

THE BARAKAT GALLERY

VOLUME XXXI



H.683
T'ang Sancai-Glazed Celestial King
Dated ca. 618-906 A.D.
Height: 34 3/4 inches, 88.3 cm
From China

405 N. Rodeo Drive, Beverly Hills, California 90210

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The T'ang Dynasty was a golden age of Chinese culture. The arts reached new levels of sophistication. Poetry and literature flourished under the enlightened rulership. The Silk Road brought fortunes into China on the backs of camels, carrying exotic luxury items from distant lands. Foreign merchants from across Central Asia and the Middle East settled in the urban centers of the T'ang China, foremost among them the thriving capital of Chang'an (modern X'ian), a bustling cosmopolitan center of over two million inhabitants. The T'ang Dynasty was a relatively stable period of great prosperity representing one of the greatest cultural flourishing in human history.



H.678
T'ang Sancai-Glazed Camel
Dated ca. 618-906 A.D.
Height: 21 inches, 53.3 cm
From China

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H.681

T'ang Sancai-Glazed Spirit Guardian
Dated ca. 618-906 A.D.
Height: 29 1/4 inches, 74.3 cm
From China



H.680

T'ang Sancai-Glazed Spirit Guardian
Dated ca. 618-906 A.D.
Height: 33 inches, 83.8 cm
From China



The legacy of the T'ang survives foremost in their tremendous artistic creations. While poems and literature recreate the mood of the times, when confronted by a T'ang sculpture, we are in direct contact with the past. Holding a marbled-glazed vessel in our hands, we repeat an ancient action just as a T'ang aristocrat might have done ages ago. Much of the work that survived intact was specifically commissioned for burial purposes. Known as mingqi, literally meaning, "works for the afterlife," this ancient tradition is based upon the Chinese belief that death was merely an extension of our earthly existence. Mingqi were any variety of objects created in order to provide the deceased with a comfortable life in the next world.

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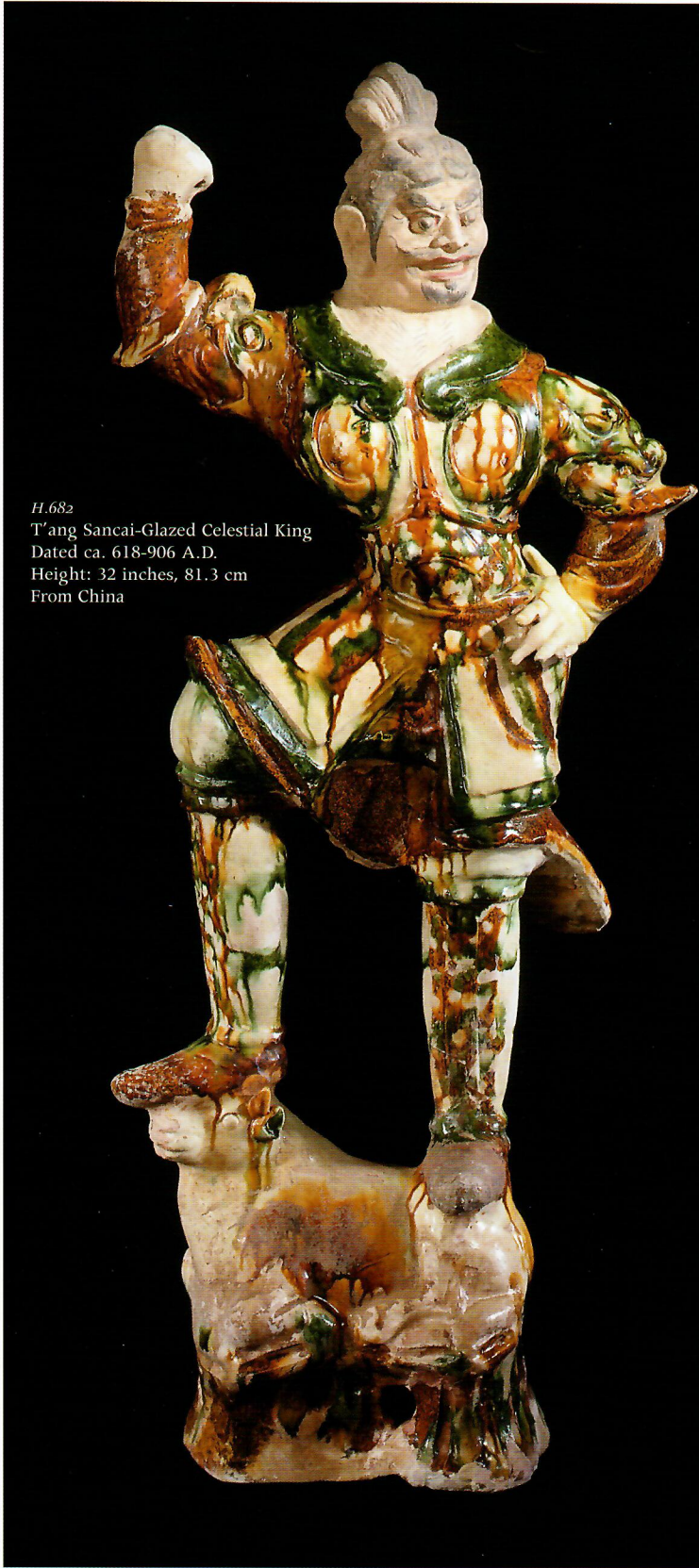
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Throughout Chinese history, the diverse forms of mingqi, ranging from sculptures of warriors and government officials to cooking vessels and livestock, reflect the religious and social customs of the time and place in which they were interred. During the T'ang Dynasty, mingqi generally symbolized the power of the centralized state and the economic fortunes amassed through trade along the Silk Road. However, mingqi of the T'ang era are notable for their distinctive glazing technique known as Sancai, or "three-colored." The technique of Sancai glazing was a unique innovation of T'ang artists, expounding upon the traditional monochrome glazing techniques initiated during the Han Dynasty (206 B.C.-220 A.D.).

