: Extra Fine
Location: UAE

“The camel is an unusual domestic animal; it carries a saddle of flesh on its back; swiftly it dashes over the shifting sands; it manifests its merit in dangerous places; it has a secret understanding of springs and sources, subtle indeed is its knowledge.”

This quote by Guo Pu dates to the 3rd Century A.D. and reveals the extent to which the Chinese adulated camels. These creatures symbolized the wealth and luxury that resulted from trading on the Silk Road. Commerce across this extensive network of paths and trails brought prosperity, foreign merchants, and exotic merchandise into China. However, the dusty trails of the Silk Road were an arduous journey through the rugged mountains and harsh deserts of Central Asia that could only be traversed by the two humped Bactrian camel. This remarkable beast was able to withstand the scorching heat of the desert and maintain its own nutrients, surviving for months without fresh supplies of water. The government kept vast herds of these invaluable creatures, presided over by civil officials, for hauling their precious commodities across the Silk Road. These exotic creatures were a common sight in the cosmopolitan cities of Tang China, carrying both traders and their goods directly into the markets. Likewise, Tang artists began to create charming representations of these prized creatures as *mingqi* in order to symbolize continued wealth and prosperity throughout the afterlife.

This seated camel with a detachable rider is a particularly fine example of this genre. The animal raises its head in protest as the rider commands it to continue on its arduous journey. The rider would have once held a whip or similar item, probably fashioned from a more perishable material which explains its disappearance. The original polychromy remains largely intact and is especially apparent on the rider's flushed cheeks. Great care has been lavished on the details of his costume, particularly the peaked cap, and the hairs of his full beard are precisely defined with incised lines. This sculpture reveals the Tang Dynasty's respect and admiration for this beast of burden, so essential to the prosperity of ancient China. - (DL.2067)

Early Tang Painted Pottery Seated Camel with Detachable Saddle



DL.2069
Origin: Shaanxi Province - 'Xi'an'
Circa: 618 AD to 907 AD
Dimensions:
6.1" (15.5cm) high x 11" (27.9cm) wide

Collection: Chinese Art
Medium: Terracotta
Condition: Extra Fine
Location: UAE

“The camel is an unusual domestic animal; it carries a saddle of flesh on its back; swiftly it dashes over the shifting sands; it manifests its merit in dangerous places; it has a secret understanding of springs and sources, subtle indeed is its knowledge.”

This quote by Guo Pu dates to the 3rd Century A.D. and reveals the extent to which the Chinese adulated camels. For the Chinese, these creatures symbolized the wealth and luxury that resulted from trading on the Silk Road. Commerce across this extensive network of paths and trails brought prosperity, foreign merchants, and exotic merchandise into China. However, the dusty trails of the Silk Road were an arduous journey through the rugged mountains and harsh deserts of Central Asia that could only be traversed by the two humped Bactrian camel. This remarkable beast was able to withstand the scorching heat of the desert and maintain its own nutrients, surviving for months without fresh supplies of water. The government kept vast herds of these invaluable creatures, presided over by civil officials, for hauling their precious commodities across the Silk Road. These exotic creatures were a common sight in the cosmopolitan cities of Tang China, carrying both traders and their goods directly into the markets. Likewise, Tang artists began to create charming representations of these prized creatures as mingqi in order to symbolize continued wealth and prosperity throughout the afterlife.

During the Tang Dynasty restrictions were placed on the number of objects that could be included in tombs, an amount determined by an individual's social rank. In spite of the limitations, a striking variety of tomb furnishings have been excavated. Entire retinues of ceramic figures - animals, entertainers, musicians, guardians, etc. - were buried with the dead in order to provide for the afterlife. This sculpture of a camel is a gorgeous example of the refined artistry of works that they were never meant to be seen by the living. This recumbent camel has paused for a moment before returning to its arduous journey. The fully detachable saddle is packed high with goods including rolled carpets possibly from Central Asia. A fur blanket with engraved tufts of hair tops the bundle. The camel's head is held high in the air, as if getting ready to stand. This sculpture reveals the Tang Dynasty's respect and admiration for this beast of burden, so essential to the prosperity of Ancient China. This fine unglazed example would date back to the early Tang period, i.e. 7th century AD, when unglazed pottery figurines were still preferred to the later sancai glazed earthenware. - (DL.2069)

