

THE BARAKAT GALLERY

Chinese Art

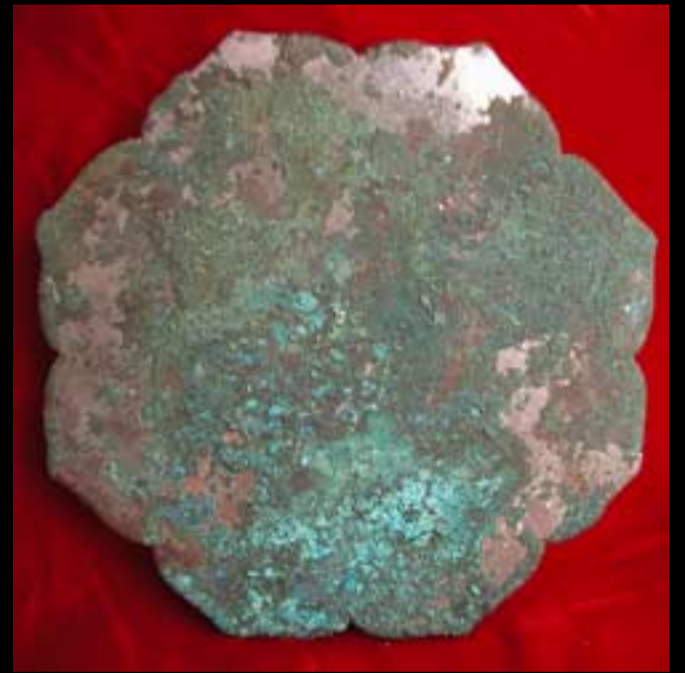
Tang Bronze Mirrors
Tang Fat Ladies
Tang Sancai-Glazed Works
618 AD - 907 AD



Tang Bronze Mirrors

Today, when we think of mirrors, we think of a thin layer of reflective metal, usually a combination of tin and mercury, covered in a layer of protective glass. However, the modern mirror was an innovation of 16th Century Italian craftsmen. Before that, since ancient time, mirrors of highly polished bronze were used. Bronze mirrors themselves were introduced into China during the 6th Century B.C. They were used not only as functional articles but as sacred objects filled with their own powers. The custom of placing mirrors in a tomb originated around the 4th Century B.C. The Chinese believed that mirrors had the ability not only to reflect, but also to radiate light, and thus illuminate the tomb for eternity. Often multiple mirrors were entombed, not alongside the other funerary objects, but close to the body of the deceased.

Tang Octofoil Silver-Plated Bronze Mirror



H.839
Origin: China
Circa: 618 AD to 906 AD
Dimensions: 4" (10.2cm) high

Collection: Chinese
Style: Tang Dynasty
Medium: Bronze
Location: United States

The octofoil shape of this mirror is typical of the Tang Dynasty, as are the representation of ducks and geese. Here, two duck and two geese are arranged around the large central boss with a drilled hole. A chord would have been wound through this hole to serve as a handle. The general layout of this design relates back to earlier examples that symbolize the four cardinal directions and quadrants of the universe. The imagery on this example, however, relates to the realm of human emotions, and not the order of the universe. The Mandarin duck, in Chinese art, symbolizes the strong love of a married couple while the goose serves as an allusion to correspondences between lovers. The foliage and flowers that decorate the border reinforce the amorous symbolism. We can imagine a young lover holding this mirror, gazing at her reflection and she longingly thinks of her husband who has ventured away to an out province on a diplomatic mission or business affairs. As she primps herself, she can take solace in the imagery that decorates the back of this mirror, knowing that their love is strong, like that of the duck. - (H.839)

Tang Octofoil Silver-Plated Bronze Mirror



H.841
Origin: China
Circa: 618 AD to 906 AD
Dimensions: 5.375" (13.7cm) high

Collection: Chinese
Medium: Bronze
Location: United States

The octofoil shape of this mirror is typical of the Tang Dynasty, as are the representation of two ducks and a small bird. Here, the animals are arranged around the large central boss with a drilled hole. A chord would have been wound through this hole to serve as a handle. The Mandarin duck, in Chinese art, symbolizes the strong love of a married couple while the bird may serve as an allusion to correspondences between lovers. The foliage and flowers that decorate the border reinforce the amorous symbolism. We can imagine a young lover holding this mirror, gazing at her reflection and she longingly thinks of her husband who has ventured away to an out province on a diplomatic mission or business affairs. As she primps herself, she can take solace in the imagery that decorates the back of this mirror, knowing that their love is strong, like that of the duck. - (H.841)

Tang Silver-Plated Bronze Mirror



H.842
Origin: China
Circa: 618 AD to 906 AD
Dimensions: 3.875" (9.8cm) high

Collection: Chinese
Medium: Bronze
Location: United States

The backside of this silver plated bronze mirror is decorated with a charming motif of various wildlife creatures frolicking amongst a vineyard. This iconography is characteristic of mirrors of the T'ang era. Specifically, the bunches of grapes is a motif that is believed to have been influenced by Sassanid glazed terracotta vessels imported from central Asia. The central boss takes the form of a recumbent beast that appears to be a lion with its head turned to the side. A hole has been drilled here, as if the creature is arching its back, and originally a chord would have been inserted to serve as a handle. Four more lions leap around the foliage and bunches of grapes while the outer rim is filled with birds. Mirrors were considered powerful talismanic devices through which one could view not only their own reflection, but also see into the spirit world. However, despite all vanity, the beautiful relief decorations adorning this mirror make it difficult to look away from the back, and the real purpose of seeing ourselves is forgotten. - (H.842)

