

## *Terra Cotta Horses*

### *Funeral object*

*600 horse statues  
each horse different and unique, as were warriors  
tall but heavy in build  
likely Asiatic Wild Horse or Hequ horse*

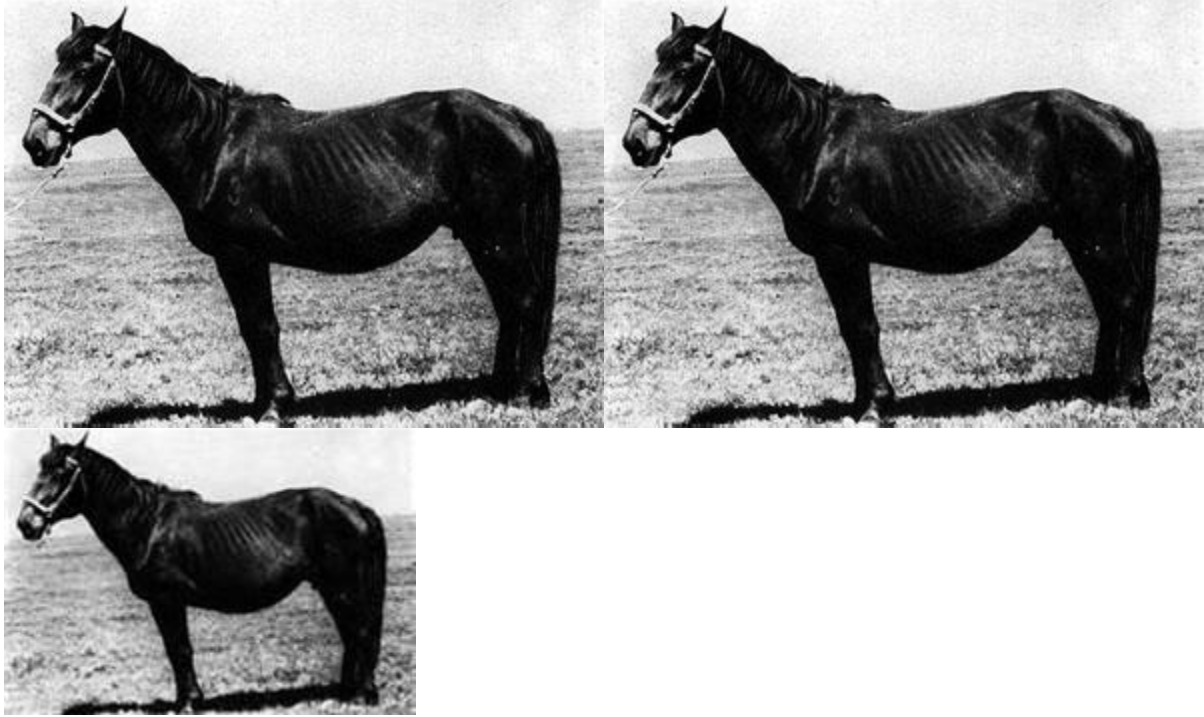
### *Cavalry horse-*

*Working horse, bred for speed and power  
Well groomed, mane, forelock and braided tail  
Attentive- eyes are alert, nostril are flared, potentially fierce  
The "Dragon" horse of legends. The attributes of a dragon embodied in a horse  
Saddle with no stirrups, balance and finesse of rider, plus manipulating a  
weapon while galloping across uneven terrain in a tight formation.*

### *Chariot horse-*

*Sturdy and capable of pulling  
Smaller than cavalry horse  
Sets of four, must work well together*

*The cavalry and war chariots had an extremely important place in ancient armies. Those examples excavated from the pit included steeds that were vigorous and fat. Their ears were erect, their eyes wide and mouths open, with smallish heads and relatively short legs. Some people say that these horses seem to resemble the Hequ Horses found in Gansu today or the Hetian Horses found in Xinjiang, which are excellent racehorses, good at climbing slopes, and also are excellent warhorses with great strength.*



