

Transportation on the Silk Road.

Magda Ketterer.

The Silk Road began in the 2nd c. BC as a result of military expansion. One branch goes to India, one to Russia and the third to the Black Sea. It is really a network of trade routes, which encouraged an amalgam of cultures. The central Asian trade included dancers, ostrich eggs, precious stones, musicians, jugglers, Persian textiles, Syrian glass. Uighur families helped control route and supply of horses.

Whiteware from Shang dynasty, a fusion with feldspar, 1100BC, led to the development of high temperature firing. True porcelain not until Tang (7th c.) Xian was capital, with 2 million inhabitants. Finished canal from Xian to Yangtse delta, which served primarily to transport rice and other foodstuffs. This was the beginning of large-scale trading in Asia. Industry in contrast to the agrarian society of the Han. In their heyday they traded with over 70 countries, including Japan, Vietnam, Korea in the East, Persia and W. Asia. Constantinople is the W. end of the Silk Road.

Tang dynasty was mixed blood, with Turkish intermarriage. All the arts flourished in this period. Pottery shows exchange of ideas. In the second half of period Tang potters and other artists concerned with capturing the spirit of their subjects; before that they presented lithe figures with emphasis on their strength. The later Tang developed an ampler concept of beauty. Trade was of crucial importance for them. They conquered the W. Turks and small states in central Asia became part of China again.

Horse of crucial importance in Chinese culture. In calendar, it represents creativity, friendliness, speed, perseverance. Purchase of horses cost 50million feet of silk per annually during Han, for 16 hand horses. The Tang used cavalry to control empire. Only Imperial family and aristocracy allowed to ride: merchants could use horses only to transport goods.

Sensei horses are very naturalistic and accurate in modelling; believed that horse took the soul of deceased to paradise.

Camels: Bactrian camels domesticated by 3c. BC. Used for news carrying. They have no symbolic value in art, they are just a trade animal. Caravans had one or two species of camels—the dromedary from India. Bactrian camels especially useful for cold areas of Central Asia: go easily on sand and snow; they can close their nostrils, and lose up to 25% of their water without suffering dehydration (humans: 2%).

Chinese belief in afterlife from Neolithic; funeral rites very important for Tang; there was a government department charged with overseeing manufacture of funeral wares. Tomb was a new house for the soul, so everything necessary and luxurious was included. Tang imperial tombs are amongst the most spectacular in the world. Clay models increasingly used, with figurines instead of human sacrifice (which began to disappear in 5th C. BC.) The figurines in Tang reflect aristocratic life. Sensei lead glaze to improve appearance. Earliest is brown/yellow, derived from iron; copper oxide gives the green.

Unglazed figures had colouring close to nature: Tang liked the three colours, regardless of verisimilitude. Glaze: silica, alumina and flux (lead oxide); metallic washes added. Fired twice: 1000° C. then again at 900° C. Colour run was intentional and admired. Clay tomb figurines substitute for bronze articles.

Contrapposto used to suggest movement (note horse's head, turned to side mounted on.); the camel is braying, loaded and saddled (neck is restored). Burrell bought it in 1945 for £105. The horse shows Persian (Sassanian) influence; attendant in Central Asian dress; also bought 1945 for £190. The harness, medallions, bridle cast separately.