Tang Dynasty Painted Pottery Walking Camel



DL.2072

Origin: Shaanxi Province - 'Xi'an'

Circa: 618 AD to 907 AD

Dimensions:

17.38" (44.1cm) high x 13.38" (34.0cm) wide

Collection: Chinese Art

Medium: Terracotta

Condition: Very Fine

Location: UAE

'The camel is an unusual domestic animal; it carries a saddle of flesh on its back; swiftly it dashes over the shifting sands; it manifests its merit in dangerous places; it has a secret understanding of springs and sources, subtle indeed is its knowledge.' -- Guo Pu, 3rd Century AD

For the Chinese, camels symbolized commerce and its associated wealth, largely concentrated on profits through trading on the Silk Road. Trade across this extensive network of paths and trails brought prosperity, foreign merchants, and exotic merchandise into China. However, the dusty trails of the Silk Road were an arduous journey through the rugged mountains and harsh desert of Central Asia that could only be traversed by the two humped Bactrian camel. This remarkable beast was able to withstand the scorching heat of the desert and maintain its own nutrients, surviving for months without fresh supplies of water. The government kept vast herds of these invaluable creatures, presided over by civil officials, for hauling their precious commodities across the Silk Road. These exotic creatures were a common sight in the cosmopolitan cities of Tang China, carrying both traders and their goods directly into the markets. Likewise, Tang artists began to create charming representations of these prized creatures as mingqi in order to symbolize wealth and prosperity in the afterlife.

Mingqi were works of art specifically created in an ancient Chinese custom for interment in the tombs of elite individuals in order to provide for their afterlife. Some of the most beautiful works of Chinese art were excavated from such tombs, and this sculpture of a camel is a perfect example of the refined artistry dedicated to such works despite the fact that they were never meant to be seen by the living. Traces of original polychromy survive on this friendly looking animal, fashioned with large eyes and a raised head. This sculpture reveals the Tang Dynasty's respect and admiration for this beast of burden, so essential to the prosperity of ancient China. - (DL.2072)

Early Tang Painted Pottery Walking Camel
with Detachable Rider



DL.2073
Origin: China
Circa: 618 AD to 907 AD
Dimensions:
22" (55.9cm) high x 18.5" (47.0cm) wide

Collection: Chinese Art
Medium: Terracotta
Condition: Extra Fine
Location: UAE

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For the Chinese, camels symbolized commerce and its associated wealth, largely concentrated on profits through trading on the Silk Road. Trade across this extensive network of paths and trails brought prosperity, foreign merchants, and exotic merchandise into China. However, the dusty trails of the Silk Road were an arduous journey through the rugged mountains and harsh desert of Central Asia that could only be traversed by the two humped Bactrian camel. This remarkable beast was able to withstand the scorching heat of the desert and maintain its own nutrients, surviving for months without fresh supplies of water. The government kept vast herds of these invaluable creatures, presided over by civil officials, for hauling their precious commodities across the Silk Road. These exotic creatures were a common sight in the cosmopolitan cities of Tang China, carrying both traders and their goods directly into the markets. Likewise, Tang artists began to create charming representations of these prized creatures as mingqi in order to symbolize wealth and prosperity in the afterlife.