Tang Silver-Plated Bronze Mirror



H.844
Origin: China
Circa: 618 AD to 906 AD
Dimensions: 5" (12.7cm) high

Collection: Chinese
Medium: Bronze
Location: United States

The backside of this silver plated bronze mirror is decorated with a charming motif of various wildlife creatures frolicking amongst a vineyard. This iconography is characteristic of mirrors of the T'ang era. Specifically, the bunches of grapes is a motif that is believed to have been influenced by Sassanid glazed terracotta vessels imported from central Asia. The central boss takes the form of a recumbent beast, perhaps a bear. A hole has been drilled here, as if the creature is arching its back, and originally a chord would have been inserted to serve as a handle. Six lions leap around the foliage and bunches of grapes while the outer rim is filled with birds. Mirrors were considered powerful talismanic devices through which one could view not only their own reflection, but also see into the spirit world. However, despite all vanity, the beautiful relief decorations adorning this mirror make it difficult to look away from the back, and the real purpose of seeing ourselves is forgotten. - (H.844)

Tang Octofoil Silver-Plated Bronze Mirror



H.845
Origin: China
Circa: 618 AD to 906 AD
Dimensions: 3.875" (9.8cm) high

Collection: Chinese
Medium: Bronze
Location: United States

The octofoil shape of this mirror is typical of the Tang Dynasty, as are the representation of ducks and geese. Here, two ducks and two geese are arranged around the large central boss with a drilled hole. A cord would have been wound through this hole to serve as a handle. The general layout of this design relates back to earlier examples that symbolize the four cardinal directions and quadrants of the universe. The imagery on this example, however, relates to the realm of human emotions, and not the order of the universe. The Mandarin duck, in Chinese art, symbolizes the strong love of a married couple while the goose serves as an allusion to correspondences between lovers. The foliage and flowers that decorate the border reinforce the amorous symbolism. We can imagine a young lover holding this mirror, gazing at her reflection and she longingly thinks of her husband who has ventured away to an out province on a diplomatic mission or business affairs. As she primps herself, she can take solace in the imagery that decorates the back of this mirror, knowing that their love is strong, like that of the duck. - (H.845)

Tang Silver-Plated Bronze Mirror



H.848
Origin: China
Circa: 618 AD to 906 AD
Dimensions: 4.625" (11.7cm) high

Collection: Chinese
Medium: Bronze
Location: UAE

The backside of this silver plated bronze mirror is decorated with a charming motif of various wildlife creatures frolicking amongst a vineyard. This iconography is characteristic of mirrors of the Tang era. Specifically, the bunches of grapes is a motif that is believed to have been influenced by Sassanid glazed terracotta vessels imported from central Asia. The central boss takes the form of a recumbent beast, perhaps a wild boar. A hole has been drilled here, as if the creature is arching its back, and originally a chord would have been inserted to serve as a handle. Four lions leap around the foliage and bunches of grapes while the outer rim is filled with birds and dragonflies. Mirrors were considered powerful talismanic devices through which one could view not only their own reflection, but also see into the spirit world. However, despite all vanity, the beautiful relief decorations adorning this mirror make it difficult to look away from the back, and the real purpose of seeing ourselves is forgotten. - (H.848)

Tang Bronze Mirror with Silver Applique



SF.348

Origin: China

Circa: 7 th Century AD to 9 th Century AD

Dimensions: 7.50" (19.1cm) wide

Collection: Chinese Art

Style: Tang Dynasty

Medium: Bronze, Silver

Location: Great Britain

Tang Fat Ladies

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. These gorgeous women reflect the appreciation of the female form during the Tang Dynasty.

T'ang Sculpture of a Lady-in-Waiting



H.746
Origin: China
Circa: 618 AD to 906 AD
Dimensions: 15.5" (39.4cm) high

Collection: Chinese
Medium: Painted Terracotta
Location: United States

This sophisticated woman 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. This stunning lady wears her hair in an elegant coiffure. This sophisticated hairstyle is matched by her sumptuous robe painted in orange and green hues. A remarkable amount of the original pigment that once decorated this work remains intact, most noticeable on her robes and her red lips and rosy cheeks. 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 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.746)

T'ang Sculpture of a Lady-in-Waiting



H.748

Origin: China

Circa: 618 AD to 906 AD

Dimensions: 15.25" (38.7cm) high

Collection: Chinese

Medium: Painted Terracotta

Location: United States

This sophisticated woman 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 mysteriously points with one hand with her truncated arm. Perhaps some object that has deteriorated over the centuries was once attached in place there. This stunning lady wears her hair in an elegant coiffure. This sophisticated hair style is matched by her sumptuous robe. A remarkable amount of the original pigment that once decorated this work remains intact, most noticeable in her red lips and rosy cheeks. 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 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.748)

T'ang Sculpture of a Lady-in-Waiting



H.749

Origin: China

Circa: 618 AD to 906 AD

Dimensions: 12.75" (32.4cm) high

Collection: Chinese

Medium: Painted Terracotta

Location: United States

This sophisticated woman 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. This stunning lady wears her hair in an elegant coiffure. This sophisticated hair style is matched by her sumptuous robe. A remarkable amount of the original pigment that once decorated this work remains intact, most noticeable in her red lips and urna. 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 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.749)

T'ang Sculpture of a Lady-in-Waiting



H.747
Origin: China
Circa: 618 AD to 906 AD
Dimensions: 13" (33.0cm) high

Collection: Chinese
Medium: Painted Terracotta
Location: United States

This sophisticated woman 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. This stunning lady wears her hair in an elegant coiffure. This sophisticated hairstyle is matched by her sumptuous robe decorated with a beautiful flower pattern. A remarkable amount of the original pigment that once decorated this work remains intact, most noticeable on her robe and her red lips and rosy cheeks. 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 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.747)

T'ang Sculpture of a Lady in Waiting



H.869
Origin: China
Circa: 618 AD to 906 AD
Dimensions: 13" (33.0cm) high

Collection: Chinese
Medium: Painted Terracotta
Location: United States

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 T'ang 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. Remnants of the original pigment that once decorated this work remain intact, most noticeable on her rosy cheeks, red lips, and urna. 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 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.869)

