

THE BARAKAT GALLERY

Masterpieces of Chinese Art
Volume III
907 AD - 1912 AD



The Liao Dynasty

The Liao Dynasty was founded by nomadic Qidan tribesmen, possibly an offspring of the 5th century Xianbei people, in 907 A.D. At its height, Liao territory comprised much of modern Manchuria, Mongolia and the northeastern corner of China. After the establishment of the Song Dynasty in 960 A.D., a border war between the two dynasties ensued. After a series of decisive victories, the Liao armies began to approach the Song capital when a compromise was reached recognizing the authority of the Liao in parts of northern China. An annual tribute to the Liao was agreed upon and a period of peace and stability between the two Dynasties followed. Commercial and cultural links forged during this year exposed the Liao to many influential Chinese customs. However, the Liao maintained many of their native traditions. The Liao Dynasty came to an end after one of their subjects, the Juchen tribe, rose up with the aid of the Song, overthrew their masters and established the Jin Dynasty in 1125 A.D.

Liao Bronze Funerary Mask



LA.512
Origin: China
Circa: 918 AD to 1125 AD
Dimensions: 8.75" (22.2cm) high

Collection: Chinese Art
Medium: Bronze
Location: Great Britain

Preservation of the physical remains of the deceased was a central focus of the funerary rites of the Liao. The corpse served as a sanctuary for the spirit of the dead and was carefully preserved for post-mortem immortality in the afterlife. To achieve this goal, the tomb's occupant was encased in a metal-mesh vest, his feet covered with metal boots and his face covered with a metal sheet mask, which according to the rank, could range from bronze to silver and gold. Indeed, the same custom of placing a face mask over the dead represented a long-standing tradition among the nomadic tribes inhabiting the borderland of northern China, since the Bronze Age period, influenced by similar practices in ethnic groups from north and north-east Asia such as the Scythians, and was later enriched with Daoist and Buddhist religious connotations.

One of the richest tombs yielding beautiful gold masks, similar to the one here illustrated, belonged to Princess Chen and her consort. One of the fewest unspoiled Liao burials to date, Princess Chen's tomb was unearthed in 1986 at Qinglongshan, Naiman Qi in Inner Mongolia. It was indeed a very elaborate burial that could have only been afforded by the wealthy elite. Still it provides an unparalleled account on Qidan burial practice. According to Qidan customs, the deceased was placed in the rear chamber on a painted brick pedestal (guanchuang) without a coffin, the top of the pedestal paved with cypress slips and covered by a canopied textile curtain. The wooden interior of the rear chamber probably imitated the traditional felt yurt of the Qidan people, while the masks and silver-meshes covered the corpse, further ornamented with jades, ambers and beautiful silk kesi textiles.

Our mask, instead, was made of thin bronze metal sheet, repoussed into shape, and later gilded, and possibly belonged to an official of middle rank. The facial features of the mask are simple yet hauntingly evocative: prominent arched brows meet at the bridge of the inverted T-shaped nose. The eyes are narrow, as if squinting, the mouth rigid and tense. Judging from the archaeological evidence, also this mask –like those found in Princess Chen's tomb- would have been placed on the face of the deceased and ornamented further with colourful fabrics and personal accessories, now lost forever.

Reference: Gold face mask belonging to Princess Chen, Tomb 3 at Qinglongshan, Naiman Qi, Inner Mongolia in Yang Xiaoneng, *Chinese archaeology in the Twentieth Century*, Yale University press, 2004: pp. 459-461. And Nei Menggu Kaogu Yanjiusuo, *Liao Chenguo gongzhu fuma hezang mu fajue jianbao*, *Wenwu* 1987.11: 4-24 And *Liao Chenguo Gongzhu Mu*, 1993. - (LA.512)

Liao Basalt Torso of a Standing Guanyin



LA.541
Origin: China
Circa:
10 th Century AD to 12 th Century AD
Dimensions: 69" (175.3cm) high

Collection: Chinese Art
Medium: Basalt
Location: Great Britain

An exquisitely sculpted grey basalt torso of a Bodhisattva ('enlightened being') standing frontally with legs joined on a low pedestal. He holds a jar with lotus buds between his palms at chest level. The outer robe, known as the sanghati, covers both shoulders and descends in delicate folds. The monumental scale of the statue allowed the sculptor to carve the drapery and scarves in fine detail.

The Khitan were an ancient nomadic tribe that lived in north-eastern China. The name 'Liao' comes from the valley of the Liao river where they originally lived. They were brought under Chinese rule during the Tang dynasty. In 907 AD when the Tang collapsed, a Khitan chieftain established the empire of Liao. They ruled north-eastern China contemporaneously with the Five Dynasties and later with the Northern Song. The Liao were important patrons of Buddhism. The pacifism of Buddhism and the assimilation of Chinese wealth and cultural elements gradually weakened the Liao's once-military character. In 1125 AD the Song army annihilated the Liao. - (LA.541)

The Song Dynasty

After the fall of the Tang Dynasty, a period of unrest and war ensued, finally ending with the establishment of the Song Dynasty. The Song era was considered a time of consolidation for Chinese culture. Traditional text were reanalyzed and reinterpreted, bringing forth a revival of Confucianism peppered with new ideas. Once again, civil scholars became more influential than their military counterparts. This was an era of peace, where technology and innovation flourished. Trade now focused on the seas, since the Silk Road had since been cut off. The Song viewed themselves as the culmination of two thousand years of Chinese culture. However, splinters began to emerge among the various ethnic groups that had been unified under the Tang. As these ethnic rivalries began to grow, the government became fractured as officials began to oppose each other, allowing the Mongols from the north to invade and conquer.

Song Granite Sculpture of a Celestial Guardian



H.557

Origin: China

Circa: 960 AD to 1279 AD

Dimensions:

63.75" (161.9cm) high x 26.75" (67.9cm) wide

Catalogue: V20

Collection: Chinese

Medium: Granite

Location: United States

Stone figures usually line the entrance of tomb complexes, offering halls, and temples to remove forces of evil and ensure harmonious ties between the spiritual and material worlds. This granite guardian, called a Heavenly King, exemplifies Sung stylistic taste for realistic representation in stone figure art. The guardian's form resembles those of military officials whose sturdy, stout bodies convey strength, endurance, and determination--features commonly associated with calvary horses. His arched eyebrows, bulging eyes and menacing frown frighten evil spirits and mortal wrongdoers. Holding a four stringed guitar in his hands, he is seated with one leg forward as an expression of loyalty to whom he serves. When played, the guitar emits a magical sound which is heard throughout the world, setting the camps of enemies on fire. Dressed in chain mail armor gathered at the waist with a belt bearing the emblem of a mythical animal, he attends to the responsibilities of maintaining justice and order in the universe through his power to regulate climate and fortune. Likewise, the Heavenly Guardians were a popular choice of figures to be cast in stone and placed near sites of great spiritual and ritual value. The names of four guardians (heavenly kings) are generally as follow (sanskrit/chinese): 1. In the East: "Dhritarastra 东方持国天王" Represents "Compassion" and ability to 'protect' a country. Usually the one holding a Pipa (a chinese instrument), symbolizing the use of music to encourage sentient beings to seek refuge in buddhism, protecting the east. 2. In the South: "Vidradhaka 南方增长天王" Generally means one who can encourage sentient beings to prolong their roots of kindness. He has green color body, and uses a sword, protecting the south. 3. In the West: "Virapaksa 西方广目天王" Generally means one who can look very far and observe the world and protect the people. Usually has a red body and is the leader of the 4 kings. He carries a dragon, and when one sees it, they will believe in buddhism. He also uses rope to catch believers and get them to see refuge in Buddhism. He was in charge of protecting the west. 4. In the North: "Vaisramana 北方多闻天王" (sometimes also known as "毗沙门 Pisamen") Generally means "one who knows alot". Usually has a green body and carries an umbrella on his right hand and carries a magic mouse on his left hand. These were used to subdue the demons and protect and maintain people's wealth. Sometimes, he is also known as the God of prosperity in India. The four guardians of Buddhism are sometimes also known as the "4 heavenly kings 四大天王". They were actually the "4 Dharma Protectors 四大护法" (i.e. Protectors of Buddhist teaching) whose mission is to protect the world, advise sentient beings to do good and avoid evil, records the deeds of sentient beings etc. In chinese Buddhist temples, you will often see the statues of these 4 deities in front of the gate/entrance to the temple. Sometimes, you can also see their paintings on the wooden door/gate of the temple. They were there to 'protect' the temple. In Buddhist cosmology, the universe was divided into 3 worlds: 1) the world of desire (欲界) 2) the world of form (色界) 3) the world of form-less (无色界) Most of sentient beings including humans are living in the world of desire, which has 6 levels of heaven known as "6 desire heavens 六欲天". The 1st levels of heaven (known as "Xuer Mountain 须弥山") has a mountain known as "Jiantuolo Mountain 犍陀罗山". This is where the 4 heavenly kings live. The Jiantuolo Mountain has 4 peaks, each of which protected by the heavenly kings. - (H.557)

Song Granite Sculpture of a Celestial King



H.523

Origin: China

Circa: 960 AD to 1279 AD

Dimensions: 63.75" (161.9cm) high

Catalogue: V17

Collection: Chinese

Medium: Granite

Location: United States

Stone pieces from the Song Dynasty tend to depict the real world. Figures of civil and military officials were particularly important as some were recreated in stone on ceremonial occasions. Bearing an umbrella and dressed in battle ready gear, this king kneels with one fist pressed against his forward knee. His arched eyebrows, bulging eyes and menacing frown convey his grandeur and strength as well as his commitment to loyalty and righteousness.

In Chinese they are called tian wang, which means Celestial king. These intimidating figures guard heaven and earth, removing the forces of evil that wreck havoc in both realms. Spiritually and physically, they maintain peace throughout the universe. They also ensure perfect climate for agricultural growth that was a primary concern for rulers who wanted to remain ruling. The Mandate of Heaven that legitimizes a ruler could be justifiably taken away if disaster should strike the crops, since it was believed disaster only occurs out of the wrath of heaven to banish evil rule. These guardians also had the ability to regulate wind, rain, lightning and thunder; by doing so they could make a good person/country advance/bloom or destroy the bad and evil ones. Likewise, the Guardian Heaven became the choice of rulers and elites to be replicated in stone in tomb complexes, offering halls and temples. The names of four guardians (heavenly kings) are generally as follow (sanskrit/chinese): 1. In the East: "Dhritarastra 东方持国天王" Represents "Compassion" and ability to 'protect' a country. Usually the one holding a Pipa (a chinese instrument), symbolizing the use of music to encourage sentient beings to seek refuge in buddhism, protecting the east. 2. In the South: "Vidradhaka 南方增长天王" Generally means one who can encourage sentient beings to prolong their roots of kindness. He has green color body, and uses a sword, protecting the south. 3. In the West: "Virapaksa 西方广目天王" Generally means one who can look very far and observe the world and protect the people. Usually has a red body and is the leader of the 4 kings. He carries a dragon, and when one sees it, they will believe in buddhism. He also uses rope to catch believers and get them to see refuge in Buddhism. He was in charge of protecting the west. 4. In the North: "Vaisramana 北方多闻天王" (sometimes also known as "毗沙门 Pisamen") Generally means "one who knows alot". Usually has a green body and carries an umbrella on his right hand and carries a magic mouse on his left hand. These were used to subdue the demons and protect and maintain people's wealth. Sometimes, he is also known as the God of prosperity in India. The four guardians of Buddhism are sometimes also known as the "4 heavenly kings 四大天王". They were actually the "4 Dharma Protectors 四大护法" (i.e. Protectors of Buddhist teaching) whose mission is to protect the world, advise sentient beings to do good and avoid evil, records the deeds of sentient beings etc. In chinese Buddhist temples, you will often see the statues of these 4 deities in front of the gate/entrance to the temple. Sometimes, you can also see their paintings on the wooden door/gate of the temple. They were there to 'protect' the temple. In Buddhist cosmology, the universe was divided into 3 worlds: 1) the world of desire (欲界) 2) the world of form (色界) 3) the world of form-less (无色界) Most of sentient beings including humans are living in the world of desire, which has 6 levels of heaven known as "6 desire heavens 六欲天". The 1st levels of heaven (known as "Xuer Mountain 须弥山") has a mountain known as "Jiantuolo Mountain 犍陀罗山". This is where the 4 heavenly kings live. The Jiantuolo Mountain has 4 peaks, each of which protected by the heavenly kings. - (H.523)