Mingqi were works of art specifically created in an ancient Chinese custom for interment in the tombs of elite individuals in order to provide for their afterlife. Some of the most beautiful works of Chinese art were excavated from such tombs, and this sculpture of a camel and detachable rider is a perfect example of the refined artistry dedicated to such works despite the fact that they were never meant to be seen by the living. The distinct physiognomy of the rider reveals that he is of foreign descent, most likely a Turkic merchant from Central Asia. We can imagine him guiding a caravan into the cities of Tang China, carrying his precious goods directly into the market. Traces of polychromy survive on both the camel and the rider. The animal's head is raised, teeth visible in its open mouth, perhaps in protest at its long journey. The hairs on its neck are expertly modelled as are the details of the rider's clothing. He wears boots and a peaked cap and sports a full beard. He probably held a whip of some kind in his left hand which has since been lost. This sculpture reveals the Tang Dynasty's respect and admiration for this beast of burden, so essential to the prosperity of ancient China. - (DL.2073)

Tang Dynasty Painted White Pottery Prancing Horses



DL.2074
Origin: Shaanxi Province - 'Xi'an'
Circa: 618 AD to 907 AD
Dimensions:
21" (53.3cm) high x 21.6" (54.9cm) wide

Collection: Chinese Art
Medium: Terracotta
Condition: Extra Fine
Location: UAE

Early Tang Painted Pottery Horse
with Detachable Saddle



DL.998
Origin: China
Circa: 618 AD to 907 AD
Dimensions:
22.64" (57.5cm) high x 22.83" (58.0cm) wide

Collection: Chinese
Medium: Terracotta
Condition: Extra Fine
Location: UAE

T'ang Dynasty Painted Terracotta Fat Lady



DL.2075
Origin: Shaanxi Province - 'Xi'an'
Circa: 618 AD to 907 AD
Dimensions: 12" (30.5cm) high

Collection: Chinese Art
Medium: Painted Terracotta
Condition: Extra Fine
Location: UAE

During the Tang Dynasty, restrictions were placed on the number of objects that could be included in tombs, an amount determined by an individual's social rank. In spite of the limitations, a striking variety of tomb furnishings, known as mingqi, have been excavated. Entire retinues of ceramic figures - animals, entertainers, musicians, guardians - were buried with the dead in order to provide for the afterlife. Of the various types of mingqi, there is perhaps none more charming than the beautiful sculptures of elegant female courtiers, sometimes known as "Fat Ladies" for their fleshy faces. These gorgeous women reflect the appreciation of the female form during the Tang Dynasty.

This sophisticated woman provided eternal companionship for her lord throughout the afterlife. We can imagine her gracefully dancing or singing a poetical song, two popular customs for ladies during the Tang Dynasty. Such courtiers are described in the numerous love poems written during this era, considered a golden age of Chinese culture. She has her hair styled in a sophisticated coiffure that crown her heads while she wears an elegant long-sleeved robe typical of the time period. A remarkable amount of the original pigment that once decorated the work remains intact, most noticeable on the floral motifs that decorate the dress as well as her rosy cheeks and lips. Such women may represent wives, princesses, or attendants. Her beauty inspires us as we are transported back to another time. This gorgeous sculpture has been to the next world and returned to our modern era to tell us her tale. They speak of the enormous wealth and sophisticated culture of the Tang Dynasty, one of the greatest periods of artistic creation in human history. - (DL.2075)

Tang Fat Lady



DL.2077
Origin: Shaanxi Province - 'Xi'an'
Circa: 618 AD to 907 AD
Dimensions: 15.89" (40.4cm) high

Collection: Chinese Art
Medium: Terracotta
Condition: Extra Fine
Location: UAE

During the Tang Dynasty, restrictions were placed on the number of objects that could be included in tombs, an amount determined by an individual's social rank. In spite of the limitations, a striking variety of tomb furnishings, known as mingqi, have been excavated. Entire retinues of ceramic figures - animals, entertainers, musicians, guardians - were buried with the dead in order to provide for the afterlife. Of the various types of mingqi, there is perhaps none more charming than the beautiful sculptures of elegant female courtiers, sometimes known as “Fat Ladies” for their fleshy faces. These gorgeous women reflect the appreciation of the female form during the Tang Dynasty.