Tang Sculpture of a Fat Lady



DK.110
Origin: Shaanxi Province, Xi'an
Circa: 618 AD to 907 AD
Dimensions: 25" (63.5cm) high

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

Tang Sculpture of a Fat Lady



DK.111
Origin: Shaanxi Province - 'Xi'an'
Circa: 618 AD to 907 AD
Dimensions: 19.5" (49.5cm) high

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

Tang Sculpture of a Fat Lady



DK.112 (LSO)
Origin: China
Circa: 618 AD to 907 AD
Dimensions: 19" (48.3cm) high

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

This beautifully-finished ceramic attendant was made during what many consider to be China's Golden Age, the Tang 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 Tang 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 current sculpture is a classic example of the genre. She stands with an air of self-possession, draped from neck to foot with a long, pleated dress with large sleeves. She leans her weight slightly on her left foot, and tips her head to her left as if in gentle enquiry. Her features are soft and smooth, with rounded jowls and cheeks that accentuate the delicacy of her features. Her face is painted and modelled in the perfect serenity that characterises these pieces, with a small, rounded nose, pouting lips and slanted, dark, painted eyes with distinct iris/pupils. Her hands are folded together, with the drapery of her sleeves hanging loosely in ripples between her wrists and elbows. Her right hand is folded over her left, with her index finger extended as if indicating something to her left side – perhaps a discreet warning? Her hair is ornately arranged in a large bouffant scroll running from left to right, with a double tight bun to her rear left. Her gown is pale in colour, and decorated with the remains of floral designs. Her feet are shrouded by her gown, but are indicated by lotus flowers that probably represent the “golden lilies” – or deliberately dwarfed feet – that were so beloved of the Chinese aristocracy. The tradition of foot binding started in the Tang Dynasty, apparently due to the delicacy of tread of a contemporary princess – Yao Niang – who skimmed across the ground “...as if over golden lilies”. Another version is that she was ordered to bind her feet in the shape of the new moon. This seems to have taken place in the latter half of the Tang dynasty, so this is probably a 8th century example. Sources are fairly vague, but the longevity of the tradition informs us as to the immense discomfort and pain caused by foot binding. The ideal as to attain feet only 3” long; most of the toe bones would fracture as a result. The most popular shoes for foot deformation were known as Lotus shoes, which are being worn by this attendant.

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. - (DK.112 (LSO))

A Pair of Tang Fat Ladies



DK.114 (LSO)
Origin: Shaanxi Province - 'Xi'an'
Circa: 618 AD to 907 AD
Dimensions: 13" (33.0cm) high

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

This imposing pair of austere ceramic attendants was made during what many consider to be China's Golden Age, the T'ang Dynasty. They were designed as grave furnishings (mingqi), and while there were many different forms, 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 idealised beauty of T'ang Dynasty China, while also demonstrating sculptural mastery in exaggerating characteristics for effect, and for sheer elegance of execution. These are made in a relatively unusual manner, which has notable geographical specificity within the Shaanxi province. They are notably less rotund than the majority of these figures, with more detailed modelling and a more conservative appearance than the “classical” fat ladies. They have the same rounded cheeks and jawlines, but they have a far more dignified and reserved pose than is usual for the genre. Their faces are detailed, with a small, rounded nose and pursed lips, but their expressions are less coquettish than is standard. Their austerity is heightened by the rather powerful geometric hairstyles; one rises fan-like on a raised column from the back of the head, while the other is more bouffant, with a secondary bun towards her left. The effect is more courtly and formal than the rather flippant look of standard fat ladies. Rather than the usual, rather ambiguous “come hither” hand gestures, their hands are folded primly inside their sleeves. Their dress is modelled as full-length dresses, with folds picked out using indentations. The ground colour is pale, with reddish pigment on the upper halves of their bodies. The figure with the bouffant hair also has some green pigment below the hands; her colouring is much more defined, presumably an artefact of preservation. Both figures – but especially the one with the bouffant hair – have further detailing in the form of floral patterns picked out in dark pigment across much of their dresses. Their pointed toes protrude from under their dresses; their feet do not seem to have been deformed through foot binding. It is possible that these predate the development of the system, which was a late T'ang innovation.

This pair of sculptures is a remarkable reminder of China's outstanding heritage, and a beautiful addition to any serious collection of the genre. - (DK.114 (LSO))

Tang Sculpture of a Fat Lady



TF.009
Origin: China
Circa: 618 AD to 907 AD
Dimensions: 13.25" (33.7cm) high x
3.25" (8.3cm) wide

Collection: Chinese Art
Style: Tang Dynasty
Medium: Terracotta
Location: Great Britain

Tang Sculpture of a Fat Lady



TF.010

Origin: China

Circa: 618 AD to 907 AD

Dimensions: 12.75" (32.4cm) high x
4" (10.2cm) wide

Collection: Chinese Art

Medium: Terracotta

Location: Great Britain

Tang Sculpture of a Fat Lady



TF.011
Origin: China
Circa: 618 AD to 907 AD
Dimensions: 14" (35.6cm) high x
4" (10.2cm) wide

Collection: Chinese Art
Medium: Terracotta
Location: Great Britain

Tang Sculpture of a Fat Lady



SK.009

Origin: China

Circa: 618 AD to 907 AD

Dimensions: 15.75" (40.0cm) high x
5.65" (14.4cm) wide

Collection: Chinese

Style: Tang Dynasty

Medium: Terracotta

Location: UAE

Tang Sculpture of a Fat Lady



RP.078
Origin: China
Circa: 618 AD to 907 AD
Dimensions: 12.25" (31.1cm) high x
3.5" (8.9cm) wide

Collection: Chinese Art
Medium: Terracotta
Location: UAE

This beautiful 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 creations, and many of China's best-known painters and artists.

