

# Highlights of the Chinese Tang Dynasty Objects at the Burrell Collection

*by Emma May*

The Tang dynasty, which lasted from the seventh to the tenth century, marks one of the richest and most glorious peaks in the history of Chinese art. Sir William Burrell purchased his first Tang dynasty burial object in 1911. It was not until later on in his life during the 1940's that he avidly began collecting Tang burial objects to form an incredible and varied collection. George Eumorfopolous, a famous collector of Chinese ceramics, brought over a large percentage of Sir William Burrell's Tang dynasty collection from China during the 1940's. The collection comprises of approximately 110 ceramics, 5 jades and 3 bronzes from the Tang dynasty. The collection as a whole represents some of the most fundamental concepts and techniques that were established in the Tang dynasty that were essential to the later development of Chinese porcelain. The development of sancai 'three colour' glaze was the most important technical development during the Tang due to more intensified communications between the East and West by both land and sea and with the continual impact of Buddhism. The collection has many key sancai ceramic wares that were used in burial and were highly prized status objects, the most remarkable are a pair of guardian Fangxiang or Tian Wang (heavenly kings) figures standing nearly a metre tall, they compare closely with a pair in the Victoria and Albert Museum. The ceramic collection has been influenced through Buddhism and this is reflected in the development of Tang dynasty flat dishes to hold offerings, alms bowl shaped vessels and sutra pagoda shaped jars. There are also a great deal of tea bowls, teacups and water droppers within the collection. There are a few examples of pottery figurines from the short-lived Sui dynasty.

The principal types of object associated with the collection for this period are Pottery (lead glazed, hand painted, feldspathic glazed, sancai glazed), Jade and Bronze .

## **Star objects from the collection:**

38-140 Tang dynasty earthenware seated figurine of a wine seller with unglazed face with robes decorated with sancai lead glaze T'ang 618-906AD

38-139 & 38-138 A pair of Tang dynasty earthenware figurines standing with robes decorated with lead glazed sancai. T'ang 618-906AD

38-183 & 38-184 A pair of tang dynasty fangxiang guardian tomb figurines with sancai lead glazing T'ang 618-906AD

38-119 Tang dynasty sancai glazed earthenware model of a Bactrian camel early 8th Century AD.