This sophisticated woman provided eternal companionship for her lord throughout the afterlife. We can imagine her gracefully dancing or singing a poetical song, two popular customs for ladies during the Tang Dynasty. Such courtiers are described in the numerous love poems written during this era, considered a golden age of Chinese culture. This stunning lady wears her hair in an elegant coiffure arranged into a large fan-shaped bun that crowns her head. Her sumptuous long sleeved dress matches the beauty of her sophisticated hairstyle. Remnants of the original pigment that once decorated this work remain intact, most noticeably on her rosy cheeks and red lips. Such women may represent wives, princesses, or attendants. Their beauty inspires us as we are transported back to another time. This gorgeous sculpture has been to the next world and returned to our modern era to tell us her tale. She speaks of the enormous wealth and sophisticated culture of the Tang Dynasty, one of the greatest periods of artistic creation in human history. - (DL.2077)

Tang Dynasty White Painted Pottery

Prancing Horse



DL.2085

Origin: China

Circa: 618 AD to 907 AD

Dimensions:

12.5" (31.8cm) high x 13.3" (33.8cm) wide

Collection: Chinese

Medium: Terracotta

Condition: Extra Fine

Location: UAE

The great influence of the horse throughout the history of China cannot be underestimated. In fact, the ancient unification of the Chinese Empire was due in large part to the horse. Their rapid mobility allowed for quick communication between far away provinces. Likewise, the military role of horses aided in the conquest and submission of distant lands. The need to import stronger, faster steeds from Central Asia (as opposed to the native Mongol pony) led to the creation of the Silk Road. The importance of the horse in the history and culture of China can be viewed, in part, through the artistic legacy of this great civilization. In sculpture, painting, and literature, horses were glorified and revered, believed to be relatives of dragons, a theory reflecting their sacred status within society. During the Tang Dynasty, the adoration of the horse can be seen through their burial art. Horse models excavated from mausoleums of the period are among the most splendid and easily recognizable works of Chinese art.

This gorgeous example still retains much of its original white paint. It may once have had a detachable saddle which is now lost to us. The horse raises one leg in the air as he turns his head to the side. Both these features are sought after by collectors. This elegant sculpture is a testament to the admiration and adoration the Chinese had for these marvelous creatures. Although they were an integral part in the expansion and defense of the empire, they were equally regarded for their beauty and grace as revealed by this sculpture. - (DL.2085)

A Tang Dynasty Red Painted Pottery Prancing Horse



DL.2086

Origin: China

Circa: 618 AD to 907 AD

Dimensions:

12.89" (32.7cm) high x 13.77" (35.0cm) wide

Collection: Chinese

Medium: Terracotta

Condition: Extra Fine

Location: UAE

The great influence of the horse throughout the history of China cannot be underestimated. In fact, the ancient unification of the Chinese Empire was due in large part to the horse. Their rapid mobility allowed for quick communication between far away provinces. Likewise, the military role of horses aided in the conquest and submission of distant lands. The need to import stronger, faster steeds from Central Asia (as opposed to the native Mongol pony) led to the creation of the Silk Road. The importance of the horse in the history and culture of China can be viewed, in part, through the artistic legacy of this great civilization. In sculpture, painting, and literature, horses were glorified and revered, believed to be relatives of dragons, a theory reflecting their sacred status within society. During the Tang Dynasty, the adoration of the horse can be seen through their burial art. Horse models excavated from mausoleums of the period are among the most splendid and easily recognizable works of Chinese art.

This gorgeous example still retains much of its original red polychromy and the white saddle is delicately incised. The horse raises one leg in the air as he turns his head to the side. Both these features are sought after by collectors. This elegant sculpture is a testament to the admiration and adoration the Chinese had for these marvelous creatures. Although they were an integral part in the expansion and defense of the empire, they were equally regarded for their beauty and grace as revealed by this sculpture. - (DL.2086)

Early Tang Painted Pottery Horse with Detachable Saddle



DL.2087
Origin: Shanxi Province
Circa: 618 AD to 907 AD
Dimensions:
15.3" (38.9cm) high x 13.7" (34.8cm) wide