*Hequ horse*

***Celestial Horses***  
***Funeral object***



2002.45 @ MIA

*This magnificent statue of a young stallion represents one of the fabled "heavenly horses" of the Eastern Han dynasty (A.D. 25-220). Imported along the Silk Road from Ferghana in Central Asia, western horses were greatly admired for their strength, size, and endurance by the Han military and aristocracy. All members of Han elite owned horses for riding and to pull their beautifully appointed carriages. Bronze horses such as this one were placed in elaborately furnished aristocratic tombs and were meant to provide transportation for the deceased in the afterlife.*

*Funeral object, transportation in the afterlife  
Celestial horses were Arabian horses, introduced over the Silk Road,  
called celestial as they appear to have come from heaven*

### **Tomb Reliquary**

*Funeral object*

*The stunning horses of this set can be argued to be Arabians from the Middle East, known for beauty, endurance and confirmation. One horse could be as expensive as 40 bolts of the finest Chinese silk.*

*While the Mongolian pony was stamping its mark in Asia the Arabian was kicking up the sands of the Arabian Peninsula. The Arab is a thin skinned desert horse of incredible beauty, stamina, endurance and loyalty.*

*In the 6<sup>th</sup> century CE the Prophet Muhammad is said to have selected the Arabian horse for his service and for his evangelizing missions. The Arabian was referred to as the "Supreme Blessing". Mares were prized and used in battle because they were less likely to vocalize than stallions, which allowed for silent and deadly surprise attacks. Legend tells that Muhammad penned one hundred mares in the desert in the blazing sun with no water or food for three days. At the end of the three days he ordered the pen opened with food and water right outside. At that very instant he blew the battle horn to charge and three mares turned away from food and water and immediately came towards the battle horn. Legend states all Arabians have descended from those three mares.*

*Horses were of tremendous importance to the rulers of T'ang. The horse was considered an instrument of diplomatic (tribute) and military policy, and horsemanship was regarded to be an aristocratic privilege. Foreign horses poured into the T'ang empire from the nomadic horse dealers in the region of Ferghana as far West as Samarkand, but it was the Turks who dominated the horse market through the 8th century. Accordingly, the horse became a symbol of status and power to the 8th-century Chinese aristocrats, and it is little wonder that they chose to be accompanied in death by images of their favorite riding animals. Given the infinite variety of superb ceramic steeds in the total repertoire, it may be stated that the T'ang realistic style reached its height with figures of horses.*

*Object of the Month-February 2012  
Sheila-Marie Untiedt*

*Tomb Retinue*  
*Circa 725 CE*  
*Gallery 208*  
*49.1.1-10*



*Medium: Decorative Arts and Utilitarian Objects, Ceramic | Earthenware with polychrome glaze*

*Size: 38 3/4 x 20 in. (98.43 x 50.8 cm)*

*Creation Place: Asia, China*

*Culture: Asia, China*

*Style: T'ang dynasty, 8th century*

*Physical Description: Dignitary, probably a civil counselor. Glazed pottery tomb figure, one of a pair, mounted on a stand. The costume is predominantly brown with details in mottled colors. Head, headdress and hands unglazed.*

*Credit: Collection Minneapolis Institute of Arts; The Ethel Morrison Van Derlip Fund*

*Accession Number: 49.1.1*

*I personally frequently use this tomb retinue on tours because it seems to connect with children and school groups due to the animals and the coloring and also with adults due to the historical content and the pure visual appeal. The display case is helpful in that groups can move along the case front and really see each object but it is problematic in that it is only a 200 degree view.*

*This item has been heavily researched and catalogued. I have included an interview with Robert Jacobsen I discovered and also the extensive material file from Arts ConnectEd. There is also a thick file in the docents lounge with even more background information. The amount of material can be overwhelming frankly so I will humbly attempt to "net it out" for you.*