The current sculpture is a classic example of the genre. She is draped from neck to foot in a long pleated dress with large sleeves. She leans her weight slightly on her left foot and tips her head to her left as if in gentle enquiry. Her features are soft and smooth, with rounded jowls and cheeks that accentuate the delicacy of her features. Her face is painted and modeled in perfect serenity complete with a small rounded nose, pouting lips and slanted dark painted eyes with distinct pupils. Her hands are folded together with the drapery of her sleeves hanging loosely in ripples between her wrists and elbows. Her gown is pale in color and decorated with the remains of floral designs.

This piece offers a narrative of courtly life over a thousand years ago, in superbly delicate and refined detail. This stunning piece of Chinese art serve as a beautiful addition to any collection of ancient art. - (RP.078)

Tang Sculpture of a Fat Lady



RP.163

Origin: China

Circa: 618 AD to 907 AD

Dimensions: 20.75" (52.7cm) high x

9.5" (24.1cm) wide

Collection: Chinese Art

Medium: Painted Terracotta

Location: UAE

Tang Sculpture of a Fat Lady



RP.164

Origin: China

Circa: 618 AD to 907 AD

Dimensions: 19.5" (49.5cm) high x

7.8" (19.8cm) wide

Collection: Chinese Art

Medium: Painted Terracotta

Location: UAE

Tang Sculpture of a Fat Lady



RP.165

Origin: China

Circa: 618 AD to 907 AD

Dimensions: 19.7" (50.0cm) high x
7.75" (19.7cm) wide

Collection: Chinese Art

Medium: Painted Terracotta

Location: UAE

Pair of Tang Sculptures of Fat Ladies



RP.167

Origin: China

Circa: 618 AD to 907 AD

Dimensions: 16.25" (41.3cm) high x
5.5" (14.0cm) wide

Collection: Chinese Art

Medium: Painted Terracotta

Location: UAE

Tang Sculpture of a Fat Lady



RP.166

Origin: China

Circa: 618 AD to 907 AD

Dimensions: 17.5" (44.5cm) high x
6.75" (17.1cm) wide

Collection: Chinese Art

Style: Tang Dynasty

Medium: Terracotta

Location: UAE

Tang Sancai-Glazed Works

Pair of a Tang Sancai-Glazed Lokapala and Attendant



H.008
Origin: China
Circa: 618 AD to 907 AD
Dimensions: 17" (43.2cm) high x
8" (20.3cm) wide

Collection: Chinese
Medium: Glazed Terracotta
Location: United States

The Deva King assumes a threatening posture waving raised arm and clenched fist into the air with the other arm cocked on hip. He stands atop an ox or cow with an air of confidence and fixity. He wears layers of robes beneath clad armor with circular chest plates tightened with a wide belt. Flared wrist and forearm plates, close-fitting calf plates with circular design and a tight-fitting black cap with red border and top knot include some of his many accessories. Accompanying the Deva King is a military officer bearing resemblance to the Deva King with his ferocious grimacing face and exaggerated facial features. Yet, his posture is more contained, standing to attention, arms to side, hands stretched forward to hold weapon. His attire is less ornate, but equally impressive--clad armor with a striped waistcoat over flowing pantalones. Both figures were produced using sancai glazing, owing to their beautiful coloration resulting from the fusion of amber, yellow, and green glazes. The 'Deva King' is an image of fear and respect. Borne out of a synthesis of the indigenous Chinese 'Heavenly Kings', legendary guardians of the four directions, and the Buddhist "Guardian Kings," lokapalas, these supernatural beings were held in high esteem among T'ang burial objects for their protective role. Up to 1.5 meters tall, they trample on evil in the form of a small demon, or they stand on an ox or cow, symbolizing that the king is the guardian of the south. During the Tang, it was common to situate the Deva King in pairs with other figures such as civil officers, military officers, animal guardians, and divination guardians. Though lesser in size and privilege, military officers were important members of the underground society, serving their function to lead massive armies into battle and protect one's sovereign. Considered to be the finest examples of Chinese burial objects, Tang figurines reached their peak in the first half of the eighth century. The important role assigned to these models in Tang tomb arrangements and their significance as status symbols and powerful guardians protecting the dead meant that these clay figures became luxury objects. They reflect the artistic vitality of the time and give a unique perspective into the luxurious and sophisticated world of contemporary upper class life. - (H.008)

Tang Sancai-Glazed Tripod Vessel



PF.4768

Origin: China

Circa: 618 AD to 906 AD

Dimensions: 5.25" (13.3cm) high x

5.25" (13.3cm) wide

Collection: Chinese

Medium: Glazed Terracotta

Location: Great Britain

This ceramic tripod vessel is modeled in the form of ding-- a bronze ritual vessel for cooked food with a round body and three legs made throughout the Shang, Zhou, Qin and Han period. By the Tang, the practice of replicating bronze ritual objects in ceramic had thrived, rejuvenated by technological advancements made in the production of ceramics. Sancai glazing developed into an art form under the Tang noted for some of the most exquisite tomb ware and ritual pieces. The globular shape of the belly, upright side handles, and wide-ridged mouth adhere to stylistic features of ding bronze ware. As characteristic of ceramic representations, this piece is intricately decorated in floral and animal motif. The body is surmounted on three legs formed by the gaping mouths of mystical creatures. All decoration emanates from the central floral image which contains a diamond shaped cut out. Curved stems and vines create a vivid design, linking the images of two mystical animals turned upward with mouth agape. Green and golden glaze cover the vessel with earth attached throughout. - (PF. 4768)

Tang Sancai-Glazed Camel



H.678
Origin: China
Circa: 618 AD to 907 AD
Dimensions: 21" (53.3cm) high

Collection: Chinese
Medium: Glazed Terracotta
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, foreigner 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 dusty trails of the Silk Road could only be traversed by the 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, 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 dragon, this gorgeous sculpture reveals the Tang Dynasty's respect and admiration for this magnificent creature. - (H.678)