Song Bronze Sculpture of a Taoist Immortal



H.041

Origin: China

Circa: 960 AD to 1279 AD

Dimensions:

9.5" (24.1cm) high x 3.25" (8.3cm) wide

Collection: Chinese

Medium: Bronze

Location: UAE

The Taoist immortal has long been a favorite subject of Chinese statuary art. These legendary beings are said to have lived at various times and attained immortality through their studies of Nature's secrets. Their special powers include the ability to become invisible, raising the dead, changing tangible objects into gold, and transforming their appearance. Shown standing on a rectangular base, this figure wears a long crossover robe belted above the waist, high boots, and a squarish cap. The draping folds of the robe are exposed as the figure raises his arms, assuming a lively gesture that captures the movement of a walking figure. The position of the arms and evidence of holes in the hands implies the figure could have held a walking stick or emblematic object. The figure's jovial expression is conveyed through the well-modeled eyes, cheekbones, nose and beard that appears to sway with the sound of laughter. - (H.041)

Song Stone Head of a Buddha



AM.0157

Origin: China

Circa: 960 AD to 1279 AD

Dimensions: 15" (38.1cm) high

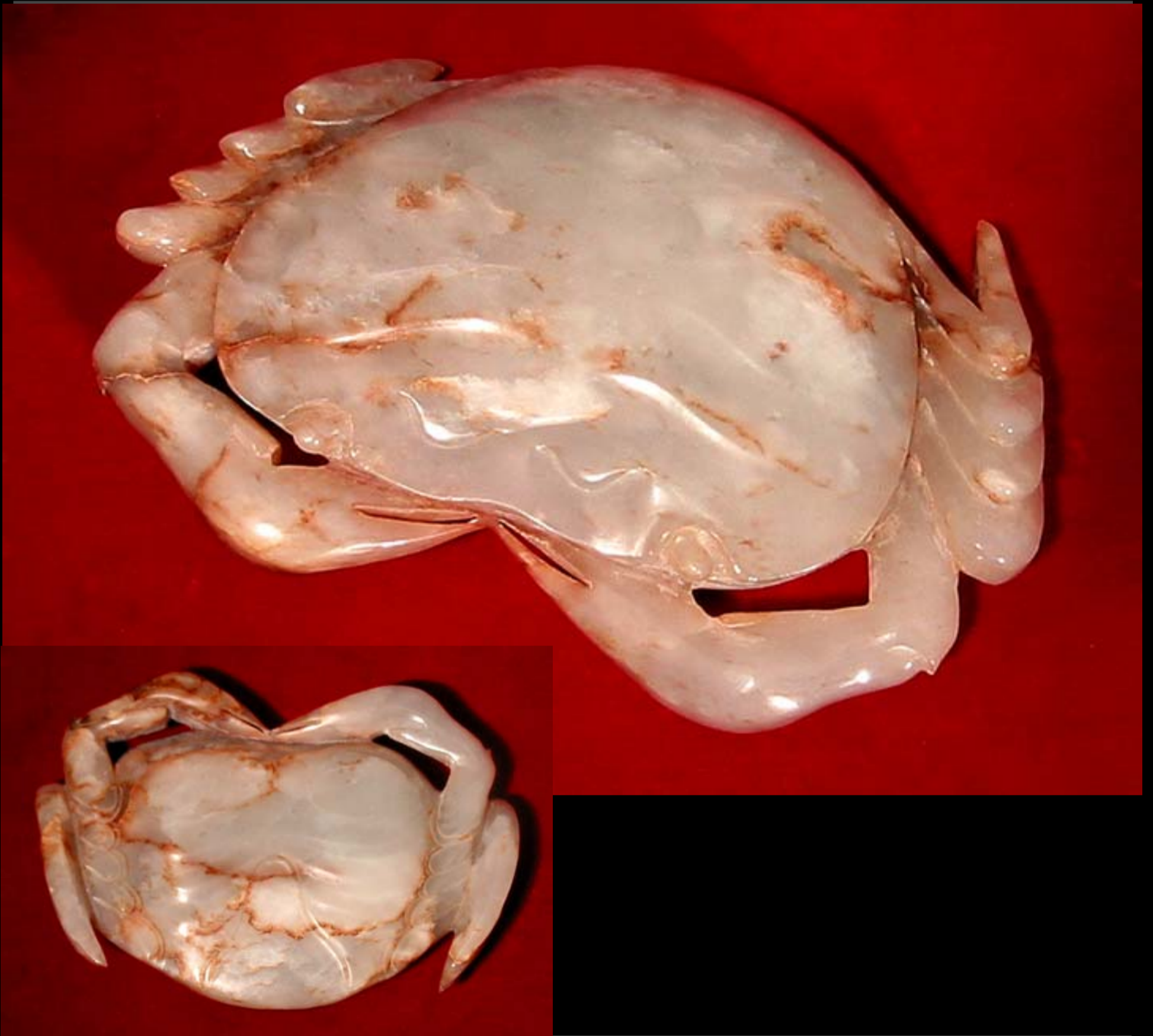
Collection: Chinese

Medium: Stone

After the collapse of the Tang Dynasty (906 AD), there was a succession of short-lived governments (known as the Five Dynasties). This period of unrest came to an end with the establishment of the Song Dynasty in 960 AD. Renewed political stability helped to usher in a period of economic prosperity and a massive rise in population. Amongst the many cultural achievements of the Song Dynasty, the re- invigoration of the examination system and the invention of movable type rank highly. It was also the period which witnessed the development of Neo-Confucianism- a philosophical movement heavily influenced by Buddhist teachings. Although there is evidence that Buddhism had reached China from India during the Han Dynasty, it took time for the new faith to make progress. This was partly because it had to compete with native ideologies, namely Confucianism and Daoism. It was possible, however, to find common ground between these belief systems and by the Tang Dynasty Buddhism was experiencing a golden age in China.

It is extremely rare to find such an early and well-preserved Buddha head on the market. The head is a fragment from an over life-size sculpture that would probably have depicted the Buddha in a seated position. The hair consists of small, finely carved, spiral curls which are arranged in regular horizontal tiers above the forehead, rising up into a mound that denotes the Buddha's spiritual wisdom. The eyes are downcast with heavy, deeply cut eyelids. The expression is one of calm serenity and a meditative state. The elongated earlobes reference the historical Buddha's life of luxury (the elongation was caused by wearing heavy earrings), before he set out of the path to enlightenment. This sculpture is a unique object that recalls the piety of early Buddhists as well as the refined sensibilities of the Song era. (AM) - (AM.0157)

Song Agate Sculpture of a Crab



PF.6213

Origin: China

Circa: 960 AD to 1279 AD

Dimensions:

1.25" (3.2cm) high x 5.625" (14.3cm) wide

Collection: Chinese

Medium: Agate

Location: United States

Although best known for their philosophical contributions, this sculpture of a crab attests to the rich artistic tradition that flourished under the enlightened rulers of the Song Dynasty. Carved from precious agate, this crab holds its claws up to its mouth as if nibbling on its latest catch. Each of the multiple legs is individually articulate, contributing to the illusion that this creature might scatter away, sideways of course. With beady, round eyes, the crab stares back at us unsure whether to run and hide or continue eating. We can picture this sculpture once decorating the imperial palace of Song Dynasty. Clearly the stunning artistry of the carving would have awed all who saw it. Likewise, finding this effigy of a sea creature inside the royal residence would have delighted the onlooker. Such a work, treasured both for its form as well as its material, would have been a luxury only afforded by the royals themselves or high-ranking officials within the court. Today, it continues to inspire us with its beauty and history that only increase with time. - (PF.6213)

Pair of Song Dynasty Panels
Featuring Scenes from the Life of the Buddha



AM.0346 (LSO)

Origin: China

Circa: 960 AD to 1276 AD

Dimensions:

18.1" (46.0cm) high x 51.18" (130.0cm) wide x 5.12" (13.0cm) depth

Collection: Chinese Art

Medium: Stone

Location: Great Britain

Although best known for their philosophical contributions, this sculpture of a crab attests to the rich artistic tradition that flourished under the enlightened rulers of the Song Dynasty. Carved from precious agate, this crab holds its claws up to its mouth as if nibbling on its latest catch. Each of the multiple legs is individually articulate, contributing to the illusion that this creature might scatter away, sideways of course. With beady, round eyes, the crab stares back at us unsure whether to run and hide or continue eating. We can picture this sculpture once decorating the imperial palace of Song Dynasty. Clearly the stunning artistry of the carving would have awed all who saw it. Likewise, finding this effigy of a sea creature inside the royal residence would have delighted the onlooker. Such a work, treasured both for its form as well as its material, would have been a luxury only afforded by the royals themselves or high-ranking officials within the court. Today, it continues to inspire us with its beauty and history that only increase with time. - (PF.6213)

Pair of Late Southern Song Lidded Funerary
Urns (Ping) with Cranes and Dragons



CK.0149

Origin: Jiangxi Province, China

Circa: 1200 AD to 1279 AD

Dimensions:

35.25" (89.5cm) high x 6.5" (16.5cm) wide

Collection: Chinese

Medium: Glazed Terracotta

Location: United States

This dynamic pair of matched vases is a supreme masterwork from the Southern Song dynasty. They are very tall and graceful, with the widest section in the bottom one third of their total height. They then taper progressively to the top one third, where they flare again to a rather wider apex, crowned with extremely ornate lids, each bearing a crane with outstretched wings. The bottom third is banded with fine lines above a small, plain pedestal base. A ring of roped beading separates this from a line of standing court officials, interspersed with animals such as deer. Above this is a taller section, liberally decorated with floral motifs and featuring a long and highly complex dragon – and an accompanying lotus flower (?) – rendered in very high relief. The entirety is decorated with transparent glaze over a cream/yellow slip.

The Song Dynasty was founded after the fall of the Tang Dynasty and a period of major social unrest. Perhaps because of this, it is viewed as a Golden Age for Chinese civilization. It was also highly complex, as different areas of China were ruled by different dynasties and traditions. The Northern Song was founded in 960 AD, and quickly developed art styles and social changes that were remarkable for their liberalism. Many of China's greatest landscape painters, sculptors and ceramicists worked during their supremacy, while literary achievements – notably translation of ancient texts and a revival of Confucianism – also benefitted from enlightened leadership. Foreign trade also flourished, leading to major networks of luxury goods running to and from China. However, the stability was threatened by the invasion – in 1125 AD – of Northern China by the Jurchen, a semi-nomadic people from the steppe area. They validated their leadership by founding the Jin Dynasty, although the Song court – who had fled to Hangzhou in the South – continued to govern their area for another 120 years. The Southern Song eventually collapsed due to a combination of internal intrigue and invasion by the Mongols in 1279 AD.

The Song Dynasty is considered to be the golden age of Chinese ceramics, for mass production was perfected, leading to an explosion of different styles and traditions. The elite ceramicists became ever more adventurous, producing remarkable creations for a native class of aristocrats, the ruling elite, high-ranking government officials and wealthy merchants. Technical innovations led to breakthroughs in the fields of glazing and firing, culminating in the first true porcelain to be produced in any significant quantity.