- 1. This is clearly a "Golden Age" of China. The T'ang dynasty (618-906 CE) was certainly a height of power, wealth and reach. China was a vigorous trading partner along the Silk Road. Goods and materials entered China and much in turn left China for foreign markets. Not only did trade products enter China but ideas, foreigners and religions entered and began to be absorbed into Chinese culture. Buddhism is an excellent example. The stunning horses of this set can be argued to be Arabians from the Middle East, known for beauty, endurance and confirmation. One horse could be as expensive as 40 bolts of the finest Chinese silk.*
- 2. Sets like this were created as funerary objects to guide and assist the dead in the afterlife. The MIA celestial horse would be another object to compare to*

*the tomb retinue. These tomb pieces became a symbol of importance and wealth and became more and more expansive and expensive. The cobalt blue glaze was extremely expensive and rare. The extensive use on this object suggests the retinue was for an emperor and emperor's family.*

- 3. These sets were commissioned, produced and paraded through the city in a funeral parade before being placed in the tomb. Truly, these objects may have been viewed and displayed to the public for hours only before being buried. We are fortunate they are so well preserved and in perfect condition. Some areas, such as the saddle, were intentionally unglazed or only given a wash of some type, which has now disappeared.*
- 4. As the funerary pieces became more and more lavish and extensive the production began to strain the supply of artisans and materials. An imperial decree was issued in 742 CE setting limits on the size and number of tomb pieces according to the rank of the deceased.*
- 5. This set was excavated in 1948 from an imperial tomb at An Chia Kou near Lo-yang in Honan Province. The city is located on the south bank of the Yellow river in Honan Province that served as one of the imperial capitals in ancient times. It is traditionally regarded as the site where Buddhism was first propagated into China.*

*Sheila-Marie Untiedt*

*Interview with Robert Jacobsen (from MIA website, Asia section)*

*Curator of Asian Art*

*1. Where did these figures come from and where were they made?*

*This set of ten figurines was excavated intact in 1948 from an imperial tomb in Honan province. They've been dated to the 8th century, and in fact were found near the capital of the ancient T'ang dynasty, which was in place between the years 618 and 906 A.D. The "retinue", as such a group is called, is remarkable for its large size, fine modeling, lavish use of rare cobalt-blue glaze and the fact that it is apparently one of only two complete excavated tomb sets in Western collections.*

*2. What are all of the individual figures?*



(1) One of two *lokapalas*, or guardian warriors.



(2) The *lokapalas* stand on scaled-down bulls.

*The retinue consists of five pairs of figures. There are two lokapalas (pronunciation: "LOH-kah-pah-lahs")(1, 2), which are guardian warriors of Indian Buddhist origin, often shown standing on bulls as they are here.*





(3) *Ch'i-t'ou*, or earth spirits.



(4) Civil officials.



(5, 6) Two camels.



(7) Two fine horses are included in the retinue.

*Then there are ch'i-t'ou (pronunciation: "CHEE-toh") – or earth spirits (3) – which you can see are composite creatures with feline bodies, grotesque heads, flaring wings, and flame-like crests. There are two civil officials (4), two camels (5, 6), and two exceptionally fine horses.(7)*

**3. What was the purpose of these relatively large figures?**

*The ancient Chinese believed wholeheartedly in life after death, and during the T'ang dynasty they continued a long-established practice of placing clay figures in the burial chambers of their dead.*

*These burial sculptures, called ming ch'i (pronunciation: "MING-chee") or "spirit articles," were placed in tombs to accompany and protect the dead in the afterlife. A special imperial government office was created for the production and supervision of ming ch'i.*

*Funeral processions at this time were extravagant and festive occasions. An ancient writer wrote that the dead were accompanied to their graves by great crowds who were entertained, in tents and pavilions along the route, with food, wine, actors, and acrobats.*