H.682
T'ang Sancai-Glazed Celestial King
Dated ca. 618-906 A.D.
Height: 32 inches, 81.3 cm
From China

H.679
T'ang Sancai-Glazed Camel
Dated ca. 618-906 A.D.
Height: 21 1/4 inches, 54 cm
From China



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H.676

T'ang Sancai-Glazed Horse

Dated ca. 618-906 A.D.

Height: 18 1/2 inches, 47 cm

From China



Although Sancai-glazed works are among the most famous of all Chinese art objects, they were only created within a two hundred year span during the T'ang Dynasty. The main technical advantage of the Sancai method was its comparatively low firing temperature of around 800 degrees. The sculptures were made out of kaolin, a nearly spotless white clay that allowed the colors of the glaze to shine uncontested. Metallic ores were added as the coloring agents, iron for red and brown, antimony for yellow, and copper for green. The forms of the sculpture were impressed from molds, the various parts assembled together while still wet, highlights added, and finally the whole was covered in glaze and fired. Occasionally, a work would be coated with a special glaze and fired again in order to achieve a glossier coat. The Sancai glaze was not reserved for any particular type of work and was applied to the full range of mingqi, including warriors, guardians, civic officials, and animals alike.

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H.47A
T'ang Seated Lady
Dated ca. 618-906 A.D.
Height: 8 1/4 inches, 21 cm
From China



One of the most common types of figures is the Lokapala, also known as the Devaraja, or Celestial King. This fierce, armored guardian traditionally stands upon a recumbent ox, as seen in these two examples, symbolic of the Celestial King's authority. One of the two Celestial Kings wears an impressive headdress, delicately modeled and carefully painted, in the form of a magnificent phoenix-like bird. These figures had their origins in Buddhist philosophy; however, over the ages, as society became more secularized, they began to fulfill the more generic role of tomb guardians. As society evolved, these figures lost their religious significance and became symbolic of the military might that protected the borders of the empire from barbarian invaders. Clearly, these are imposing figures that were supposed to ward away the forces of evil and protect the deceased throughout eternity.



H.675
T'ang Marble-Glazed Terracotta Bowl
Dated ca. 618-906 A.D.
Height: 1 3/4 inches, 4.5 cm
From China

Perhaps the most unique mingqi are representations of mythological composite creatures known as spirit guardians that defended the tombs of Chinese rulers. Originating during the Six Dynasties period (222-589 A.D.), these figures are always represented in pairs, one being an amalgamation of various animal parts and the other a combination of human and animal features. With snarling teeth and fangs, animal hooves and claws, wings emerging from their shoulders, and headdresses of flames, these creatures are clearly meant to inspire fear and dread in the hearts of robbers, or any evil spirits that might attempt to infiltrate the tomb. Although these works are supposed to be frightful, the masterfully delicate sculpting of their flaming heads and the gorgeous colors of their Sancai glaze prove more attractive than repelling.

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H.33
Pair of T'ang Figures
Dated ca. 618-906 A.D.
Height: 9 1/4 inches, 23.5 cm
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At Left:

H.685

T'ang Sancai-Glazed Civic Official

Dated ca. 618-906 A.D.

Height: 28 inches, 71.1 cm

From China

At Right:

H.684

T'ang Sancai-Glazed Civic Official

Dated ca. 618-906 A.D.

Height: 30 3/4 inches, 78.1 cm

From China

Below:

FJ.6845

T'ang Gold Cup

Dated ca. 618-906 A.D.

Height: 2 1/2 inches, 6.3 cm

From China



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H.677
T'ang Sancai-Glazed Horse
Dated ca. 618-906 A.D.
Height: 18 3/4 inches, 47.6 cm
From China

Among the most popular examples of Chinese art are the charming representations of camels and horses, revealing the significance of these animals within the culture. Horses, believed to be ancestors of dragons, were revered symbols of prestige and military might. The horses imported from the Turkic tribes of Central Asia, a bigger, stronger breed than the native Mongol Pony, were vital to repelling nomadic invaders from the North and securing the borders of the empires. A group of three mounted foreigners, shown with distinctive beards, most likely depict Central Asian or Jewish merchants who traded along the Silk Road. Perhaps they have arrived to trade these valuable steeds for precious Chinese silk. Horses were treasured possessions of the aristocracy who enjoyed playing games of polo and training steeds to prance. Another horse depicts a mounted female courtier possibly practicing her equestrian skills for a tournament or ceremony. The elegant adornments that decorate these horses reveal their sacred status. Only the finest quality saddle, patterned numnah, ornamented bridal and headstall were elegant enough to be worn by the horse.