Tang Sancai-Glazed Camel



H.679
Origin: China
Circa: 618 AD to 906 AD
Dimensions: 21.25" (54.0cm) high

Collection: Chinese
Medium: Glazed Terracotta
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, foreigner 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 dusty trails of the Silk Road could only be traversed by the 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 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. This gorgeous sculpture reveals the Tang Dynasty's respect and admiration for this magnificent creature. - (H.679)

Tang Sancai-Glazed Celestial King



H.683

Origin: China

Circa: 618 AD to 906 AD

Dimensions: 34.75" (88.3cm) high

Collection: Chinese

Style: Tang Dynasty

Medium: Glazed Terracotta

Location: UAE

Known as Lokapala and as the Devaraja, or Celestial King, this style of guardian figures are 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. 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. Traditionally, this fierce, armored guardian stands, as represented here, upon a recumbent ox, with one foot resting on the head and another on the body, symbolic of the Celestial King's authority. 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 Tang from the nomadic barbarian invaders of the North. Clearly, these are imposing figures that were supposed to ward away the forces of evil and protect the deceased throughout eternity. Although these works were never meant to be seen by the living, they amaze us with their refined artistry and sophisticated beauty. Especially pleasing is the delicate modeling of the spectacular bird headdress that crowns his head. With spread wings and undulating neck, this gorgeous headdress is a fine example of the masterful artistry of Tang sculptors. 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.683)

Tang Sancai-Glazed Horse and Female Rider



H.739

Origin: China

Circa: 618 AD to 906 AD

Dimensions: 16.25" (41.3cm) high

Collection: Chinese

Medium: Glazed Terracotta

Location: UAE

During the Tang 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. Both the dress of the lady and the horse have been treated in a gorgeous Sancai-glaze. Although the word Sancai (literally meaning "three-colors") is widely known among collectors, the production of Sancai-glazed wares is relatively scarce, spanning only two centuries of the entire Chinese history. Such works are among the most highly prized examples of Chinese art, treasured as much for their rarity as their stunning beauty. This marvelous sculpture is no exception. We can imagine this lady prancing around on this horse, perhaps taking part in an important ceremony. The horse stands with his mouth partially open, another rare feature that collectors eagerly search out. 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.739)

Tang Sancai-Glazed Spirit Guardian



H.990
Origin: China
Circa: 618 AD to 906 AD
Dimensions: 14.25" (36.2cm) high

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

Originating during the Six Dynasties period (222-589 A.D.), this type of figure is known as a spirit guardian; for traditionally, a pair always stood guard at the tombs of Chinese rulers. Generally, both of the figures are mythological composite creatures; one an amalgamation of various animals while the other a combination of human and animal traits, as is the case for this splendid example. This guardian is part of a broader category 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 the afterlife. This guardian was interred along with his lost companion in order to ward off potential tomb robbers or otherworldly evil spirits that might try to infiltrate the tomb. This mythological beast combines the body of an ox, complete with hooves, with the bearded head of a man. A coiled horn emerges from the center of his head and contributes to the protective nature of the beast. The work is covered in a gorgeous tri-colored sancai glaze that seems to imitate the spotted coats and stripped hides of certain exotic animals. Although this work is supposed to frighten and intimidate us, the delicate sculpting of the horned head and the gorgeous colors of the sancai glaze prove more attractive than repelling. - (H.990)

Tang Sancai-Glazed Lokapala



H.982
Origin: China
Circa: 618 AD to 906 AD
Dimensions: 16.5" (41.9cm) high

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

Known as Lokapala and as the Devaraja, or Celestial King, this style of 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. 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. Traditionally, this fierce, armored guardian stands, as represented here, upon a recumbent ox, with one foot resting on the head and another on the body, symbolic of the Celestial King's authority. 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 Tang from the nomadic barbarian invaders of the North. Clearly, these are imposing figures that were supposed to ward away the forces of evil and protect the deceased throughout eternity. The body armor of this Lokapala has been decorated with a gorgeous sancai, or three colored, glaze. This type of glaze originated during the Tang Dynasty and sancai-glazed pieces remain among the most popular works of Chinese art. Although these works were never meant to be viewed by the living, they amaze us with their refined artistry and sophisticated beauty. While this Celestial King is supposed to frighten us with his stern glare and aggressive posture, we are instead drawn to his overwhelming beauty and history. - (H.982)

Tang Sancai-Glazed Civic Official



H.980
Origin: China
Circa: 618 AD to 906 AD
Dimensions: 17.5" (44.5cm) high

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

This sculpture is a general type of Chinese burial 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 work 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 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. Rigorous examinations ensured that only the most qualified individuals were able to serve this crucial position, their intelligence reflected by the writing boards the official holds in his arms. 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 the aquiline noses, elongated ears, and piercing eyes, are quite similar to those of the guardian figures and no doubt reveals his extraordinary powers. The garments of this official are treated in a lovely sancai glaze. Although the word sancai (literally meaning "three-colors") is widely known among collections, the production of sancai-glazed wares is relatively scarce, spanning only two hundred years of the entire Chinese history. Such works are among the most highly prized examples of Chinese art, treasured as much for their rarity as for their stunning beauty. This marvelous sculpture is no exception. 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.980)

Zodiac Figurine of the Year of the Pig



LA.519
Origin: China
Circa: 1368 AD to 1644 AD
Dimensions: 9" (22.9cm) high

Collection: Chinese Art
Medium: Terracotta
Location: Great Britain

Glazed pottery figurine depicting an anthropomorphic pig painted in pink, emerging from a swirl of green coloured clouds, a short green mantel covering his shoulders.

Numerology and astrology have been integral part of Chinese culture from the beginning. Association of animals with directions, times of the year, certain constellations and specific qualities were central in the yin-yang wuxing (Yin and Yan and five elements) belief of the Han dynasty. The appearance of certain animals played an important role in Chinese beliefs regarding omens and portents and reflected a complex and evolving system of belief that spanned the Han dynasty through the period of disunity into the Tang dynasty.