Collection: Chinese
Medium: Terracotta
Condition: Very Fine
Location: UAE

The great influence of the horse throughout the history of China cannot be underestimated. In fact, the ancient unification of the Chinese Empire was due in large part to the horse. Their rapid mobility allowed for quick communication between far away provinces. Likewise, the military role of horses aided in the conquest and submission of distant lands. The need to import stronger, faster steeds from Central Asia (as opposed to the native Mongol pony) led to the creation of the Silk Road. The importance of the horse in the history and culture of China can be viewed, in part, through the artistic legacy of this great civilization. In sculpture, painting, and literature, horses were glorified and revered, believed to be relatives of dragons, a theory reflecting their sacred status within society. During the Tang Dynasty, the adoration of the horse can be seen through their burial art. Horse models excavated from mausoleums of the period are among the most splendid and easily recognizable works of Chinese art.

This charming sculpture of a horse still retains much of its original white pigment intact. The orange painted saddle has been carefully incised to create a more realistic texture. Equally impressive is the fact that the saddle has been separately crafted; it may once have supported a rider who is now lost to us. The animal's large eyes and friendly countenance have been expertly captured by the sculptor. This gorgeous horse is a testament to the admiration and adoration the Chinese had for these marvelous creatures. Although they were an integral part in the expansion and defence of the empire, they were equally regarded for their beauty and grace as revealed by this sculpture - (DL.2087)

Early Tang Painted Pottery Horse with Detachable Saddle



DL.2088
Origin: Shanxi Province
Circa: 618 AD to 907 AD
Dimensions:
12" (30.5cm) high x 12" (30.5cm) wide

Collection: Chinese
Style: Tang
Medium: Terracotta
Condition: Very Fine
Location: UAE

The great influence of the horse throughout the history of China cannot be underestimated. In fact, the ancient unification of the Chinese Empire was due in large part to the horse. Their rapid mobility allowed for quick communication between far away provinces. Likewise, the military role of horses aided in the conquest and submission of distant lands. The need to import stronger, faster steeds from Central Asia (as opposed to the native Mongol pony) led to the creation of the Silk Road. The importance of the horse in the history and culture of China can be viewed, in part, through the artistic legacy of this great civilization. In sculpture, painting, and literature, horses were glorified and revered, believed to be relatives of dragons, a theory reflecting their sacred status within society. During the Tang Dynasty, the adoration of the horse can be seen through their burial art. Horse models excavated from mausoleums of the period are among the most splendid and easily recognizable works of Chinese art.

This work is remarkable for the amount of the original pigment that has survived the ravages of time, specifically apparent on the orange saddle and black reins. Equally impressive is the fact that the saddle has been separately crafted; it may once have supported a rider who is now lost to us. This gorgeous sculpture is a testament to the admiration and adoration the Chinese had for these marvelous creatures. Although they were an integral part in the expansion and defense of the empire, they were equally regarded for their beauty and grace as revealed by this sculpture. - (DL.2088)

A Pair of Tang Dynasty Painted Pottery Fat Ladies on Horses



DL.2093
Origin: Shaanxi Province, Xi'an
Circa: 618 AD to 907 AD

Collection: Chinese
Medium: Terracotta
Condition: Extra Fine
Location: UAE

During the Tang Dynasty, restrictions were placed on the number of objects that could be included in tombs, an amount determined by an individual's social rank. In spite of the limitations, a striking variety of tomb furnishings, known as mingqi, have been excavated. Entire retinues of ceramic figures - animals, entertainers, musicians, guardians - were buried with the dead in order to provide for the afterlife. Of the various types of mingqi, there is perhaps none more charming than the beautiful sculptures of elegant female courtiers, sometimes known as “Fat Ladies” for their fleshy faces. These gorgeous women reflect the appreciation of the female form during the Tang Dynasty. Such courtiers are described in the numerous love poems written during this era, considered a golden age of Chinese culture.