*Some families spent everything they had in efforts to compete with the funerals of their neighbors. Eventually, an imperial decree issued in 742 A.D. set limits on the size and number of tomb pieces allowed, according to the rank of the deceased. For example, dignitaries of high rank were allowed up to seventy pottery figures, while commoners were permitted fifteen.*

#### *4. How were they made?*

*These large objects were made by pressing clay into molds. The earth spirits, for example, were made in a two-part mold and then joined together with a clay slip at the arms and legs. The heads were made in a separate pair of molds and set into the bodies.*

*The same general principles of construction were followed in making animals and large-scale figures such as these, although the number of molds required was greater. By using molds, Chinese potters were able to create large-scale, three-dimensional pieces that were hollow, which prevented them from exploding in the kiln during firing.*

*Molds also permitted the potters to satisfy the substantial commercial demand for burial sculpture. All works still had to be finished by hand, however, which allowed for greater detail and individual expression despite the mass quantities made.*

*After the mold was completed, most tomb pieces were completely covered with a white substance called a slip. This process kept the iron content of the clay from discoloring the glazes, which were added next, and gave the colors a clearer, brighter quality.*

*The colored glazes most often used were green, amber, and yellow, although the potter was not limited to these three colors, as these figures show. The colors were formed by adding iron, manganese, or copper to a clear lead glaze.*

*Occasionally, rare and costly blue glazes were also applied. The blue coloring agent was cobalt, a highly sought-after import item first brought into China from the Middle East during this period. The scarcity of this fourth color suggests that it was usually reserved for the best and most striking pieces.*

*The lavish use of the cobalt blue glaze on these figures indicates that they were commissioned by a wealthy family who could afford the rare and costly material.*

*During the firing process, the lead glazes would run and streak, resulting in the luxuriously blended splashes and drips of color that typify T'ang ceramics.*

*5. How can we be so certain about the dating of objects like this?*

*Well, this group of objects is dated within the first half of the 8th century. This date is based on both stylistic and technological evidence. First, excavations of T'ang tombs have established that the height of multi-colored ceramics lasted from 700 to 756 A.D., ending when the country was shaken by the disastrous An Lushan rebellion. Second, samples from this group underwent thermo-luminescence tests at the Research Laboratory for Archaeology and the History of Art, in Oxford, and the results were positive, placing the works within the range 718-1000 A.D.*

### *From Arts ConnectEd*

*This retinue was reportedly excavated in early April of 1948 from an imperial tomb at An Chia Kou near Lo-yang in Honan Province. Comprised of five pairs of court officials, warrior guardians, earth spirits, horses, and camels, the set is distinguished by its fine modeling, large-scale figures, abundant use of rare cobalt blue glaze, excellent surface condition and the fact that it has survived intact, constituting one of the few complete tomb sets in existence.*

### **BACKGROUND**

*The T'ang dynasty (A.D. 618-906) has long been considered by the Chinese as a "Golden Age," and it certainly ranks as one of their most vigorous cultural periods. It might be argued that it is the art of pottery, with its robust vitality, cosmopolitan character and technical advances, that affords us the most tangible link to T'ang artistic genius.*

*One can also not overemphasize the invigorating effect that the influx of foreigners during the 7th and 8th centuries had on the Chinese intellect and creative spirit. During most of the 7th century, China was militarily expansive, incorporating Mongolia, Chinese Turkestan, and Korea. Eventually, her political influence extended into Russian Turkestan, Transoxiana, and she administered Kashmir, Kabul, and Balkh through the Chinese viceroy at Kucha in Turkestan. During this period of relative prosperity, China was the major power between the Yellow Sea and Persia, and her trade goods were highly regarded by the rest of the world.*