Known as Qingbai ware (also called Yingqing ware), this distinctive, blue-glazed, thinly wheel-thrown stoneware with moulded and applied decoration was produced mainly in Jiangxi province at Jingdezhen and in the Hebei province. Qingbai ware continued to be made well into the Ming Dynasty, with Jingdezhen remaining as an important production centre.

This outstanding pair of vessels was made towards the end of the Song Dynasty, in retreat in to the South, and is a major masterwork of ancient China.

- (CK.0149)

The Yuan Dynasty

The Yuan Dynasty was established by Kublai Khan, the grandson of Genghis Khan, upon relocating the capital of his empire from Mongolia to Beijing. The Forbidden City was constructed, a relative oasis of Mongolian culture in the heart of China. While the Mongol elite retained their native language and customs, they did adapt the Chinese system of bureaucratic government and cemented the authoritarian rule of the emperor. Although they were unaffected by Chinese culture, the Yuan did little to stifle the native traditions and beliefs of their subjects. Buddhism continued to flourish, although the monasteries received little funding from the state. In fact, during the Yuan Dynasty, China first began to open up to foreigners. Christian and Hindu missionaries were established in Beijing and Marco Polo made his famous journey during the Yuan era. While the Chinese never accepted the Yuan as a legitimate dynasty, instead viewing them as foreign bandits, the Mongolians rebelled against the Beijing Khans for becoming, “too Chinese.” In the end, the Yuan Dynasty had the shortest duration of the major Chinese Dynasties, lasting little more than a hundred years.

Yuan Cizhou Ware Terracotta Vessel



H.858
Origin: China
Circa: 1279 AD to 1368 AD
Dimensions: 12.75" (32.4cm) high

Collection: Chinese
Medium: Terracotta
Location: United States

The term, “Cizhou,” denotes a particular type of ceramics ware. Named after the Cizhou province where examples were first unearthed, there have also been ruins of related kilns discovered in the Hebei and Henan provinces. While Cizhou ware was first created during the Five Dynasties, it only became popular during the Song and Yuan Dynasties, after which point production ceased. Cizhou wares are celebrated for their great variety of decorative motifs characterized by bold, expressive patterns with painterly qualities that can almost be called calligraphic. The free, expressive nature of Cizhou ware might be a reflection of the fact that they were created for the public and not intended for court consumption where tastes tended to be more refined. While the production of Cizhou ware was short-lived, its emphasis on decoration would affect the course of future ceramic production in China.

This gorgeous, wide-bodied vase is a perfect example of the Cizhou style. While the shape of the vessel itself is quite pleasing, it is not what is emphasized. Instead, our eyes are attracted to the beautiful painted motifs that adorn this vase. The majority of the painted decoration is composed of three circular-framed areas. One is filled with a blossoming flower painted with the same freedom of brushstroke normally reserved for calligraphy and scroll painting. The other two areas depict scenes of philosopher-types contemplating the beauty of nature. No doubt the vivacity of the decoration, typical of Cizhou ware, was influenced by the constant fluctuation of nature and the changing seasons. - (H.858)

Yuan Terracotta Relief Sculpture
Depicting a Qilin



H.528
Origin: China
Circa: 1279 AD to 1368 AD
Dimensions: 16.25" (41.3cm) high
Catalogue: V17

Collection: Chinese
Style: Yuan Dynasty
Medium: Terracotta
Location: UAE

In this Yuan relief, a mythical animal called a qilin (unicorn) frolics in a pasture composed of clouds, conch shells, and shrubs. Usually pictured alone, the unicorn is said to attain the age of one thousand years, and to be the noblest form of animal creation, the emblem of perfect goodness. It is regarded as a happy portent, on its alleged appearance, of the advent of good government or the birth of virtuous rulers. The unicorn envelops itself with benevolence, and crowns itself with rectitude. A fabulous creature of good omen, and the symbol of longevity, grandeur, felicity, illustrious offspring, and wise administration, the qilin became a popular motif in court clothing of high-ranking officials, paintings, chinaware and architectural reliefs.

This representation of a qilin reflects the common myth and lore regarding its appearance and adheres to iconographic standards for depicting a qilin. Because its footsteps bring good to those who cross over them, the qilin is pictured in light stride, all fours blessing the ground it touches, never inflicting harm to the grass or insects it encounters. Surrounded by either fire or clouds, it is also pictured with its head turned back and mouth wide open, from which the sound of bells and other musical instruments can be heard. The qilin possesses all the good qualities that are to be found among all hairy animals such as a kind disposition, discriminating mind, and brightly colored skin. It resembles a stag in its general form but combines the body of the musk deer with the tail of an ox, the forehead of a wolf, the hoofs of a horse, and a soft-tipped horn emblematic of its unique, gentle nature. The auspicious nature of the qilin emanates from this relief sculpture that is sure to inject positive energy into its surroundings. - (H.528)

Yuan Painted Terracotta Head of the Buddha



H.693

Origin: China

Circa: 1279 AD to 1368 AD

Dimensions: 13" (33.0cm) high

Collection: Chinese

Style: Yuan Dynasty

Medium: Painted Terracotta

Location: United States

The historical figure, Buddha Gautama Sakyamuni is the Buddha of compassion who, having achieved the highest evolutionary perfection, turns suffering into happiness for all living beings. Born around 560 B.C. somewhere between the hills of south Nepal and the Rapti river, his father was a Raja who ruled over the northeastern province of India, the district including the holy Ganges River. The young prince was married to Yashoda when he was about 17 years old and together they had a son named Rahula. At the age of 29, he left his life of luxury, feeling compelled to purify his body and make it an instrument of the mind by ridding himself of earthly impulses and temptations. Chinese Buddhist art is heavily influenced both by earlier Indian examples and the stylistic tendencies of the Central Asian cultures who brought the religion into China.

Here, the Buddha is portrayed as a youthful prince with a round, full face, suggestive of his spiritual fullness and inner self-satisfaction. An inner calm and complacency is visible on his face and in his sweet smile. Tight curls of hair cover his head and ushnisha, the symbol of his infinite wisdom. His elongated earlobes droop down, the sagging caused by wearing heavy earrings as an infant, reflecting his royal origins. The urna, or “third eye,” is represented by a small bump in between his eyebrows, is also symbolic of his nobility and enlightenment. This fragment of a head was most likely originally part of a full-figured sculpture that once revered inside a temple or shrine. He appears to look down upon us with his inlaid eyes, suggesting that the work might have been raised upon a pedestal structure. The mystical energy and divine wisdom of the Buddha radiates from within this sculpture. The contemplative wisdom of the Buddha shines through the stucco and warms our spirits. - (H.693)

The Ming Dynasty

Upon leading a victorious rebellion against the foreign Mongul rulers of the Yuan Dynasty, a peasant named Zhu Yuanzhang seized control of China and founded the Ming Dynasty in 1368. As emperor, he founded his capital at Nanjing and adopted the name Hongwu as his reign title. Hongwu, literally meaning “vast military,” reflects the increased prestige of the army during the Ming Dynasty. Due to the very realistic threat still posed by the Mongols, Hongwu realized that a strong military was essential to Chinese prosperity. Thus, the orthodox Confucian view that the military was an inferior class to be ruled over by an elite class of scholars was reconsidered. During the Ming Dynasty, China proper was reunited after centuries of foreign incursion and occupation. Ming troops controlled Manchuria, and the Korean Joseon Dynasty respected the authority of the Ming rulers, at least nominally.

Like the founders of the Han Dynasty (206 B.C.- 220 A.D.), Hongwu was extremely suspicious of the educated courtiers that advised him and, fearful that they might attempt to overthrow him, he successfully consolidated control of all aspect of government. The strict authoritarian control Hongwu wielded over the affairs of the country was due in part to the centralized system of government he inherited from the Monguls and largely kept intact. However, Hongwu replaced the Mongul bureaucrats who had ruled the country for nearly a century with native Chinese administrators. He also reinstated the Confucian examination system that tested would-be civic officials on their knowledge of literature and philosophy. Unlike the Song Dynasty (960-1279 A.D.), which received most of its taxes from mercantile commerce, the Ming economy was based primarily on agriculture, reflecting both the peasant roots of its founder as well as the Confucian belief that trade was ignoble and parasitic.

Culturally, the greatest innovation of the Ming Dynasty was the introduction of the novel. Developed from the folk tales of traditional storytellers, these works were transcribed in the everyday vernacular language of the people. Advances in printmaking and the increasing population of urban dwellers largely contributed to the success of these books. Architecturally, the most famous monument of the Ming Dynasty is surely the complex of temples and palaces known as the Forbidden City that was constructed in Beijing after the third ruler of the Ming Dynasty, Emperor Yongle, moved the capital there. Today, the Forbidden Palace remains one of the hallmarks of traditional Chinese architecture and is one of the most popular tourist destinations in the vast nation.

Ming Glazed Terracotta
Sculptural Tile from a Temple



H.742
Origin: China
Circa: 1368 AD to 1644 AD
Dimensions: 29.5" (74.9cm) high

Collection: Chinese
Medium: Glazed Terracotta
Location: United States

Glazed sculptural tiles are today considered one of the hallmarks of classical Chinese architecture. However, despite their popularity in modern times, they were relatively scarce until after the end of the T'ang Dynasty. Even then, during the Song and Yuan Dynasties, they were still infrequently used. It was not until the rise of the Ming Dynasty that glazed sculptural tiles became a popular decorative device extensively employed in temples, altars, imperial palaces, and gardens. Beijing became the center of glazed architectural tile production during the Ming period, and colorfully decorated pagodas began to sprout up around this region. Eaves and entryways were decorated with vibrant sculptures that served both decorative and sometimes religious purposes.

This glazed terracotta tile would have been one of the centerpieces in the decorative schemes of a Ming Dynasty temple. Brilliantly colored in blue, green, and ochre hues, this tile depicts an armored figure standing with his hands clasped together in meditation. He may be standing upon a bridge, for waves of water appear to flow over rocks below. It is clear from the edges that this work would have been joined with others on either side that would have completed the image. The subject matter, although not apparent, is most likely Buddhist, considering the nature of the temple. When we imagine the entire temple structure covered in such tiles, from the walls to the roof, the glory of Ming Dynasty China becomes apparent. - (H.742)

Ming Bronze Sculpture of the Buddha
Seated in the Dhyanasana Position



H.015

Origin: China

Circa: 1368 AD to 1644 AD

Dimensions:

16" (40.6cm) high x 9" (22.9cm) wide

Collection: Chinese

Medium: Bronze

Location: UAE

This gorgeous bronze sculpture depicts the Buddha seated in the dhyanasana position (also called the padmasana position), the posture of meditation better known in the West as the lotus position upon a double lotus throne. With his right hand, he forms the bhumisparsha mudra, literally translated as the “gesture of touching the earth” in which the Buddha, when seated underneath the Bodhi tree, touches the ground in order to call on the earth to witness his enlightenment. This gesture is considered a symbol of unshakable faith and resolution. His other hand rests upon his leg, holding a small begging bowl. All Buddhist monks must possess a begging bowl in which they collect food offerings. They became a symbol of law, and therefore the Buddha himself. The origins of begging bowls are Indian, and they appear in Buddhist art as early as the Gandhara era.