In these examples, the ladies-in-waiting are depicted on horseback. Considerable traces of the original polychromy survive, in particular a dark pigment has been used to indicate the saddle and the reins. The high status of the riders is indicated by the delicate floral motifs which adorn their long-sleeved dresses. Their hair is fashionably arranged in two different styles. Such women may represent wives, princesses, or attendants. Their beauty inspires us as we are transported back to another time. These gorgeous sculptures have been to the next world and returned to our modern era to tell us their tale. They speak of the enormous wealth and sophisticated culture of the Tang Dynasty, one of the greatest periods of artistic creation in human history. - (DL.2093)

3 Piece Set of Early Tang Painted Pottery
Horses with Detachable Lady Riders



DL.2095
Origin: Shaanxi Province, Xi'an
Circa: 618 AD to 907 AD

Collection: Chinese
Medium: Terracotta
Condition: Extra Fine
Location: UAE

The important influence of the horse throughout the history of China cannot be overestimated. In fact, the ancient expansion of the Chinese Empire was due in a large part to the horse. The rapid mobility of horses allowed for enhanced communication between distant provinces. Likewise, the military role of horses facilitated the conquest and submission of other lands as well as securing the borders against barbarian invaders. The need to import stronger, faster steeds from Central Asia (as opposed to the local Mongol pony) contributed to the creation of trading routes along what became known as the Silk Road. The significance of the horse in the history and culture of China can be viewed, in part, through the artistic legacy of this great civilization. In sculpture, painting and literature, horses are frequently glorified and revered as distant relatives of sacred, mythological dragons.

During the Tang dynasty the adoration of the horse is evident in their burial art. Horse models excavated from mausoleums of the period are among the most celebrated and splendid works of Chinese art. Naturally, owing to their rarity, horses became a status symbol for the aristocratic elite. Polo and other equestrian pastimes became popular. These sculptures depicting three ladies-in-waiting on horseback are remarkable for several reasons. Firstly, in each case, the lady and saddle detach from the body of the horse in one piece. Small traces of the original polychromy remain, most visibly on the ladies' red lips. They each wear a long sleeved dress, a type of which was used in a popular dance where the excess of fabric was swirled around in the air. Unusually, each horse is depicted with its head raised, ears upright, and nostrils flaring. They intimidate us with their open mouths and visible teeth. Remarkably, the women seem unaffected by whatever has startled their steeds and they retain their dignified pose. - (DL.2095)

Early Tang Painted Pottery
Horse with Detachable Rider



DL.2096
Origin: China
Circa: 618 AD to 907 AD
Dimensions:
15" (38.1cm) high x 12.5" (31.8cm) wide

Collection: Chinese
Medium: Terracotta
Condition: Very Fine
Location: UAE

The majority of Tang horses were produced to accompany the deceased throughout the afterlife. The striking beauty of this work is even more impressive, considering that it was created specifically for internment and was not supposed to be seen by the living. Today, we marvel in the beauty of this sculpture as much as its tremendous history and intriguing legacy.

Early Tang Painted Pottery Horse
with Detachable Lady Rider



DL.2097
Origin: China
Circa: 618 AD to 907 AD
Dimensions:
13.7" (34.8cm) high x 12.5" (31.8cm) wide

Collection: Chinese
Medium: Terracotta
Condition: Very Fine
Location: UAE

Early Tang Painted Pottery
Horse with Detachable Rider



DL.2098
Origin: China
Circa: 618 AD to 907 AD
Dimensions:
14.3" (36.3cm) high x 12.5" (31.8cm) wide

Collection: Chinese
Medium: Terracotta
Condition: Extra Fine
Location: UAE

Tang Dynasty Painted Pottery Fat Nobleman



DK.108
Origin: Shaanxi Province - Xi'an
Circa: 618 AD to 907 BC
Dimensions: 28" (71.1cm) high

Collection: Chinese Art
Medium: Terracotta
Condition: Very Fine
Location: UAE

A pair of magnificent museum quality pottery fat nobleman from the T'ang Dynasty .
Each painted with red flower pattern on their robe. - (DK.108)