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H.629
T'ang Painted Horse
Dated ca. 618-906 A.D.
Height: 12 3/4 inches, 32.4 cm
From China



Although less refined, the camel was an equally integral part of society. This lovely Sancai-glazed sculpture of a camel is depicted hauling a load of merchandise into the market. The fortunes amassed through commerce along the Silk Road were made possible through the camel.

The dusty, treacherous trails of this route could only be traversed by the two-humped Bactrian camel, a durable creature that could withstand the scorching heat of the desert and the freezing chills of the snowcapped mountains. The T'ang government kept vast herds of these invaluable beasts; for they were the empire's economic link to far away markets where their precious silk supplies could be bartered. Likewise, camels were a common sight in cosmopolitan T'ang cities, frequently seen hauling the latest shipment directly into the marketplace, symbolic of commerce and the extravagant wealth of the Silk Road.

The fortunes that flowed into China from the Silk Road created a luxury loving culture that demanded the finest. The elegant set of six bronze wine cups is one such example. Of importance is the two-character inscription on the base of one of the larger cups that denotes, "Imperial Warehouse." Thus, we can presume that this set was once the treasured possession of the Emperor or a member of the imperial entourage. We can imagine a courtier, so wonderfully immortalized in the set of eight figures, offering to refill the cup after all the wine was consumed. Whether in bronze or gold, such wine cups were a staple accessory in T'ang times and are frequently mentioned in poetry of the era as symbols of joy and prosperity. Such precious items are astounding not only for their beauty and refinement, but also for the extreme wealth and luxury they symbolized today.

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H.690
Set of Eight T'ang Courtiers
Dated ca. 618-906 A.D.
Height: 9 inches, 22.9 cm
From China



H.656
Set of Six T'ang Bronze Wine Cups
Dated ca. 618-906 A.D.
Diameter of Largest Cup: 4 1/2 inches, 11.4 cm
From China

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The wealth brought into the nation along the Silk Road was a result of the relative stability of the time, a stability maintained by the vast legions of government officials who presided over far away territories.

These civic officials embody the will of the imperial court, carrying out the Emperor's orders both in the capital and in distant provinces. Immortalized in Sancai-glazed sculptures, appearing composed and austere, these officials stand erect, proudly wearing their robes and headdresses. They hold writing tablets, symbols of their role within the bureaucracy as well as their intellect and wisdom. Strict examinations ensured that only the most highly qualified individuals would be inducted into the government. This honored role, the representative of the imperial will, is clearly embodied within these sculptures.



H.688

Horse and Foreign Rider

Dated ca. Late Sui Dynasty (581-618 A.D.)-Early

T'ang Dynasty (618-906 A.D.)

Height: 20 inches, 50.8 cm

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H.686

Horse and Female Rider

Dated ca. Late Sui Dynasty (581-618 A.D.)-Early

T'ang Dynasty (618-906 A.D.)

Height: 19 inches, 48.3 cm

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H.687

Horse and Foreign Rider

Dated ca. Late Sui Dynasty (581-618 A.D.)-Early

T'ang Dynasty (618-906 A.D.)

Height: 19 1/2 inches, 49.5 cm

From China

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Above all, the T'ang Dynasty can be characterized as an era of unrivalled wealth and luxury, an era where the art and literature flourished alongside commerce. A time of expansion and stability, T'ang China was a multicultural empire where foreign merchants lived next to native artisans and both thrived. Precious treasures were imported on the backs of camels from far away lands and bartered for Chinese silk, medicinal herbs, and pungent spices. New ideas and exotic artistic forms followed alongside. The T'ang Dynasty was a golden age of Chinese culture, a renaissance where many of the forms and objects we now associate with Chinese History were first created. Gazing upon this stunning collection of treasures from the T'ang Dynasty, we are confronted with an elegant assortment of burial art. With such astounding tombs, we can only imagine how glorious life must have been during this period. Truly, the T'ang era was more than just an apex of Chinese civilization; it was one of the greatest cultural outpourings in human history.



H.689
Horse and Foreign Rider
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T'ang Dynasty (618-906 A.D.)
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H.691
T'ang Female Courtier
Dated ca. 618-906 A.D.
Height: 13 1/2 inches, 34.3 cm
From China

To receive catalogs and invitations to the exhibitions, please mail your name and address or contact the gallery at (310) 859-8408. Please specify your interest: Biblical, Etruscan, African, Chinese, Egyptian, Greek, Pre-Columbian, South East Asia, Near East, Roman, Tribal Art, Contemporary Art, Ancient Glass, Ancient Coins, Jewelry, Terra-cottas

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