Yet the origin of the twelve zodiac signs remains somewhat obscure; their earliest appearance as funerary sculptures in northern Chinese tombs dates to the latter part of the Six dynasties period (6th c. C.E). Almost all early examples represent human bodies, in kneeling position with animal heads; no full set has been found so far from tombs datable to this period.

The earliest known 12 piece sets date from the Tang dynasty, but they are extremely rare. Sets of Zodiac animals become common only later in the Tang dynasty and during the Song.

Zodiac animals might have been inspired by contacts with Western and Central Asian peoples, given the fact that their first appearance coincided with the advent of the Tuoba Wei dynasty in Northern China, indeed the animal zodiac constituted a well-developed iconographical element in these areas long before their emergence in China.
- (LA.519)

Pair of Tang Sancai-Glazed Terracotta
Ladies-in-Waiting



CK.0300
Origin: China
Circa: 618 AD to 907 AD
Dimensions: 10.8" (27.4cm) high x
3.25" (8.3cm) wide

Collection: Chinese
Style: Tang Dynasty
Medium: Glazed 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 pair of ladies-in-waiting provided eternal companionship for their lord throughout the afterlife. We can imagine them 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. The garments of these ladies are treated in a lovely sancai glaze. Although the word sancai (literally meaning "three-colors") is widely known among collections, the production of sancai-glazed wares is relatively scarce, spanning only two hundred years of the entire Chinese history. Such works are among the most highly prized examples of Chinese art, treasured as much for their rarity as for their stunning beauty. This marvelous pair is no exception. Such women may represent wives, princesses, or attendants. Their beauty inspires us as we are transported back to another time. This pair of terracotta effigies of ancient courtiers has 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 T'ang Dynasty, one of the greatest periods of artistic creation in human history. Although they speak of the past, these ladies in waiting continues to amaze us in the present with their unmatched beauty and sculptural refinement. - (CK.0300)

Sancai-Glazed Pottery Ram and Bull



LA.522

Origin: China

Circa: 1368 AD to 1644 AD

Dimensions: 6" (15.2cm) high

Collection: Chinese Art

Medium: Terracotta

Location: Great Britain

Tang Lokapalas

T'ang Sculpture of a Lokapala



H.013
Origin: China
Circa: 618 AD to 907 AD

Collection: Chinese
Medium: Terracotta
Location: United States

This figure is positioned with one arm raised fist clenched as if once grasping a weapon and the other arm resting on the hip. One leg is fixed while the other is raised atop the head of an ox that serves as the base. The figure is dressed in layers of robes beneath clad armor cinched by a wide belt. The loose end of his robe appear to flow in the wind. Tall boots with a lapel reach the knee. His long slender, well-proportioned body distinguishes this figure from other depictions of Deva Kings who are often portrayed as stout and burly. An iconographical feature of the Deva King is the topknot, which in this figure, is shown as part of his elaborate hairdo.

The “Deva King” is an image of fear and respect. Borne out of a synthesis of the indigenous Chinese “Heavenly Kings,” legendary guardians of the four directions, and the Buddhist “Guardian Kings,” *lopakalas*, these supernatural beings were held in high esteem among T'ang burial objects for their protective role. They were presented as supernatural beings, with facial features and body proportions unlike those of ordinary human. Their ferocious expressions and menacing gestures are borrowed from their Buddhist counterparts, and their hair is often depicted pulled up into a distinctive knot in the fashion of Buddhist deities. Up to 1.5 meters tall, they trample on evil in the form of a small demon, or they stand on an ox, symbolizing that the king is the guardian of the south.

T'ang figurines reached their peak in the first half of the eighth century, just before the An Lushan Rebellion which resulted in the weakening of the dynasty and later persecution of Buddhism. They are considered to be the finest examples of Chinese burial objects. The important role assigned to these models in T'ang tomb arrangements and their significance as status symbols and powerful guardians protecting the dead meant that these clay figures became luxury objects. Created during one of the greatest periods in Chinese history, they reflect the artistic vitality of the time, the re-ordering of social and political life, and give a unique perspective into the luxurious and sophisticated world of contemporary upper class life. - (H.013)

T'ang Gilt Bronze Sculpture of a Lokapala



H.674

Origin: China

Circa: 618 AD to 906 AD

Dimensions: 3.125" (7.9cm) high

Collection: Chinese

Medium: Gilt Bronze

Location: United States

Lokapala, referred to in Chinese as "Heavenly Kings", were guardians of the universe and protectors of Buddhist law. Usually dressed in military attire and with fierce expressions they are portrayed as formidable figures capable of keeping the demons at bay. They became particularly popular during the Tang period when large numbers were made in pottery to serve as tomb guardians. This luxurious, diminutive sculpture was most likely a personal relic that would have originally stood watch over a household shrine or might have accompanied an important T'ang dignitary during his travels. The Lokapala is represented in a traditional T'ang manner, standing atop a subdued demon with one arm bent upwards toward his head. This work is composed of two pieces, the upper portion of the Lokapala, and a base into which it attaches. The base appears to depict a recumbent quadruped, perhaps a mythological creature. The unusual features of this animal suggest that it may be an oxen, or perhaps a lion. Clearly, this creature reinforces the power of the Lokapala, who stand proudly over the conquered demon as well as this great beast. This splendid treasure was clearly too sumptuous to have been anything but the private possession of an important, and wealthy, member of the T'ang hierarchy. Yet despite his wealth and status, the original owner of this sculpture still sought the protection of the Lokapala. While today we consider this sculpture a gorgeous work of art, prized for its cultural and historical values, perhaps this Lokapala will continue to protect us from the evil forces that haunt the world. - (H.674)

T'ang Sculpture of a Lokapala



H.744
Origin: China
Circa: 618 AD to 906 AD
Dimensions: 30.5" (77.5cm) high

Collection: Chinese
Medium: Painted Terracotta
Location: Great Britain

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. 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, armored guardian stands atop a recumbent ox. This stance symbolizes the heavenly king's authority and responsibility as protector of the tomb. 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 two weapons in his hand. Perhaps swords, these weapons were likely fabricated in a material such as wood that deteriorated over the centuries. Looking at his stern face 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.744)