Tang Dynasty White Marble 'Bodhisvatta' Torso



DK.117a
Origin: Shaanxi Province - 'Xi'an'
Circa: 618 AD to 907 AD
Dimensions: 59" (149.9cm) high

Collection: Chinese Art
Medium: Terracotta
Condition: Very Fine
Location: United States

Large Tang Terracotta Sculpture of a Kneeling Camel



CK.0559

Origin: China

Circa: 618 AD to 906 AD

Dimensions:

31" (78.7cm) high x 11" (27.9cm) wide x 42" (106.7cm) depth

Collection: Chinese Art

Style: Tang Dynasty

Medium: Terracotta

During the Tang Dynasty, restrictions were placed on the number of objects that could be included in tombs, an amount determined by an individual's social rank. In spite of the limitations, a striking variety of tomb furnishings, known as mingqi, have been excavated. Entire retinues of ceramic figures - animals, entertainers, musicians, guardians, etc. - were buried with the dead in order to provide for the afterlife. Some of the most beautiful works of Chinese art were excavated from tombs and never meant to be seen by the living.

“The camel is an unusual domestic animal; it carries a saddle of flesh on its back; swiftly it dashes over the shifting sands; it manifests its merit in dangerous places; it has a secret understanding of springs and sources, subtle indeed is its knowledge.”

This quote by Guo Pu dates to the 3rd Century A.D. and reveals the extent to which the Chinese adulated camels. For the Chinese, these creatures symbolized the wealth and luxury that resulted from trading on the Silk Road. Commerce across this extensive network of paths and trails brought prosperity, foreign merchants, and exotic merchandise into China. However, the dusty trails of the Silk Road were an arduous journey through the rugged mountains and harsh deserts of Central Asia that could only be traversed by the two humped Bactrian camel. This remarkable beast was able to withstand the scorching heat of the desert and maintain its own nutrients, surviving for months without fresh supplies of water. The government kept vast herds of these invaluable creatures, presided over by civil officials, for hauling their precious commodities across the Silk Road. These exotic creatures were a common sight in the cosmopolitan cities of T'ang China, carrying both traders and their goods directly into the markets. Likewise, T'ang artists began to create charming representations of these prized creatures as mingqi in order to symbolize continued wealth and prosperity throughout the afterlife.

This magnificent camel has been represented kneeling down on its front legs, as if preparing to be laden with bundles of merchandise for a journey along the Silk Road. This is the largest example of a Tang Dynasty camel that we know of, and certainly the largest in this rare posture. - (CK.0559)

Early Tang Painted Pottery
Seated Camel with Detachable Saddle



RP.157

Origin: China

Circa: 618 AD to 906 AD

Dimensions: 10" (25.4cm) high x 17.5" (44.5cm) wide

Collection: Chinese Art

Medium: Terracotta

Location: UAE

During the Tang Dynasty, the status of the beloved camel ranked second only to the revered horse. Camels symbolized commerce and its associated wealth, profits made possible primarily through the legendary Silk Road. Trade across this extensive network of paths and trails brought prosperity, foreigner merchants, and exotic merchandise into China, connecting the Mediterranean world with the Far East. However, this arduous journey through the jagged mountains and rugged deserts of Central Asia could only be undertaken by the two-humped Bactrian camel, a beast able to withstand the scorching heat of the desert and to maintain its own nutrients, surviving for months without fresh supplies of water. The government kept vast herds of these invaluable creatures, presided over by civil officials, for hauling their precious silk supplies across the Silk Road. These exotic creatures were a common sight in the cosmopolitan cities of Tang China, carrying both traders and their goods directly into the markets. Likewise, T'ang artist began to create charming representations of these prized creatures as mingqi wealth and prosperity to come in the afterlife. An ancient Chinese custom, mingqi were works of art specifically created to be interred in the tombs of the elite classes in order to provide for the afterlife. Some of the most beautiful works of Chinese art were excavated from such tombs, and this glazed sculpture of a camel is a perfect example of the refined artistry dedicated to such works, despite the fact that they were never meant to be seen by the living. - (RP.157)

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