



Unknown, China

Tang dynasty (618 – 907 AD)

Bactrian Camel and Groom

Pottery

Asian Arts Council purchase with funds provided by Susan and Eliot Black, 2006.39.1-2

MEET THE ARTIST

These ceramic figures were created during the Tang Dynasty (618-907 ADE) in China. Tomb figures were created by unknown artists as representations of the people, animal, and objects that would be needed in the afterlife.

CONSIDER THE CONTEXT

The Bactrian (two-humped) camel and groom are examples of tomb figures. In ancient China, families of the deceased placed sculptures like these into tombs to represent persons needed to serve their relative in the afterlife. Since artists painted the figures to make them as lifelike as possible, we learn about Silk-Road culture from them. For example, the groom wears Middle Asian attire, typical of oasis towns. In cosmopolitan areas along the Silk Road, Chinese aristocrats hired foreigners, like this Middle Asian, to tend their horses and camels.

For nearly 2000 years, the Silk Road connected the Far East to the Mediterranean world by a vast network of trade routes stretching for over 5000 miles. Caravans traveled through deserts, over mountains and by sea from Turkey to China, from Rome to India or from Egypt to Japan. The traders transported silk, spices, art and other goods, but more importantly they facilitated communication and the exchange of languages, religions and cultures.

LOOK CLOSELY

Questions to start a conversation:

- Encourage students to describe the work of art: “What do you see? What material might it be made from?”
- At first glance these figures look like plain terracotta (baked clay), but on closer inspection we see what appears to be remains of paint. What colors might they have been painted? Why would the paint no longer be easily visible?
- Look at the position of the groom’s arms, and consider what he might be doing. What do you imagine him holding in his hands?
- Why would someone think a camel and groom would be a necessity in an afterlife? What does this need tell us about the society in which these objects were created?

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

HISTORY/ SOCIAL STUDIES THE SPEED OF TECHNOLOGY

Work in groups to research and order different modes of communication to understand how it has evolved.

1. At home or in the classroom, research the following modes of communication. After learning basic information about each, put them in order by the date of their invention.
 - Cellular telephone calls
 - E-mail
 - Fax machine
 - Homing pigeons
 - Newspapers
 - Online instant messages
 - Phonograph
 - Postal system
 - Printing press
 - Radio
 - Satellites
 - Signal flags

- Telegraph
 - Telephone
 - Text Messaging
2. Have students take turns summarizing each mode of communication.
 3. How does technology make the world seem smaller than it did 1000, 100 or even 10 years ago? Consider the rate at which goods and people travel around the world; the ease and speed with which we send and receive information; and our increased understanding of world cultures, histories and religions.

WRITING

1. Have students imagine they've been tasked with selecting one object to send with the President of the United States, into an afterlife.
2. Each student will identify the most important, and write a persuasive essay defending their selection.
3. Have students share their essays, and then write a rebuttal to another student's selection.

ART STARTS

PACKING FOR THE AFTERLIFE

Materials

Ceramic clay (if kiln available) or air dry clay

Ceramic tools

Shoebox or other small sized container

Instructions

1. Have students consider the objects they might pack if going on a trip and never returning home. While they cannot take pets, other people, or large objects such as cars or buildings – they may choose to bring a representation of these.
2. Have students hand build clay models for the objects they would pack. Sufficient detail should be added to effectively identify the specific object they wish to bring with them.
3. All objects must fit into the box or container provided, limiting the size and quantity of objects.
4. Have students write an accompanying statement about the objects they elected to bring with them, and why these were selected.

LEARN MORE

Wells, Donald. *The Silk Road*. New York: Weigl Publishers, 2004.

Mark, Joshua J. The Silk Road. Ancient History Encyclopedia. http://www.ancient.eu/Silk_Road