Sculpture of a Lokapala



H.774
Origin: China
Circa: 618 AD to 906 AD
Dimensions: 40.75" (103.5cm) high

Collection: Chinese
Style: T'ang Dynasty
Medium: Painted Terracotta
Location: United States

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 terracotta 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. 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, armored guardian stands atop a recumbent ox. This stance symbolizes the heavenly king's authority and responsibility as protector of the tomb. 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, this colorfully painted Lokapala would have brandished a weapon in his hand. Most likely a spear, this object was probably made from a material such as wood that deteriorated over the centuries. Look unto his handsome face, complete with a carefully groomed moustache, and gazing into his stern 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.774)

T'ang Sculpture of a Lokapala



H.760

Origin: China

Circa: 618 AD to 906 AD

Dimensions: 17.75" (45.1cm) high

Collection: Chinese

Medium: Painted Terracotta

Location: United States

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 terracotta 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.

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, armored guardian stands atop a recumbent ox. This stance symbolizes the heavenly king's authority and responsibility as protector of the tomb. 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, this colorfully painted Lokapala would have brandished a weapon in his hand. Most likely a spear or sword, this object was probably made from a material such as wood that deteriorated over the centuries. A remarkable amount of the original polychrome paint that once covered this work has survived the ravages of time, most visible in his red lips and flowed armor. Looking at his face and gazing into his stern 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.760)

T'ang Sculpture of a Lokapala



H.752
Origin: China
Circa: 618 AD to 906 AD
Dimensions: 21.5" (54.6cm) high

Collection: Chinese
Medium: Painted Terracotta
Location: United States

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. 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 originally pigment has survived the ravages of time intact, perhaps most visible in the spectacular vibrant red, blue, and green floral decorations that adorn his armor. 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.752)

T'ang Sculpture of a Lokapala



H.753

Origin: China

Circa: 618 AD to 906 AD

Dimensions: 21.25" (54.0cm) high

Collection: Chinese

Style: T'ang Dynasty

Medium: Painted Terracotta

Location: United States

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. 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 originally pigment has survived the ravages of time intact, perhaps most visible in the individual whiskers of his beard and moustache. 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.753)

T'ang Sculpture of a Lokapala



H.819
Origin: China
Circa: 618 AD to 906 AD
Dimensions: 20" (50.8cm) high

Collection: Chinese
Medium: Painted Terracotta
Location: United States

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. 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, armored guardian stands atop a recumbent white ox. 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. His armor features red and green highlights while he wears a bright orange undergarment, and his flesh has been painted pink. Of particular note are the sleeves of his armor that have been modeled after fish or snake heads, as if his arms were being spewed forth from their scaled mouths. Also, a headdress in the form of a bird with its wings spread outwards, perhaps a phoenix or swan, crowns his head.

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 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.819)

T'ang Sculpture of a Lokapala



H.820
Origin: China
Circa: 618 AD to 906 AD
Dimensions: 19.5" (49.5cm) high

Collection: Chinese
Style: T'ang Dynasty
Medium: Painted Terracotta
Location: United States

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. 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, armored guardian stands atop a recumbent, red spotted ox. 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. Spectacular patterns painted in orange, green, and black decorated his headdress and armor. His fleshy face and fisted forearms have been painted pink and his lips are vibrant red. In addition, the individual hairs of his moustache and beard have each been painted stroke by stroke. A particular feature of note is the sleeves of his armor that have been modeled after fish or serpent heads, as if his arms were being spewed forth from their scaled mouths.

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 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.820)

T'ang Sculpture of a Lokapala



H.821
Origin: China
Circa: 618 AD to 906 AD
Dimensions: 21" (53.3cm) high

Collection: Chinese
Medium: Painted Terracotta
Location: United States

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. 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, armored guardian stands atop a recumbent, horned ox. This stance symbolizes the heavenly king's authority and responsibility as protector of the tomb. Traces of this sculpture's original pigment have survived the ravages of time intact. His fleshy face is colored pink while the shoulder ornaments of his armor retain their red hue. Of particular note are the sleeves of his armor that have been modeled after fish or snake heads, as if his arms were being spewed forth from their scaled mouths.

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 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.821)

T'ang Sculpture of a Lokapala



H.822
Origin: China
Circa: 618 AD to 906 AD
Dimensions: 20.25" (51.4cm) high

Collection: Chinese
Medium: Painted Terracotta
Location: United States

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. 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, armored guardian stands atop a recumbent, horned ox. 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. Floral patterns painted in red and green decorated his headdress and armor while his fleshy, pink face features the individual hairs of his beard and moustache painted stroke by stroke. Of particular note are the sleeves of his armor that have been modeled after fish or snake heads, as if his arms were being spewed forth from their scaled mouths.

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 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.822)

T'ang Sculpture of a Lokapala



H.823

Origin: China

Circa: 618 AD to 906 AD

Dimensions: 19" (48.3cm) high

Collection: Chinese

Medium: Painted Terracotta

Location: United States

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. 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, armored guardian stands atop a recumbent ox. This stance symbolizes the heavenly king's authority and responsibility as protector of the tomb. Traces of this sculpture's original pigment have survived the ravages of time intact. His armor is decorated in red floral patterns with green and purple highlights. His face still features vibrant red lip, the pink hue of flesh, and remnants of the individual hairs of his beard and moustache painted stroke by stroke.

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 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.823)

T'ang Sculpture of a Lokapala



H.824
Origin: China
Circa: 618 AD to 906 AD
Dimensions: 20" (50.8cm) high

Collection: Chinese
Medium: Painted Terracotta
Location: United States

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. 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, armored guardian stands atop a recumbent ox. This stance symbolizes the heavenly king's authority and responsibility as protector of the tomb. Traces of this sculpture's original pigment have survived the ravages of time intact. His face still features vibrant red lip, the pink hue of flesh, and remnants of the individual hairs of his beard and moustache painted stroke by stroke. Of particular note are the sleeves of his armor that have been modeled after fish or snake heads, as if his arms were being spewed forth from their scaled mouths.