*The great capital, Chang-an, had, by the 8th century, nearly 2 million taxable residents, including a sizable foreign population comprised chiefly of envoys, clerics, and merchants from the West and North: Turks, Uighurs, Tocharians, Sogdians, Arabs, Persians, and Hindus. Much of the exotic wealth brought into China and the silks, ceramics, and metalwork traded for it traveled along the great overland silk routes which stretched from the teeming cities of Yang-chou, Lo-yang, and Chang-an out through the northwestern frontier of China along the edge of the Gobi desert, leading eventually to Samarkand, Persia, and Syria. Accordingly, the influence of Indian religions and astronomy, Persian textile patterns, Sassanian metalcraft, Tocharian music and dance, Turkish costume, and horses from Farghana entered into the mainstream of T'ang aristocratic life. It is this basic cosmopolitanism which lies behind the extraordinary variety of motif and figures encountered in the Minneapolis tomb set and, for that matter, in most forms of T'ang art.*

#### **MING-CH'I**

*During this era of exotic taste, however, the Chinese continued their long established practice of interring wood and clay figurines of humans and animals in the burial chambers of their deceased. The ancient Chinese believed in an afterlife, and human and animal sacrifice during the Shang and Chou dynasties (1766-255 B.C.) was often practiced as archaeology has shown. Exactly when the changeover to replicas took place is not certain, but Confucius (6th century B.C.) condemned the tradition of human sacrifice, and the Chou li (Book of Chou, ca. 4th century B.C.) mentions the substitution of ming-ch'i for human sacrifice. The Chinese term for these articles, ming-ch'i, is perhaps best translated as "spirit articles," and they were meant to accompany and protect the dead in the afterlife. Although already popular during Western Han (206 B.C.-9 A.D.), it was during the early T'ang (618-756 A.D.) that they were produced in their greatest numbers at a time when funeral processions and burial had become most extravagant. In fact, a special imperial government office, the Chen-Kuan-shu, was created for the production and supervision of ming-ch'i. Regulations were established as to the number and type of grave objects and the arrangements of the funeral procession according to rank, not only of the aristocracy, but of the common classes as well. T'ang funeral processions were relatively festive occasions, and mourners would often carry the grave furnishings, including ceramics, to the tomb in full view of massed crowds as a*

*somewhat ostentatious gesture of filial piety. An ancient account relates that some families, in an effort to compete with their neighbors, were faced with financial disaster. (Prodan 64) Eventually, an imperial decree issued in 742 set limits upon the size and number of tomb pieces allowed according to the rank of the deceased.*

#### **TECHNIQUE**

*Typically, most pottery figures were mold-made in mass quantity, and both glazed and unglazed figurines could be interred in the same tomb, even when it was a royal burial, as recent excavations have shown. Glazed wares were usually decorated over a white slip with a palette of green, amber, cream, and straw yellow to produce the unique san t'sai or three-color glaze which typified T'ang ceramics. Although san t'sai means three-color, many variations of the above hues were used in san t'sai ceramics so that the colors were not necessarily limited to three. On occasion, rare and costly blue glazes were also applied, but the scarcity of this fourth color suggests that it was usually reserved for the best and most striking figures, and it has been associated with more important tombs. The blue coloring agent was cobalt oxide, a highly sought-after import item first brought into China from the Middle East during early T'ang. When added to a lead silicate glaze and fired in oxidizing conditions, it will mature as a pale cornflower blue, or when properly concentrated in an alkaline solution, it deepens into a brilliant Prussian blue. Although other tomb sets exist, only one other predominantly blue glazed group is known. It is part of a Japanese collection but is smaller in scale and less articulately modeled than the Minneapolis set.*

#### **DATING**

*The MIA Tomb Retinue is dated within the first half of the 8th century. This date is based on stylistic and technological evidence. First, excavations of T'ang tombs have established that the height of polychromed ceramics lasted from 700 to 756 A.D., ending when the country was shaken by the disastrous An Lushan rebellion. Second, samples from the Minneapolis group underwent thermoluminescence tests at the Research Laboratory for Archaeology and the History of Art, Oxford, in June of 1978, and the results were positive, placing the works within the range 718-1000 A.D.*