During the Ming Dynasty, representations the Buddha displaying Tibetan influences were cast in bronze, such as this gorgeous example. A thick robe of many folds drapes over his left shoulder and swoops around the neck with graduated layered edges hanging over his right shoulder. His facial features are well modeled with a serene, content expression. His pendulous earlobes droop down, resulting from the heavy earring he used to wear during his royal youth. The Buddha's tightly curled coiffure is crowned by an ushnisa, or bump, which symbolizes his divine intellect. The creation of Buddha images, both large and small, highlights the devotional intent of Buddhist art. The pious hoped to gain merit in the next world by making and offering images of the Buddha. The images themselves were also didactic, conveying aspects of doctrine and belief. - (H.015)

Ming Stone Head of the Buddha



H.527

Origin: China

Circa: 1368 AD to 1644 AD

Dimensions: 17.25" (43.8cm) high

Catalogue: V17

Collection: Chinese

Medium: Stone

Location: United States

Buddhist iconography of the Ming period is characterized by an attempt to syncretize elements of movement associated with Tibetan iconography and simplistic sculptural styles of China. It is likely that its body assumed a gentle pose or maintained the thematic simplicity apparent in the facial features. His hair is combed tightly over a square shaped head, dramatizing the length of his characteristically elongated ears. The eyebrows, eyes, nose, mouth, cheeks, and chin are carved with as little detail as possible to convey the transcendental nature of the Buddha from different stages of absorption. The creation of images, both large and small, highlights the devotional intent of Buddhist art. The pious hoped to gain merit into the next world by making an offering image of the Buddha and of Bodhisattvas, beings who have attained enlightenment but have elected to remain in the world in order to assist mankind. Images were also didactic, conveying aspects of doctrine and belief. In the Ming period imposing representations of many different Buddhist deities were made. The strong shape and bold face of this Buddha head give an impression of inward contemplation, and the power of the image lies in its static form. Slightly smiling, the Buddha reveals his inner disposition of benevolence and kindness, a trait the Buddha cherished in its full capacity. - (H.527)

Ming Gilt and Painted Head
of a Celestial Guardian



H.647
Origin: China
Circa: 1368 AD to 1644 AD
Dimensions: 17.25" (43.8cm) high

Collection: Chinese
Medium: Stucco
Location: United States

Large sculptures of celestial guardians usually line the entrance of tomb complexes, offering halls, and temples to remove forces of evil and ensure harmonious ties between the spiritual and material worlds. This bust of a guardian, called a Heavenly King, exemplifies the traditional aesthetic tastes for realistically represented sculptures. The religious and ceremonial significance of this work is reflected by the luxurious decorations that adorn it. The entire face of the figure has been gilt. Over the ages, the vibrant luster of the gold has faded into dark hues of brown; however, upon close inspection, one can still discern remnants of the former luminosity. The guardian is crowned with a headdress, painted blue and white, featuring two decorative panels depicting red and white flowers, perhaps orchids, on either side of his stern face.

The forceful expression of this guardian surely intimidated and commanded reverence from followers although it was meant to scare away evil spirits. Perhaps he would have discouraged non-believers from entering the hallowed ground he protected. The energy of his expression and the naturalism of the sculpture are both equally heightened by the inlaid glass pupils. The eyes appear eerily realistic, as the guardian almost seems to gaze back out at us. Surely, this guard would be pleased by what he sees. Although he has been transplanted from the temple or shrine he once protected, this statue continues to be revered and adored. Once he was appreciated for his spiritual and religious powers; yet now he is revered for his tremendous cultural, historical, and artistic significance. - (H.647)

Ming Fifty Piece Painted Terracotta Processional Set



H.962
Origin: China
Circa: 1368 AD to 1644 AD
Dimensions: 15" (38.1cm) high

Collection: Chinese
Medium: Painted Terracotta
Location: United States

Ming statuette art reflects the attempt to restore purely “Chinese” artistic genres with a healthy injection of Confucian aesthetic, political, and moral standards. Realistic depictions of daily life became popular themes among artists who were often patronized by the court. Under Xuande's reign (1426-35), the art industry flourished, producing many exquisite porcelain and ceramic pieces. This glazed set is a product of the artistic revival that occurred throughout the Ming. This Ming set of glazed figurines depicts an aspect of Chinese political and social life. Tributary processions were common protocol at this time, the emperor requiring provincial lords to pay tribute and tax on a regular basis. Processions were also held for funerals, marriages, and rituals differing in grandeur depending on the status of the individuals involved and nature of the ceremony. The palanquin served as the primary form of transportation for the elite who often traveled with several attendants.

This extraordinary tomb find consists of ten horse and rider sculptures, thirty-eight individual attendants, and two palanquins. The horse march forward, followed by a retinue of attendants, both male and female, presenting a range of presents. Finally, the procession would culminate with the palanquins that were once held aloft on wooden poles, carried on the shoulders of the attendants, which have long since deteriorated. The palanquins are naturally empty, for they were meant to carry the deceased nobility alongside whom they were buried into the afterlife. As Chinese statuette art prescribes, the faces are created individually with uniquely painted features, owing to their distinctive expressions. The pieces still retain much of their original polychrome paint, remarkable considering the stresses of excavation and the delicate nature of the pigment. Evidence of gilding is still visible on a large plate carried by one of the ladies in waiting. One of the riders wears a stunning yellow and black tunic that appear to have been made from the hide of a tiger. This astounding set is a masterpiece of Ming art, not just for the size of the procession and the diversity of the poses and gestures, but also for the remarkable preservation of the original details and the beauty of each piece as an individual work of art and united together as masterpiece. - (H.962)

Ming Glazed Terracotta Tile
From a Temple Roof



H.1004
Origin: China
Circa: 1368 AD to 1644 AD
Dimensions: 17" (43.2cm) high

Collection: Chinese
Medium: Glazed Terracotta
Location: United States

Glazed sculptural tiles are today considered one of the hallmarks of classical Chinese architecture. However, despite their popularity in modern times, they were relatively scarce until after the end of the T'ang Dynasty. Even then, during the Song and Yuan Dynasties, they were still infrequently used. It was not until the rise of the Ming Dynasty that glazed sculptural tiles became a popular decorative device extensively employed in temples, altars, imperial palaces, and gardens. Beijing became the center of glazed architectural tile production during the Ming period, and colorfully decorated pagodas began to sprout up around this region. Eaves and entryways were decorated with vibrant sculptures that served both decorative and sometimes religious purposes.

Chinese architecture is one of the more distinct styles of building throughout the world. Perhaps the most characteristic element is the pagoda roofs that end in dramatic curves. This sculptural tile would have been situated on that curved edge of a Ming Dynasty temple. Depicting a figure lunging forward on the tile, this work was placed on the roof in order to frighten away any evil spirits that might attempt to infiltrate the sacred space. The exposed flesh of the bald man is covered in an ochre glaze; otherwise, he is covered in a blue and white skirt that gathers in undulating folds in between his spread legs. He has his fists clenched together, held in front of his body as if a boxer. Holes in his hands reveal that he would have once held objects likely made out of wood that have deteriorated over the centuries. Who does this figure represent? A fighter? A spiritual leader? A deity? While we may never know his true identity, we can assume that he was an important individual to be memorialized in such a way. When one considers that this remarkable architectural sculpture is just the tip of the temple, the beauty of the completed temple must be truly astounding. - (H.1004)

Ming Glazed Terracotta Guardian Dragon Incense Burner



H.976
Origin: China
Circa: 1368 AD to 1644 AD
Dimensions: 40.5" (102.9cm) high

Collection: Chinese
Medium: Glazed Terracotta
Location: United States

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During the height of the Ming Dynasty, large sculptures of dragons, called guardian dragons, were placed outside the main entrance of the imperial palace and the mansions of wealthy magistrates. Later, during the Qing Dynasty, dragons would be replaced by stone lions and Fu dogs as the main choice of guardian creatures. However, dragons continue to be revered, as they were during the Ming era, for their infinite protective qualities. This large glazed terracotta sculpture is composed of two separate pieces. The base takes the form of a snarling dragon and a warrior in full armor that struggles to control this beast. The second smaller piece is a blossoming green lotus bud that rests atop the dragon's back. Glazed colors cover the whole of the work. Brilliant yellows, lush greens, and earthy browns all decorate the sculpture and bring a sense of life and vibrancy to the piece. Considering that the work is divided into two parts, with access to inside of the dragon's body, it is possible that this piece might have been an incense burner. One can imagine the dramatic effect of the fragrant smoke pouring out of the open mouth of the guardian dragon. This gorgeous work is a stunning testament to the wealth and luxury of the Ming Dynasty. - (H.976)

Ming Glazed Terracotta Sculptural Tile
From a Temple Roof



H.1023
Origin: China
Circa: 1368 AD to 1644 AD
Dimensions: 24.25" (61.6cm) high

Collection: Chinese
Medium: Glazed Terracotta
Location: United States

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This gorgeous tile features a warrior riding atop a dragon covered in a brilliant blue glaze. It is known that such glazed works were most frequently employed on the roofs and along the doorways of imperial or sacred structures. Judging from the shape of the base, it is almost certain that this large sculptural tile was originally employed along the curved roof of a Ming Dynasty temple or pagoda. One can imagine a structure elaborately decorated with such tiles prominently displayed along the corners of the sloping roof. Holes in the warrior's hands reveal that he would have likely once held a pair of weapons, perhaps swords or spears, fabricated from wood that have deteriorated over the centuries. The dragon, however, appears more like a horse, reinforcing the Chinese belief that dragons were related to horses. While the body is remarkably equine, the head is clearly more mythological in nature. Clouds swirl below the body of the dragon, implying that this warrior is riding over the heavens, perched high atop the temple roof. When we imagine the entire temple structure covered in such tiles, from the walls to the roof, the glory of Ming Dynasty China becomes apparent. - (H. 1023)

Ming Glazed Terracotta Sculpture of a Fu Dog



H.1054
Origin: China
Circa: 1368 AD to 1644 AD
Dimensions: 16.5" (41.9cm) high

Collection: Chinese
Medium: Glazed Terracotta
Location: United States

Ming Glazed Terracotta Sculpture of a Fu Dog



H.1055
Origin: China
Circa: 1368 AD to 1644 AD
Dimensions: 18.5" (47.0cm) high

Collection: Chinese
Style: Ming Dynasty
Medium: Glazed Terracotta
Location: United States

The Fu Dog, or Fu Lion as it is also known, is a ubiquitous symbol that has been employed repeatedly throughout the history of China. Sometimes referred to as the “Dog of Happiness” or the “Celestial Dog,” the earliest traces of the Fu Dog in China date to the Han Dynasty (206 B.C.-220 A.D.). Then it disappeared from Chinese art until it was resurrected during the cultural revival experienced during the T’ang Dynasty (618-906 A.D.). While lions are not native to China, works of art with lion imagery from other civilizations were imported into China as gifts for the Emperor. The Fu Lion was brought into China with the arrival of Buddhism, where it became associated with the more familiar dog during assimilation. The lion is a sacred creature in the Buddhist pantheon, and the Fu Lion was believed to be a companion of the Buddha.

While sculptures of Fu Dogs such as this outstanding blue and green-glazed example originally stood guard outside of Buddhist temples, by the time of the Ming Dynasty, when this work was created, the Dogs had lost most of their religious significance and were placed outside the entrances to homes and palaces out of custom. Even today, many monumental public buildings are decorated with lion figures standing guard at the base of the stairway. Traditionally the Fu Dog is depicted with one of his front paws resting on a globe (or occasionally a demon). This gesture symbolizes the Dog’s authority and power over the evil spirits that might have tried to infiltrate the temple or palace. Today, Fu Dogs continue to be a popular symbol of luck and happiness. - (H. 1054) - (H.1055)

Ming Glazed Terracotta Architectural Sculpture of a Dragon



H.1048

Origin: China

Circa: 1368 AD to 1644 AD

Dimensions:

27.5" (69.9cm) high x 40.25" (102.2cm) depth

Collection: Chinese

Medium: Glazed Terracotta

Location: United States

Ming Glazed Terracotta Architectural Sculpture of a Dragon



H.1047

Origin: China

Circa: 1368 AD to 1644 AD

Dimensions:

26.5" (67.3cm) high x 41" (104.1cm) depth

Collection: Chinese

Style: Ming Dynasty

Medium: Glazed Terracotta

Condition: Very Fine

Location: United States

Glazed sculptural tiles are today considered one of the hallmarks of classical Chinese architecture. However, despite their popularity in modern times, they were relatively scarce until after the end of the T'ang Dynasty. Even then, during the Song and Yuan Dynasties, they were still infrequently used. It was not until the rise of the Ming Dynasty that glazed sculptural tiles became a popular decorative device extensively employed in temples, altars, imperial palaces, and gardens. Beijing became the center of glazed architectural tile production during the Ming period, and colorfully decorated pagodas began to sprout up around this region. Eaves and entryways were decorated with vibrant sculptures that served both decorative and sometimes religious purposes. On temples and palaces, representations of mounted warriors and snarling dragons were meant to ward off evildoers, of both the physical and spiritual kind.