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 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.824)

T'ang Sculpture of a Lokapala



H.825
Origin: China
Circa: 618 AD to 906 AD
Dimensions: 18.625" (47.3cm) high

Collection: Chinese
Medium: Painted Terracotta
Location: United States

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. 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, armored guardian stands atop a recumbent, horned ox. 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. Spectacular floral patterns painted in red and green decorated his headdress and armor while his fleshy face and fisted forearms have been painted pink. A particular feature of note is the sleeves of his armor that have been modeled after fish heads, as if his arms were being spewed forth from their scaled mouths.

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 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.825)

T'ang Sculpture of a Lokapala



H.826
Origin: China
Circa: 618 AD to 906 AD
Dimensions: 19.625" (49.8cm) high

Collection: Chinese
Medium: Painted Terracotta
Location: United States

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. 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, armored guardian stands atop a recumbent ox. 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. Floral patterns painted in red and green decorated his headdress and armor while his fleshy, pink face features vibrant red lips and the individual hairs of his beard and moustache painted stroke by stroke.

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 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.826)

T'ang Gilt Polychrome Sculpture of a Lokapala



H.926
Origin: China
Circa: 618 AD to 906 AD
Dimensions: 21.75" (55.2cm) high

Collection: Chinese
Style: T'ang Dynasty
Medium: Painted Terracotta
Location: United States

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. 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.926)

Pair of Tang Painted and Gilt Terracotta Tomb Guardians



H.1092
Origin: China
Circa: 618 AD to 906 AD
Dimensions: 26" (66.0cm) high

Collection: Chinese
Medium: Terracotta
Location: Great Britain

The T'ang 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 quasi-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. T'ang 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 T'ang 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, 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. Every need was taken care of, from food and wine, to companionship and security. These two terracotta warriors are poised to protect their deceased lord. They wear armor consisting of shin guards, chest plates, and shoulder guards with curved tips. A decorative boss adorns the center of their chest plates. Helmets with dramatic upturned rims crown their heads. They stand in mirror-image postures, each holding one arm bent to the side with hand on hip and the other arm held forwards, elbow slightly bent. In this hand, they would have originally brandished weapons, perhaps swords or spears, made from a less durable material such as wood. Between the two figures, a remarkable amount of the original polychrome paint is still in tact. Their helmets were red; as were the long-sleeved garments they wear underneath their armor. The armor itself has been elegantly decorated by painted patterns with gilt highlights.

This pair bares a striking resemblance to the gods known as Lokapalas. Historically, these deities served as protectors of Buddhist temples; however, upon being assimilated into Chinese ideology, they assumed a mortuary role. However, neither warrior in this pair stands in the traditional stance of the Lokapala: subduing a demon or triumphing over a recumbent beast. Although these figures are slightly different, we can assume their role in the afterlife would have been the same. 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 and a fellow officer came to stand guard, the ghosts quit their harassment. 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. Although they were intended to protect the tomb and ward off any infiltrators, be they tomb robbers or malevolent spirits, these warriors do not repel us; instead, their compelling history and stunning beauty attract us to them.

Both guardians are 26 inches high. - (H.1092)

Set of Three Tang Pottery Lokapalas



LA.526
Origin: China
Circa: 618 AD to 906 AD
Dimensions: 12.5" (31.8cm) high

Collection: Chinese
Medium: Terracotta
Location: Great Britain

Pair of Tang Dynasty Polychrome Lokapalas



RP.159
Origin: China
Circa: 618 AD to 907 AD
Dimensions: 40.25" (102.2cm) high

Collection: Chinese Art
Medium: Terracotta
Location: UAE

Pair of Tang Dynasty Polychrome Lokapala Warriors



LSO.40
Origin: China
Circa: 618 AD to 906 AD
Dimensions: 19.5" (49.5cm) high

Collection: Chinese
Medium: Terracotta
Location: Great Britain

This pair of polychrome Lokapala sculptures is an exceptional example of the warrior and guardian images placed in the tombs of high-ranking members of the T'ang Dynasty. As well as being exquisitely modelled, the figures are highly decorated and painted with a range of organic pigments that have survived extremely well. The first figure (LSO.40.1) wears an ornate single-disc headdress and a highly decorated high-collared tunic with zoomorphic shoulder flares and large, wide sleeves. He is standing in heroic pose (c. 52 cm tall) upon the recumbent and docile body of an ox. The tunic and details are predominantly painted, including organic and floral designs and patterns. The face is extremely fine, with good colouring and detailed point work of the features and facial hair. The second figure (LSO.40.2) has a larger, three-pointed headdress with similar clothing and zoomorphic shoulder flares, with the same large sleeves. He stands c. 50 cm tall. The animal upon which he stands is probably a deer, which has been exquisitely observed and modelled. Surface detail is both sculptural and painted, with considerable attention being paid to the texture and surface of the fabric, as well as the floral paintwork. The face is extremely finely painted, with individual swirls of hair and other features picked out in minute detail. The most extraordinary aspect of these remarkable statues is their almost perfect preservation. Whereas Lokapala statues are not uncommon in the graves of social notables, the vast majority have suffered considerable taphonomic damage through burial, notably to the fragile organic pigments with which the sculptures were usually painted. These museum-quality specimens are a spectacular exception. Warrior figures are one of the numerous figure types included in the grave offerings of deceased social luminaries throughout this period. Entire retinues of ceramic figures were incorporated into the grave furniture, including animals, entertainers, musicians and guardians. According to one Chinese tradition explaining their origin, the emperor Taizong, when ill, was threatened by ghosts outside his room screeching and throwing bricks and tiles. When 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. (LSO 40.1 AND 40.2) - (LSO.40)

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