#### **T'ANG TOMB RETINUE: The Standing Court Officials**

*The pair of standing court officials with hands clasped and wearing long robes is perhaps the most stereotyped form among the tomb figurines. Both figures are poised on rock formation pedestals, perhaps to emphasize their exalted position, and each is clad in the wide-sleeved robe, long underskirt, and turned-up shoes which was traditional attire for court officials. One robe is glazed predominantly in blue while its counterpart is decorated in brown with blue trim. The taller figure sports a so-called "butterfly hat" which had evolved from the official cap common to the earlier Han court. Each image has a perforation in his hand where originally his symbol of rank ( ) was carried. Typical of the type, the heads are unglazed, but the faces are crisply sculptured and cold pigments have been added to complete the effect of life-like portraits. The figures seem to be of different ethnic types, or perhaps represent a human being and a deity.*

#### **T'ANG TOMB RETINUE: Lokapala**

*In direct contrast to the static character of the court dignitaries are two powerful guardian deities who each strike a vigorous pose, right arm upraised, while standing on a recumbent bull. Usually referred to as Fang-hsiang or Lokapala, the figures are clearly drawn from the Buddhist pantheon, their compelling poses and their sculptural character definitely rooted in the Buddhist figural tradition. Lokapalas are the "four heavenly kings," guardians of the cardinal points of the compass, and are often seen at the four quarters of Chinese and Japanese Buddhist altars protecting the main image from evil forces. Typical of T'ang Lokapala figures, these are shown standing on a demon or bull and are clad in full-plate armor. Originally, each brandished a sword or spear in his clenched fist, but these weapons, probably made of wood, have long ago turned to dust. Although sheet armor of this type is typical of 8th-century Buddhist art, it is quite fanciful, containing decorative elements of Sassanian design and elaborate horned masks at the shoulders. The faces evince a wrathful physiognomy scowling with bulging eyes and are modeled with powerful conviction. The symbolic phoenix headdresses are common to other large T'ang guardians, and they add a dramatic accent to these dynamic images. In this instance, however, the motif is indigenous to China, the fantastic bird being one of the "four heavenly creatures" of Chinese mythology and, as such, it seems appropriate that it be associated in this fashion with the Lokapalas who themselves are heavenly kings.*

#### **T'ANG TOMB RETINUE: Earth Spirits**

*An equally compelling pair of guardians include the two fantastic winged monsters commonly referred to as chimera, earth spirits (t'u kuei), p'i-hsieh (wards off evil), or Ch'i-t'ou.*

*These ferocious composite creatures seem to blend a feline body with the horns and hooves of a deer, a grotesque head, flaring wings, and flame-like finials. Both figures sit on standard rock-work pedestals and are decorated with elaborate drip patterns in blue, amber, and white. One beast has a human face with enormous ears, all of which has been left unglazed.*

#### **T'ANG TOMB RETINUE: Horses**

*Perhaps the most popular of all subjects for the T'ang potter was the horse, and, indeed, the type has now become stereotypical of T'ang ceramic art. The two large horses in this set are truly outstanding. They stand four-square on unglazed rectangular plinthes, necks arched, heads down to one side, creating a taut profile, the linear rhythm being reminiscent of Chinese pictorial art. One steed is glazed in a brilliant, deep cobalt with a contrasting white and brown streaked mane. One of only three such blue-glazed horses known to exist, and the largest and best of those three, it stands as the highlight of the Minneapolis retinue. The saddle has been left unglazed, and the pigment which once decorated it is now gone; the harness trappings are of Sassanian origin. This horse is paired with a companion glazed in*

*chestnut brown with a blue saddle and drip-glazed blanket. The trimmed bristle mane accentuates the tensed energy of its powerful neck.*