Judging from the shape of the base of this imposing dragon tile, it is likely that it once rested along the eaves of a roof or on the top of a wall surrounding the grounds of a Ming Dynasty temple or palace. As an architectural ornament, this sculpture is a masterpiece. Surely the building that this work once adorned must have been quite spectacular. The dragon sits upon a swirling cloud, head held upwards, mouth ajar, as if poised to release a breath of fire. Spiky horns decorate the dragon's head and spine that themselves appear like miniature flames. When we imagine the entire temple structure covered in such tiles, from the walls to the roof, the glory of Ming Dynasty China becomes apparent. - (H.1048) - (H.1047)

Ming Glazed Terracotta Architectural Sculpture of a Dragon Fish



H.1066
Origin: China
Circa: 1368 AD to 1644 AD
Dimensions: 35.5" (90.2cm) high

Collection: Chinese
Style: Ming Dynasty
Medium: Glazed Terracotta
Location: United States

Ming Glazed Terracotta Architectural Sculpture of a Dragon Fish



H.1067
Origin: China
Circa: 1368 AD to 1644 AD
Dimensions: 35.25" (89.5cm) high

Collection: Chinese
Medium: Glazed Terracotta
Location: United States

Ming Glazed Terracotta Architectural Sculpture of a Dragon Fish



H.1068
Origin: China
Circa: 1368 AD to 1644 AD
Dimensions: 35.25" (89.5cm) high

Collection: Chinese
Medium: Glazed Terracotta
Location: United States

Ming Glazed Terracotta Architectural Sculpture of a Dragon Fish



H.1069
Origin: China
Circa: 1368 AD to 1644 AD
Dimensions: 35.5" (90.2cm) high

Collection: Chinese
Medium: Glazed Terracotta
Location: United States

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This stunning sculpture of a dragon fish would have originally decorated the sloping eaves of a Ming Dynasty structure, likely along the part that overhangs the building. Dragon fish are one of the more peculiar mythological composite creatures. Gorgeously glazed in vibrant green and blue hues (blue being one of the rarer colors of glaze), this work appears more charming than intimidating, even though its presumed purpose was to frighten infiltrators. The glazes have acquired a silver frosted patina that is a testament to their age. With undulating tails and fins, open mouth, bulbous noses, and scaly body, these dragon fish delight our eyes with their exotic beauty. When we imagine the entire temple structure covered in such tiles, from the walls to the roof, the glory of Ming Dynasty China becomes apparent. - (H.1066) - (H.1067) - (H.1068) - (H.1069)

Set of Four Ming Glazed Terracotta
Temple Wall Tiles Depicting a Dragon



X.0277
Origin: China
Circa: 1368 AD to 1644 AD

Collection: Chinese
Medium: Glazed Terracotta
Condition: Very Fine
Location: Great Britain

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This group of glazed terracotta tiles would have been one of the centerpieces in the decorative scheme of a Ming Dynasty temple. Brilliantly colored in rich green and yellow ochre hues, these tiles depict a ferocious undulating dragon against a background of flowers and foliage. With its open mouth, sharp fangs, and beady eyes, this dragon was clearly meant to frighten away any potential evildoers, be they human or otherworldly, which might try to infiltrate the building it once adorned. This group of four tiles is but one part of a larger frieze of glazed tiles that would have once decorated the interior or exterior of the temple structure. When we imagine the entire temple structure covered in such tiles, from the walls to the roof, the glory of Ming Dynasty China becomes apparent. - (X.0277)

Chinese Ming Wooden Sculpture of the Laughing Buddha



X.0420
Origin: China
Circa: 1368 AD to 1644 AD
Dimensions: 28.75" (73.0cm) high

Collection: Chinese
Medium: Wood
Location: Great Britain

The historical figure, Buddha Gautama Sakyamuni is the Buddha of compassion who, having achieved the highest evolutionary perfection, turns suffering into happiness for all living beings. Born around 560 B.C. somewhere between the hills of south Nepal and the Rapti river, his father was a Raja who ruled over the northeastern province of India, the district including the holy Ganges River. The young prince was married to Yashoda when he was about 17 years old and together they had a son named Rahula. At the age of 29, he left his life of luxury, feeling compelled to purify his body and make it an instrument of the mind by ridding himself of earthly impulses and temptations. Chinese Buddhist art is heavily influenced both by earlier Indian examples and the stylistic tendencies of the Central Asian cultures who brought the religion into China.

This depiction of the Buddha does not actually represent the historical figure of the Sakyamuni, but one of his disciples known as Pu-Tai. Pu-Tai was a fat wandering Zen monk who was considered a man of good and loving character. His large belly distinguished him from the other ascetics. When Buddhism was introduced into Japan, the figure of Pu-Tai was melded with the Shinto god of luck Hotei. From then on, this type of figure commonly referred to as the Laughing Buddha became a symbol of good luck, happiness, and prosperity throughout China and Japan. Today, the tradition persists that rubbing the prominent belly of the Laughing Buddha brings good luck and longevity. - (X.0420)

Pair of Sancai Glazed Roof Tiles
in the form of Standing Warriors



LA.521
Origin: China
Circa: 1368 AD to 1644 AD
Dimensions: 17.25" (43.8cm) high

Collection: Chinese Art
Medium: Glazed Terracotta
Location: Great Britain

Ming Painted Terracotta Civic Official



H.1094

Origin: China

Circa: 1368 AD to 1644 AD

Dimensions:

34" (86.4cm) high x 13.5" (34.3cm) wide x 11.25" (28.6cm) depth

Collection: Chinese

Medium: Painted Terracotta

Location: Great Britain

Traditionally in Chinese art, representations of civic officials symbolized the order of government. However, this gorgeous sculpture of a civic official, created during the Ming Dynasty, symbolizes more than mere government, it symbolizes the return of the ethnic Chinese to power. Aesthetically, the work recalls similar depictions of civic officials created during the T'ang Dynasty, a golden age of Chinese culture. Surely this visual link to the glories of the past is not unintentional. This official stands upon a substantial base, revealing his revered position within society. He is no mere administrator; he is the embodiment of the will of the Emperor. An elegant robe with long overflowing sleeves frames his body. The tall cap with a chinstrap marks his official status. His facial features and groomed goatee reveal his native Chinese ethnic origins. Remnants of the original pigment that once covered this work are still visible, including orange highlights on the robe and black on his facial hair, cap, and shoes. - (H.1094)

Ming Lacquered Wood Sculpture of Guanyin



X.0732

Origin: China

Circa: 1368 AD to 1644 AD

Collection: Chinese art

Medium: wood

Location: Great Britain

Bodhisattvas are enlightened beings who have put off entering paradise in order to help others attain enlightenment. There are many different Bodhisattvas, but the most famous in China is Avalokitesvara, known in Chinese as Guanyin. Early depictions of Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara demonstrate male characteristics, but this tradition subsequently became less rigid. By the end of the Yuan Dynasty (AD 1367/8), the majority of these figures were depicted as young women, often bearing a vase of holy water to cleanse the souls of those she was bound to protect. According to legend, Guanyin was born on the nineteenth of the second lunar month, achieved enlightenment on the nineteenth of the sixth lunar month and achieved nirvana on the nineteenth of the ninth lunar month. It is said that s/he is the top Bodhisattva beside Shakyamuni Buddha, and an assistant Bodhisattva beside Amitabha Buddha in the Western World of Ultimate Bliss. It is believed that any sentient being who recites his/her name during a disaster would be heard and saved, which can explain why his/her importance to Chinese Buddhism. "Guanyin" literally means "observing the sounds", which refers to the belief that the Guanyin would observe all the sounds in the world, particularly listening for requests from worshippers. The M'ing dynasty was one of the most important in China's long history. It saw the toppling of the Y'uan Mongol empire under Hong Wu, the third of only three peasants ever to become emperor in China. The leader of the peasants' revolt that ushered in the M'ing dynasty, Hong Wu was an extremely brutal, ruthless dictator, whose creed was one of rabid Neo-Confucianism combined with a militaristic sense of China's destiny and organisation. The one aspect of Confucius' learning that he ignored was that declaring military institutions to be inferior to intellectual elites, and that the former should be under the latter's thrall. A great deal was therefore spent on expanding the army, consolidating defences against attack by the Mongols and neighbouring groups, and in major defensive architecture – notably the Great Wall. The economy also came under scrutiny. Perhaps reflecting Hong Wu's own humble origins, the economy came to emphasise agriculture over trade (which was deemed to be vulgar and parasitical by Confucianism), and provided safeguards for peasants. Negative outcomes included enormous inflation and devaluation of money and resultant social unrest. However, this period also saw enormous cultural strides, including the development of the novel, the introduction of duotone blue/white ceramics and a plethora of artistic and religious developments that is excellently embodied by the current sculpture. This sculpture of a Guanyin is unusually posed, almost lounging back on the left arm against a low seat while casually resting the right arm on the right knee, The left leg is pressed down, parallel with the floor. This contrasts with the haughty facial expression and regal mien of the upper body. The Guanyin is dressed in long, flowing robes that hang in pleats below the level of the figure's base, as well as an additional garment (possibly a dhoti) tied off around the waist. The hands protrude rather languidly from long sleeves, and are arranged in meditative positions. The figure is also wearing an ornate necklace. The face is exquisitely carved and conveys a decidedly aristocratic expression, with half-closed eyes beneath elevated eyebrows, a small, pursed mouth and rounded cheeks. This effect is heightened by the ornate rolled hair around the top of the forehead and down to the shoulders, and the high, extravagantly decorated crown of floral and other organic motifs that almost doubles the total height of the head. This is a highly accomplished and impressive piece of ancient art. - (X.0732)

Ming Lacquered Wood Sculpture
of a Seated Buddha



X.0729
Origin: China
Circa: 1368 AD to 1644 AD
Dimensions: 41" (104.1cm) high

Collection: Chinese Art
Medium: Lacquered Wood
Location: United States

The M'ing dynasty was one of the most important in China's long history. It saw the toppling of the Y'uan Mongol empire under Hong Wu, the third of only three peasants ever to become emperor in China. The leader of the peasants' revolt that ushered in the M'ing dynasty, Hong Wu was an extremely brutal, ruthless dictator, whose creed was one of rabid Neo-Confucianism combined with a militaristic sense of China's destiny and organisation. The one aspect of Confucius' learning that he ignored was that declaring military institutions to be inferior to intellectual elites, and that the former should be under the latter's thrall. A great deal was therefore spent on expanding the army, consolidating defences against attack by the Mongols and neighbouring groups, and in major defensive architecture – notably the Great Wall. The economy also came under scrutiny. Perhaps reflecting Hong Wu's own humble origins, the economy came to emphasise agriculture over trade (which was deemed to be vulgar and parasitical by Confucianism), and provided safeguards for peasants. Negative outcomes included enormous inflation and devaluation of money and resultant social unrest. However, this period also saw enormous cultural strides, including the development of the novel, the introduction of duotone blue/white ceramics and a plethora of artistic and religious developments that is excellently embodied by the current sculpture.

Standing 41" high, this Buddha is of exceptional quality and poise. Sat in a lotus position with hands resting on the lap and the right knee, the Buddha is wearing pantaloons and a loose tunic that leaves the chest and forearms bare and which runs down to a loose gather of pleats along the lower limbs and between the legs. The tunic is tied at the waist with a thong, drawn tight and tied in a bow. Each sleeve displays a pleated gathering of cloth just above the elbow, and a large, plain bracelet adorns each wrist. The face has assumed an expression of studied tranquillity, with slightly pursed lips, lowered eyes under arched brows, and smooth, rounded cheeks. This is framed by highly textured hair, which reaches its apex at the supracranial eminence that is believed to reflect Buddha's sagacity and wisdom, and elongated earlobes. The centre of the chest is decorated with a prayer wheel design. The quality and condition of this Buddha are stunning. In terms of aesthetic and social value, this is a truly exceptional specimen that would be the star of any context into which it were placed. - (X.0729)

Sculpture of the Thousand Arms Guanyin



X.0730

Origin: China

Circa: 1368 AD to 1644 AD

Dimensions:

32" (81.3cm) high x 42.5" (108.0cm) wide

Collection: Chinese art

Medium: Lacquered Wood

Location: United States

The current sculpture dates from this fascinating and turbulent period. Guanyin is an ancient Bodhisattva, who was noted for her kindness. Bodhisattvas are beings who have attained enlightenment and therefore their right to enter Nirvana, but who choose to remain upon the mortal plane to assist others in their attainment of similarly elevated spiritual states. These benevolent Bodhisattvas minister eternally to relieve the sufferings of all creatures, rather in the general mould of Christian archangels. The artist who created this sculpture captures a beautiful image of tender serenity, unmarred by the otherworldliness of her 'thousand arms'. Masterful woodworking has provided her with a superbly detailed garment and precisely- modelled arms and hands, which form a fluid yet cohesive whole. Each of her many hands contains a different cosmic symbol, or alternatively expresses a specific ritual position, or mudra. Her cupped hands often form the Yoni Mudra, symbolizing the womb as the door for entry to this world. Traces of paint still remain, serving to heighten the general impact that this exceptional sculpture possesses. This is a truly remarkable work of art, both aesthetically and spiritually. - (X.0730)

Ming Dynasty Lacquered Wood Sculpture of Guanyin



X.0731
Origin: China
Circa: 1368 AD to 1644 AD
Dimensions: 39" (99.1cm) high

Collection: Chinese Art
Medium: Lacquered Wood
Location: Great Britain

The current sculpture dates from this fascinating and turbulent period. Bodhisattvas are enlightened beings who have put off entering paradise in order to help others attain enlightenment. There are many different Bodhisattvas, but the most famous in China is Avalokitesvara, known in Chinese as Guanyin. Early depictions of Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara displayed male characteristics, but this tradition subsequently became less rigid. By the end of the Yuan Dynasty (AD 1367/8), most Guanyin sculptures depicted the beings as young women, often bearing a vase of holy water to cleanse the souls of those they were bound to protect. According to legend, Guanyin was born on the nineteenth of the second lunar month, achieved enlightenment on the nineteenth of the sixth lunar month and achieved nirvana on the nineteenth of the ninth lunar month. It is said that s/he is the top Bodhisattva beside Shakyamuni Buddha, and an assistant Bodhisattva beside Amitabha Buddha in the Western World of Ultimate Bliss. It is believed that any sentient being who recites his/her name during a disaster would be heard and saved, which can explain why his/her importance to Chinese Buddhism. "Guanyin" literally means "observing the sounds", which refers to the belief that the Guanyin would observe all the sounds in the world, particularly listening for requests from worshippers. The current example is female, and stands 39" tall on an incorporated base. The pose is somewhat languorous, with the weight shifted onto the right leg while the left is slightly bent. The left hand hangs by the side, holding some implement or piece of drapery. The right hand is raised, and appears to be an object of contemplation by Guanyin. The head is carved in a mood of reflective serenity, and is inclined slightly to the right. The sculpture is topped with a tall, ornate crown of generally floral aspect, with plume-like eminences arranged in vertically-oriented bunches. The underlying hair has been gathered up underneath the crown, leaving a halo of hair around its perimeter. A loose tunic-like garment (dhoti) envelops the lower half of the body, and further drapery (scarves) is casually wrapped over the shoulders. The complexity of the drapery and the care with which it has been carved is stunning - the individual folds and creases are all cleanly and deftly rendered, and contrast with the smooth texture of the skin. The figure additionally wears two bracelets on the left wrist, as well as a necklace and pendant arrangement in the chest area. This is a superb and important sculpture that would grace any collection of Eastern art. - (X.0731)

Ming Glazed Sculptures of a Fu Dogs



H.1054/5
Origin: China
Circa: 1368 AD to 1644 AD
Dimensions: 19" (48.3cm) high

Collection: Chinese
Medium: Glazed Terracotta
Location: United States

The Fu Dog, or Fu Lion as it is also known, is a ubiquitous symbol that has been employed repeatedly throughout the history of China. Sometimes referred to as the “Dog of Happiness” or the “Celestial Dog,” the earliest traces of the Fu Dog in China date to the Han Dynasty (206 B.C.-220 A.D.). Then it disappeared from Chinese art until it was resurrected during the cultural revival experienced during the T’ang Dynasty (618-906 A.D.). While lions are not native to China, works of art with lion imagery from other civilizations were imported into China as gifts for the Emperor. The Fu Lion was brought into China with the arrival of Buddhism, where it became associated with the more familiar dog during assimilation. The lion is a sacred creature in the Buddhist pantheon, and the Fu Lion was believed to be a companion of the Buddha.

While sculptures of Fu Dogs such as this outstanding blue and green-glazed example originally stood guard outside of Buddhist temples, by the time of the Ming Dynasty, when this work was created, the Dogs had lost most of their religious significance and were placed outside the entrances to homes and palaces out of custom. Even today, many monumental public buildings are decorated with lion figures standing guard at the base of the stairway. Traditionally one Fu Dog is depicted with one of his front paws resting on a globe and its mate resting atop a demon. This gesture symbolizes the Dog’s authority and power over the evil spirits that might have tried to infiltrate the temple or palace. Today, Fu Dogs continue to be a popular symbol of luck and happiness.

- (H.1054/5)

Ming Dynasty Painted Female Lion



DL.1001
Origin: China
Circa: 1368 AD to 1644 AD
Dimensions:
12.2" (31.0cm) high x 11.8" (30.0cm) wide

Collection: Chinese
Style: Ming
Medium: Terracotta
Condition: Extra Fine

The Fu Lion, or Fu Dog as it is also known, is a ubiquitous symbol that has been employed repeatedly throughout the history of China. Sometimes referred to as the “Dog of Happiness” or the “Celestial Dog,” the earliest traces of the Fu Dog in China date to the Han Dynasty (206 B.C.-220 A.D.). Then it disappeared from Chinese art until it was resurrected during the cultural revival experienced during the Tang Dynasty (618-906 A.D.). While lions are not native to China, works of art with lion imagery from other civilizations were imported into China as gifts for the Emperor. The Fu Lion was brought into China with the arrival of Buddhism, where it became associated with the more familiar dog during assimilation. The lion is a sacred creature in the Buddhist pantheon and the Fu Lion was believed to be a companion of the Buddha.

While sculptures of Fu Lions originally stood guard outside Buddhist temples, by the time of the Ming Dynasty, when this work was created, the lions had lost most of their religious significance and were placed outside the entrances to homes and palaces out of custom. Even today, many monumental public buildings are decorated with lion figures standing guard at the base of the stairway. This female lion uses her front paw to trample a demon. This traditional gesture symbolizes the lion’s authority over evil spirits that might have tried to infiltrate the temple or palace. The delicate colouring, in tones of red, blue and yellow is particularly fine. The lion’s wide open mouth and protruding tongue have been expertly sculpted. The care lavished on this magnificent creation is also apparent in the swirling motifs, achieved through the use of incised lines, that decorate the plinth. - (DL.1001)

A Ming Dynasty Painted Stucco Couple



DL.2070

Origin: Shaanxi Province - 'Xi'an'

Circa: 1368 AD to 1644 AD

Dimensions:

28.5" (72.4cm) high x 28" (71.1cm) wide

Collection: Chinese Art

Style: Ming

Medium: Stucco

Condition: Extra Fine

Location: UAE

This delightful couple are an important testament to the artistic achievements of the Ming Dynasty. Standing on two sculpted bases, both figures perform the same gestures, with one hand raised and the other hidden within the sleeve of their long gowns. A small round object survives between the thumb and forefinger of the female and it is likely that the man once held a similar item. Considerable traces of the original polychromy remain and remind us that these figures would once have been alive with colour. The outer robes were dark blue, worn over a red undergarment. The hairstyles are traditional and the attention to detail is nowhere more apparent than in the expertly fashioned hairpin worn by the female. The deep furrows on the man's forehead suggest wisdom and old age, while the female has a more youthful appearance. - (DL.2070)

A Pair of Ming Dynasty Glazed Dragon Temple Tiles



DL.2078A

Origin: Temple in 'Shanxi Province'

Circa: 1368 AD to 1644 AD

Dimensions:

47.6" (120.9cm) high x 32.2" (81.8cm) wide x 9.8" (24.9cm) depth

Collection: Chinese Art

Medium: Ceramic

Condition: Extra Fine

Location: UAE

Glazed sculptural tiles are today considered one of the hallmarks of classical Chinese architecture. However, despite their popularity in modern times, they were relatively scarce until after the end of the Tang Dynasty. Even then, during the Song and Yuan Dynasties, they were still infrequently used. It was not until the rise of the Ming Dynasty that glazed sculptural tiles became a popular decorative device extensively employed in temples, altars, imperial palaces, and gardens. Beijing became the center of glazed architectural tile production during the Ming period, and colorfully decorated pagodas began to sprout up around this region. Eaves and entryways were decorated with vibrant sculptures that served both decorative and sometimes religious purposes. On temples and palaces, representations of mounted warriors and snarling dragons were meant to ward off evildoers, of both the physical and spiritual kind.

This fantastic pair would have been one of the centerpieces in the decorative scheme of a Ming Dynasty temple. Brilliantly colored in emerald green, turquoise and ochre hues, the tiles each depict two snarling dragons against a background of swirling foliage. The shape of the tiles suggests that they would have been situated on the curved edge of a temple roof. With their open mouths, sharp fangs and beady eyes these dragons would surely have been most effective at guarding the sacred space from evil spirits. This pair is but one part of a larger scheme that would once have decorated the temple structure. When we imagine the entire edifice covered with such tiles, from the walls to the roof, the glory of Ming Dynasty China becomes apparent. - (DL.2078A)

Ming Dynasty Blue and White Vase



AM.0095 (LSO)
Origin: China
Circa: 1400 AD to 1600 AD
Dimensions: 23.5" (59.7cm) high

Collection: Chinese Art
Style: Ming
Medium: Porcelain, Silver
Location: Great Britain

This beautiful blue-and-white prestige porcelain vessel dates from the Ming Dynasty, which ruled China between the mid 14th and mid 17th centuries AD and is widely believed to be one of the most definitive and important in China's long history. This is partially due to the fact that it was the last indigenous (Han) dynasty before the country fell into the hands of the Manchu-led Qing Dynasty, and partly because it was led by one of only three peasants ever to rise to Chinese imperial pre-eminence. Hong Wu, the leader of the peasant revolt, founded the dynasty on the destruction of the Yuan Mongol Empire. His background and the manner in which he seized power made him almost pathologically cautious and even paranoid. His intention, influenced by Confucianism, was to create a bureaucracy-free set of agriculturally-based communities that eschewed commercial trade – which was abhorred by Confucius. Confucian perspectives on the avoidance of military development went unheeded, however. In addition to accelerating agricultural production – again, perhaps a reflection of his own experience – he increased the standing army to over one million, imposed what approximated to martial law on his people and spent a fortune building defences, notably the Great Wall of China. He also founded the Forbidden City, from which he governed China's burgeoning population of around 200 million. Because of economic spin-offs of his agricultural policy (which provided major surpluses) untold wealth started to appear, and with it a new elite of merchant families who went on to constitute China's first Middle Class. The arts and sciences also benefited from this largesse, as did political and – inevitably – bureaucratic policy. In many respects it was the strongest period in Chinese history, and it only collapsed because of a series of natural and economic disasters – namely the undermining of the economy by Japanese trade withdrawal, a series of crop failures and the appearance of the "Little Ice Age". The eventual collapse of the Ming Dynasty was brought about by ultra-conservative Manchurian nomads (Manchu) who founded the Qing dynasty in 1644.