*Horses were of tremendous importance to the rulers of T'ang. The horse was considered an instrument of diplomatic (tribute) and military policy, and horsemanship was regarded to be an aristocratic privilege. Foreign horses poured into the T'ang empire from the nomadic horse dealers in the region of Ferghana as far West as Samarkand, but it was the Turks who dominated the horse market through the 8th century. In those last decades, the price of an Uighur horse became 40 bolts of Chinese silk, an extraordinary sum. Accordingly, the horse became a symbol of status and power to the 8th-century Chinese aristocrats, and it is little wonder that they chose to be accompanied in death by images of their favorite riding animals. Given the infinite variety of superb ceramic steeds in the total repertoire, it may be stated that the T'ang realistic style reached its height with figures of horses.*

#### **T'ANG TOMB RETINUE: Camels**

*Last to be considered in this group of grave furnishings are sculptures of another popular animal type, the Bactrian (two humped) camel. During T'ang, the Chinese empire extended across most of Central Asia, and camels were treasured for their reliability in transporting men and trade merchandise through the desert wastes of Gobi and Tarim. Like horses, camels had to be found abroad to meet domestic needs, and they, too, came as presents to the throne, commodities, and war booty. Like the imperial steeds, vast camel herds were maintained by the Chinese government on the broad grasslands of Shensi and Kansu. Private gentlemen also kept camels as riding animals and beasts of burden, although most camel herders were foreigners from Mongolia, Tibet, and central Asia. Undoubtedly, the great, dusty beasts thronging the sprawling Southern Market of Lo-yang afforded T'ang potters ample opportunity to study their every characteristic. The animals' exotic nature, as well as the wealth they represented, made them likely candidates for tomb furnishings.*

*The Minneapolis camels are rendered realistically, heads thrown back with snarling mouths; they easily convey the animals' surly nature. Both are splash-glazed with a chestnut color. One is predominantly white; the other is brown. The twin humps are draped with richly decorated blue blankets with Sassanian floret designs. One camel seems to be carrying cargo in the form of a large ogre mask. This motif, perhaps representing tooled leather saddle bags, is often encountered on other large T'ang camels, but its symbolic content remains speculative. Notably, however, where pairs of camels have survived, it is common that only one will be saddled with pack and mask. The burden usually consists of food, drink, or wild game, and it is tempting to think it represents sustenance for the deceased in his afterlife.*



*The above is an adaptation of an article written by Robert Jacobsen in June, 1979. See Docent Files: Robert Jacobsen, "Ceramic Tomb Sets of Early T'ang" in The Minneapolis Institute of Arts Bulletin (Vol LXIV, 1978-1980), pp. 5-23.*

#### **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

*Prodan, M., The Art of the T'ang Potter, London, 1960.*

*Schafer, Edward H., The Golden Peaches of Samarkand, Berkeley, 1963. An unsurpassed study of T'ang exotics and foreign trade.*

#### **TOUR TIPS**

*Use on the following tours:*

- *Asian Art*
- *Highlights of the Collection*
- *Visual Elements*
- *Safari*
- *People and Places*
- *How Was it Made?*
- *Sculpture*
- *Religion and Art*

*Compare the retinue to other objects intended for tomb burial, such as the Chinese bronzes or the Egyptian mummy, jewelry, and amulets. Make comparisons between the religious beliefs of these civilizations and the purposes of the objects.*

*Dealing with the concepts of naturalism and stylization, compare the horses and camels shown here to other animals in the collection, such as:*

- *the 15th-century German Rider Aquamanile*
- *the Luristan bronzes*
- *the Greek lion*
- *the Japanese Hanizwa Horse*
- *the Benin Leopard*
- *Brancusi's Golden Bird*

*Show how the Buddhist Lokapala image appears in Japanese art in the Juni-ten scrolls and in the Nio Pair of Guardian Figures.*

*On a tour of Chinese art which emphasizes ceramics, show how T'ang techniques relate to the development of Chinese ceramics. Stress the importance of this ancient and continuous artistic tradition, and compare and contrast T'ang aesthetic and technique to earlier (Neolithic, Shang, and Chou) and later (Sung, Yuan, Ming, and Ching) ones.*