Arts and sciences flourished in the Ming Dynasty, though this was more to do with the flow of unexpected wealth from agricultural surpluses than any particular enlightenment on the part of Hong Wu or his descendents. Painters proliferated, and were very well-paid for their works; Qiu Ying was once paid 2.8 kg (100 oz) of silver to paint a long scroll. Advances were also made in wood/ivory carving, jade-working, lacquerwork, and duotone (blue-white) ceramic design and decoration. The most prestigious pieces were presented as diplomatic gifts to Europe, Japan and SE Asia; lesser works flooded the market as trade goods, giving rise to a global obsession with chinoiserie. The major production centers for porcelain items in the Ming Dynasty were Jingdezhen in Jiangxi province and Dehua in Fujian province. The Dehua porcelain factories catered to European tastes by creating Chinese export porcelain by the 16th century, often painting designs direct from bookplates, paintings or other illustrations, in order to appeal to a wider European audience. The best items remained prestige and diplomatic goods, however, as is the case with the current piece. Just as the Ming potters reformatted their wares for the European market, so they changed them for other parts of the world.

The shape approximates to that of an hourglass, with a rounded square lower section cinched at the waist to provide an altogether more sinuous pear-like upper part, tapering to a long, slim neck. The design follows this shape, with white bands at the base of the vessel, a double band at the waist, and another at the top of the neck where the floral scrollwork gives way to a cameo pattern containing a flower. The whole is decorated with floral scrollwork patterns. It is topped off with a bell-shaped silver cap with perforated, arched design. It is ambiguous in terms of cultural assignation, if one analyses it as a whole. The appearance is essentially that of a minaret, yet the painting is clearly Chinese in origin. The metal mount is Islamic in appearance. The lack of representationalist figurative design is indicative of Islamic trends, but there again this trait is not necessarily unique and there are myriad painting forms within the Chinese repertoire. It is also possible that the piece was made by an Islamic potter under the influence of early Ming pieces; the Iznik potters of Turkey are known to have done this in the late 16th century. However when one considers the nature of contemporary naval trade and relations, and also the fact that the silverware seems to be an add-on (partly obscuring the cameo design on the neck), it would seem very likely that this was a prestige piece made for the Islamic (probably Turkish) market, which was then adapted upon arrival. This is therefore a socially-important and historically significant piece of porcelain and silver. As diplomatic pieces are usually c.30cm in height, its large size makes it yet more exceptional. The preservation and colouring are perfect. This is the finest such piece that we have ever seen. - (AM.0095 (LSO))

Ming Dynasty Blue and White Vase



SK.041

Origin: China

Circa: 1500 AD to 1600 AD

Dimensions: 10" (25.4cm) high

Collection: Chinese Art

Medium: Porcelain, Silver

Condition: Fine

Location: UAE

This beautiful blue-and-white prestige porcelain vessel dates from the Ming Dynasty, yet also bears the classic markers of the Islamic Empire. This duality is explained by the important trade that flourished between these two groups during the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries, and the diplomatic exercises that allowed the networks to develop in the first instance. The vessel is designed in an intriguing and pleasing set of styles. The main form is globular, with a defined band at the neck to a long, tapering spout. The base is slightly everted. The design is floral, with light and dark blue flowers all endlessly linked by stalks and foliate tracery. It proceeds across the vessel and only halts at the base of the neck and at the white-rimmed base. The porcelain is very high glaze, and the surface is flawless. The mouth of the vessel is partially covered by a socketed fixture and a very ornate scrollwork-design silver cap resembling an Islamic dome, surmounted by a slender spire.

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The Ming Dynasty, which ruled China between the mid 14th and mid 17th centuries AD, is widely believed to be one of the most definitive and important in China's long history. It is also remarkable for the fact that it was the last indigenous (Han) dynasty before the country fell into the hands of the Manchu-led Qing Dynasty, and also because it was led by one of only three peasants ever to rise to Chinese imperial pre-eminence. Hong Wu, the leader of the peasant revolt, founded the dynasty on the destruction of the Yuan Mongol Empire. His background and the manner in which he seized power made him almost pathologically cautious and even paranoid. In addition to accelerating agricultural production, he increased the standing army to over one million, imposed what approximated to martial law on his people and spent a fortune building defences, notably the Great Wall of China. He also founded the Forbidden City, from which he governed China's burgeoning population of around 200 million. Because of economic spin-offs of his agricultural policy (which provided major surpluses) untold wealth started to appear, and with it a new elite of merchant families who went on to constitute China's first Middle Class.

Arts and sciences flourished in the Ming Dynasty. Painters proliferated, and were very well-paid for their works. Advances were also made in wood/ivory carving, jade-working, lacquerwork, and duotone (blue-white) ceramic design and decoration. The most prestigious pieces were presented as diplomatic gifts to Europe, Japan and SE Asia; lesser works flooded the market as trade goods, giving rise to a global obsession with chinoiserie. The major production centers for porcelain items in the Ming Dynasty were Jingdezhen in Jiangxi province and Dehua in Fujian province. The Dehua porcelain factories catered to European tastes by creating Chinese export porcelain by the 16th century, often painting designs direct from bookplates, paintings or other illustrations, in order to appeal to a wider European audience. The best items remained prestige and diplomatic goods, however, as is the case with the current piece. Just as the Ming potters reformatted their wares for the European market, so they changed them for other parts of the world. Figurative designs may have been banned under Islamic law, but it would seem from other sources that floral patterning was less frowned upon.

This is a socially-important and historically significant piece of porcelain and silver. The preservation and colouring are perfect. This is an extremely fine piece.

- (SK.041)

Ming Gold-Splashed Kuei Bronze Censer



FZ.388

Origin: China

Circa:

16 th Century AD to 17 th Century AD

Dimensions:

2.75" (7.0cm) high x 5.125" (13.0cm) wide

Catalogue: V29

Collection: Chinese

Medium: Bronze

Location: UAE

This striking bronze censer has a low compressed body, slightly everted rim, loop handles and a flat base. The underside of the base has a countersunk rectangular cartouche with a six-character reign mark reading 'Da Ming Xuande nian zhi' ('Made in the Xuande era of the Great Ming'). The form of the censer is one of the classic types produced during the Xuande period (1426-1435) of the Ming Dynasty. In 1428, according to the document 'Xuande yi qi tu pu' ('Illustrated Catalogue of the Ritual Vessels of the Xuande Period'), Emperor Xuande instructed the Ministry of Works to cast a large series of bronze vessels with copper sent as tribute by the Kingdom of Siam (Thailand). They were intended for use on the altars of the palace and beyond. It was customary to display such vessels in groups of five, a central censer, flanked by pairs of vases and candlesticks. Censers were also used in secular contexts, displayed in the studies of the literati and used to burn incense. Xuande apparently commissioned c. 20,000 vessels of 117 different types. The censers were one of the most popular forms and were widely reproduced in the later Ming and Qing eras. Known simply as 'Xuande censers' many of these later pieces also bore the Xuande mark. Original marks are distinguished by characters that are complete and smooth, set against a background that is the same colour and luster as the vessel itself. This piece may date to the later Ming period and is noteworthy for its fine casting and finish.

The gold-splash decorative technique is striking for its modern aesthetic. It was achieved by a process known as fire-gilding, now banned because of the poisonous fumes emitted during the procedure. A gold and mercury amalgam was applied to the surface and then the vessel was heated to drive off the mercury leaving behind an extremely thin film of gold. This process was sometimes repeated to build up thicker layers. In this case the splashes are charmingly irregular and densely spaced, adding to the beauty of this remarkable object.

References:

Rose Kerr, *Later Chinese Bronzes*, (London, 1990), esp. p. 39.

Philip K. Hu, *Later Chinese Bronzes: The Saint Louis Art Museum and Robert E. Kresko Collection*, (2008), esp. pp. 137-141. - (FZ.388)

The Qing Dynasty

The Qing Dynasty was founded in Manchuria in 1644, following the decline of the M'ing Dynasty. The rulers of the Manchu Dynasty – as it became known – were not indigenous Chinese, but were descended from the Jurchens, natives of eastern Russia and the steppe region. The formation of the Qing was preceded by a grey area known as the Later Jin period, as a minor leader named Nurhaci escalated a series of minor tribal squabbles into unification and eventually all-out war with the then rulers of the Chinese state. He moved his capital to be closer to the Mongols, with whom he formed alliances; he thus protected himself from attack on that border, exploited their superb archers, and further expanded his power base against the M'ing. His son (Hung Taiji) succeeded him as Khan, and following a rather erratic start monopolised on his father's successes to crush Ming forces in a series of battles from 1640 to 1642 for the territories of Songshan and Jingzhou. He died in 1643, passing the new title of emperor to his 5-year-old son, Fulin. The last M'ing emperor – Chongzhen – committed suicide as Beijing fell to rebel forces, which then fought the Qing for control. Fulin – renamed emperor Shunzhi – was placed on the throne as the Son of Heaven, although it was not until the 1680's that all of China was united under the Manchu banner.

Wooden Sculpture of the Vairocana Buddha



X.0707 (LSO)

Origin: China

Circa: 15 th Century to 17 th Century AD

Dimensions:

39" (99.1cm) high x 32" (81.3cm) wide

Collection: Chinese

Medium: Wood

Location: Great Britain

This imposing Buddha dates from the dynamic period surrounding the second half then collapse of the M'ing Dynasty, and the rise of the Q'ing. This period spans the 15th to 17th centuries AD, and saw many of the most important developments in Chinese culture. The M'ing, founded in 1368 under the peasant emperor Hong Wu, was a militarily oriented socio-political entity much given to radical interpretations of Confucianism and with a very strong defensive ethos (the Great Wall dates to this period). However by the 17th century cracks had started to appear, young male heirs being manipulated as puppets by the ruling families, and the court became rotten with intrigue. To compound matters, the Manchurian Chinese cities were being attacked by local groups – dubbed the Manchus – who eventually invaded China and deposed the old regime. The last M'ing emperor, Chongzhen, hanged himself on Coal Hill overlooking the Forbidden City, bringing an end to his line and ushering in the Q'ing dynasty.

The Q'ing had been founded by Nurhaci in the early 17th century, and persisted until the collapse of imperial China in 1912 with the hapless Pu-Yi, the last emperor of China. Their isolationist policies, social control (all men required to shave their heads, wear queues, and wear Manchu rather than traditional Chinese dress) introspection and cultural conservatism was at odds with their liberality in certain social issues – such as forbidding the binding of women's feet (later withdrawn due to social pressure from the populace). However, this cultural inflexibility – which grew as the emperors grew increasingly unaware of the world outside their palace walls, much less the country's borders – was a difficult stance to maintain in the shadow of the European thalassocracies, and it may have been this which helped hasten the demise of the Imperial system.

The M'ing and the Q'ing dynasties were highly creative times, seeing the appearance of the first novels written in the vernacular, considerable development in the visual arts and outstanding craftsmanship in all fields. The present sculpture is a case in fact, and it is perhaps somewhat disarming to reflect that this peaceful figure dates from a period of such spectacular turmoil.

The Buddha represented is the Vairocana variant – that is, the divine universal aspect of Sakiamuni Buddha. He is seated in yogic posture, his legs folded in padmasanam (lotus position), the left hand resting flat on the knee (unusually) and the right hand raised in vitarka mudra (gesture of debate with the forefinger tip touching the thumb). The face has been beautifully carved into a mask of imperturbable serenity and reflection, framed by the long earlobes and the hair, which has been gathered into small, serrated spikes that cover the head like a helmet. The only part exposed is the supracranial eminence traditionally associated with Buddha's wisdom and sagacity. The drapery is simple, and robustly carved. It comprises a tunic tied at the waist with a long flowing robe that hangs to the waist and is gathered to cover the legs. The chest is bare. The Buddha is otherwise unadorned, which is appropriate given his penchant for simplicity and purity, and at odds with the more decorated Bodhisattva sculptures. The impact of the piece is boosted by its large size (38" tall), which gives it a powerful and magisterial presence. This is a true sculptural gem that deserves pride of place in a serious collection, or in any context where its beauty can be fully appreciated. - (X. 0707 (LSO))

Wooden Sculpture of the Vairocana Buddha



X.0708

Origin: China

Circa: 15 th Century to 17 th Century AD

Dimensions:

39" (99.1cm) high x 28.75" (73.0cm) wide

Collection: Chinese

Medium: Wood

Location: Great Britain

This imposing Buddha dates from the dynamic period surrounding the second half then collapse of the Ming Dynasty, and the rise of the Qing. This period spans the 15th to 17th centuries AD, and saw many of the most important developments in Chinese culture. The Ming, founded in 1368 under the peasant emperor Hong Wu, was a militarily oriented socio-political entity much given to radical interpretations of Confucianism and with a very strong defensive ethos (the Great Wall dates to this period). However by the 17th century cracks had started to appear, young male heirs being manipulated as puppets by the ruling families, and the court became rotten with intrigue. To compound matters, the Manchurian Chinese cities were being attacked by local groups dubbed the Manchus who eventually invaded China and deposed the old regime. The last Ming emperor, Chongzhen, hanged himself on Coal Hill overlooking the Forbidden City, bringing an end to his line and ushering in the Qing dynasty. The Qing was founded by Nurhaci in the early 17th century, and persisted until the collapse of imperial China in 1912 with the hapless Pu-Yi, the last emperor of China. Their isolationist policies, social control (all men required to shave their heads, wear queues, and wear Manchu rather than traditional Chinese dress) introspection and cultural conservatism was at odds with their liberality in certain social issues such as forbidding the binding of womens feet (later withdrawn due to social pressure from the populace). However, this cultural inflexibility which grew as the emperors grew increasingly unaware of the world outside their palace walls, much less the countrys borders was a difficult stance to maintain in the shadow of the European thalassocracies, and it may have been this which helped hasten the demise of the Imperial system. The Ming and the Qing dynasties were highly creative times, seeing the appearance of the first novels written in the vernacular, considerable development in the visual arts and outstanding craftsmanship in all fields. The present sculpture is a case in fact, and it is perhaps somewhat disarming to reflect that this peaceful figure dates from a period of such spectacular turmoil. This superb sculpture admirably portrays the Vairocana Buddhas poise and serenity. He rests in padmasanam (lotus) position, his hands folded together in a palms-up position known as dhyana mudra. The face is exquisitely carved, the features carefully measured and harmoniously expressed. The face is framed by pendulous earlobes and hair pulled into a helmet-like arrangement of tiny, serrated knobs. The drapery is extremely competent in its execution, describing a roll of curved pleats running from the shoulders to the lap, the tunic-like garment encasing the arms down to the wrist and concealing the legs. The patina is perfect, and the piece is in extremely good condition. The Buddha in sharp contradistinction from the more ornate Bodhisattva figures is plain and unadorned, reflecting the simplicity and purity of the Vairocana Buddhas character. Indeed, the lack of ornamental detailing increases the sensual impact and clean lines of this remarkable carving. This is a truly wonderful piece of ancient sculpture. - (X.0708)

Pair of Lacquered Wooden Sculptures
of Bodhisattvas



LA.559

Origin: China

Circa: 1500 AD to 1800 AD

Dimensions:

60" (152.4cm) high x 14.5" (36.8cm) wide x 19.5" (49.5cm) depth

Collection: Chinese Art

Style: Late Ming/Qing Dynasty

Medium: Lacquered Wood

Location: Great Britain

Pair of sculptural standing Avalokitesvara bodhisattvas, the high mukuta crowns, each bejewelled with either a small Amithaba icon, or the sacred bottle, one hand raised in vitarka mudra, the other one softly opened with palm up, the bodies slightly bent in tribanga pose, the bare chests with an ornate necklace, flowing garments reaching the feet and partly covering them. Traces of the original lacquered pigmentation remain.

The confession of the Great Vehicle, Mahayana (chin.: Dasheng), spread from Kashmir, Gandhara, Sogdia and Inner Asia into China, and further to Korea and Japan. It teaches that salvation is possible to all sentient beings because they possess the Buddha nature in them and hence all have the potentiality of being enlightened. Enlightenment is simply achieved by faith and devotion to Buddha and the religious ideal, the Bodhisattva (chin.: Pusa), Pratyekabuddha (chin.: Pizhifo) or Arhat (chin.: Aluohan, short: Luohan). These beings, though qualified to enter nirvana, delay their final entry in order to bring every sentient being across the sea of misery to the calm shores of enlightenment.

Avalokitesvara ("Observing the Sounds of the World", chin.: Guanshiyin, short: Guanyin, or Guanzizai), the Bodhisattva of Compassion, is one of the most venerated icon of the Buddhist Pantheon. In this case, the two mirror images would have been placed to the side of the main Buddha as his flanking attendants, in the main temple hall. - (LA.559)

Pair of Stone Sculptures of Children at Play



LA.560
Origin: China
Circa: 1500 AD to 1800 AD
Dimensions: 33" (83.8cm) high

Collection: Chinese Art
Medium: stone
Location: Great Britain

Pair of playful children (Chin. wa-wa) standing in their gowns and trowsers loosely worn, one holding a small finger citron that stands for plenty, the other a lidded bottle, perhaps reminiscent of a Buddhist ailment jar. Traces of the original pigments remain between the folds of the clothing and on the faces.

Wa-wa, children at play, was a theme usually associated with prosperity and joyfulness and often appeared in traditional paintings, lacquers and ceramics from the Ming period onwards. The two figures here illustrated are recognisable by their young hairstyle, one having the hair tied up into two lateral knobs, the other with two bows on the sides, above the ears.

Children depictions were often used for nianhua (New Year) paintings and auspicious prints and ceramics, possibly because of the word pun implicit in their Chinese name. As an ancient saying goes: "All senior officials are called 'zi' which is homonymous with 'zi', meaning 'son' or 'child'. So to have many 'zi' (sons) signifies many ministers or high officials in the family. All these epitomize the yearning of the people of ancient times for a happy life. Note: 'zi' was an ancient title of respect for a learned or virtuous man. - (LA.560)

Pair of Qing Dynasty Inscribed Funerary Stelae



LA.574 (LSO)
Origin: China
Circa: 1644 AD to 1912 AD
Dimensions: 72" (182.9cm) high

Collection: Chinese Art
Location: Great Britain

These impressive columns are funerary stelae, pertaining to the burial place of an elite member of society during the Qing dynasty. They are made of discrete moulded vertical funnel blocks, stacked upon each other and a base in the shape of a Fu-dog (lion). Each bears a line in cursive script which reads as follows: "there are flowers and lights that at night (would) light themselves (...), spring would often stay with no moon or bird". They would originally have supported a lintel with an additional inscription, acting as a gateway into the tomb.

The Qing Dynasty was founded in Manchuria in 1644, following the decline of the M'ing Dynasty. The rulers of the Manchu Dynasty – as it became known – were not indigenous Chinese, but were descended from the Jurchens, natives of eastern Russia and the steppe region. The formation of the Qing was preceded by a grey area known as the Later Jin period, as a minor leader named Nurhaci escalated a series of minor tribal squabbles into unification and eventually all-out war with the then rulers of the Chinese state. He moved his capital to be closer to the Mongols, with whom he formed alliances; he thus protected himself from attack on that border, exploited their superb archers, and further expanded his power base against the M'ing. His son (Hung Taiji) succeeded him as Khan, and following a rather erratic start monopolised on his father's successes to crush Ming forces in a series of battles from 1640 to 1642 for the territories of Songshan and Jingzhou. He died in 1643, passing the new title of emperor to his 5-year-old son, Fulin. The last M'ing emperor – Chongzhen – committed suicide as Beijing fell to rebel forces, which then fought the Qing for control. Fulin – renamed emperor Shunzhi – was placed on the throne as the Son of Heaven, although it was not until the 1680's that all of China was united under the Manchu banner.

The Manchu Dynasty lasted for about 350 years, and only crumbled with the definitive end of imperial China and the hands of the Xinhai revolution in 1912. During this time, China became highly internalised, with notable stratification of social classes and suppression of ethnic diversity (including the forced wearing of a queue). The arts of this period are among the most ornate and studied of China's long history, and artists were a major part of court life. They were particularly well known for their naturalistic painting, calligraphy, printing and reissuing of (censored) works by classical authors. The influence of western art – brought by traders – infiltrated various areas of Qing art in the 18th century, especially in painting and architecture (i.e. the Summer Palace). Ceramics for export – notably at the Jingdezhen porcelain kilns – became a major avenue of expression in the later periods, and were the main source of Europe's 18th century mania for Chinoiserie. Imperial and court arts are perhaps the most valuable and rare, however. Art was used to configure one's status within the court environment, and this applied in death as well as life. Pieces such as this would have been extortionately expensive at the time, and would have been made for a very prominent member of a royal court. They are an imposing reminder of China's imperial might, and would be a superb addition to any discerning collection.

- (LA.574 (LSO))

Qing Gilt Wooden Sculpture of Guanyin



PF.2959

Origin: China

Circa:

17 th Century AD to 19 th Century AD

Dimensions: 69" (175.3cm) high

Catalogue: V22

Collection: Chinese

Medium: Wood

Location: United States

Outstanding among Buddhist images is this Guanyin known as the Bodhisattva of Mercy and Compassion. The Guanyin makes helping others toward enlightenment her mission. Originally depicted as a male in early Chinese Buddhist forms, the Guanyin eventually became associated with a local Chinese Mother Goddess, "bringer of children," and also because the gentleness and compassion of the deity suggest feminine qualities. Thus, a child accompanies the goddess figure either in her embrace or at her side.

Wearing a lavish crown of jewels illuminated by the glow of her halo, she stands atop a dragon submerged by the water gushing out of the vase she controls with her foot. The head, erect and frontal, shows the calm serenity of one who, having overcome the suffering of this world, has found peace in the lotus of the good law. Raised in the abhaya mudra the hand indicates that the faithful should have no fear but should put their trust in her. She holds a mala, rosary, in one hand and draped over her raised forearm as she assumes an elegant pose, her body clothed in exquisite silken robes of lotus decor.

The feeling of serenity that emanates from this religious figure is sure to touch those who share her presence. Guanyin sculptures were often worshipped by local women who gave offerings to the goddess in exchange for her protection and guidance in domestic affairs. - (PF.2959)

THE BAKARAT GALLERY

Emirates Palace, Abu Dhabi, UAE | Tel: 971-269-08950

Alserkal Avenue, Street 8, Al Quoz 1 Dubai, UAE, B9 | Tel: 971-501-306248

58 Brook Street, Mayfair, London, UK | Tel: 44-20-7493-7778

421 North Rodeo Drive, Beverly Hills, California | Tel: 1-310-859-8408

8645 Sunset Boulevard, West Hollywood, California | Tel: 1-310-360-0712

31 Nagdawi Street, Rabieh, Amman, Jordan | Tel: 962-06-5545960