

The Splendour of *Sancai*

The Sze Yuan Tang collection

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INTRODUCTION

Sancai wares, literally three coloured wares, are earthenware moulded figures and vessels boldly glazed with splashes of bright green and amber on a straw-coloured ground. More rarely, blue or a purplish-brown are also added. These wares are so deeply ingrained in the history of Chinese art that it is difficult to imagine that they were first discovered only right at the end of the 19th century, when Tang dynasty tombs were accidentally unearthed in Mangshan near Luoyang by surveyors building the Longhai railway. Although initially ignored, some pieces eventually made their way to the antique market of Liulichang in Beijing where their importance was realized by the renowned philologists Wang Guowei and Luo Zhenyu.

The appeal of *sancai* lay not only in its brilliant colours and expressive sculptural forms, but in its ability to vividly evoke the dazzling, luxurious, cosmopolitan life of the Tang dynasty, providing a fascinating window into this golden age of China. In private collections and museums, *sancai* pieces are highlights, the exotically shaped vessels and foreign traders providing visual evidence of Tang China's taste for western luxuries, while musicians, dignitaries, dancers and polo players re-animate the courtly life of more than a thousand years past.

Yet in spite of its wide appeal, until recently not that much was known about *sancai*. In 1981 Margaret Medley, in the first English language review on the subject, bemoaned the lack of controlled excavations that would allow the reconstruction of a chronology of these wares. She concluded that they could only be broadly dated using stylistic criteria. Since then the picture has changed completely. The end of the 20th century has been acknowledged as the golden age of Chinese archeology, and discoveries of Tang *sancai* have been no exception. As will be seen, multiple discoveries have now allowed us to retrace the development of *sancai* wares and while not all the questions regarding these pieces have been answered, it is now possible to give *sancai* its rightful place within the broad history of Chinese ceramic art.

Thus, it is no coincidence that the splendid group of *sancai* pottery that we are able to offer was formed over the last 30 years, during this period of archeological abundance. The celebrated collectors, already known for their stellar collection of archaic bronzes, have managed to amass examples of the rarest and most exquisite examples known. The group as a whole provides a wonderful synopsis of the development of these pieces over a 500 year period.

The roots of *sancai* pottery lie in the rule of the nomadic Xianbei peoples in Northern China during the 5th and 6th centuries. Embarking on a systematic program of Sinicization, they adopted Han dress, language, culture and etiquette. However, they also brought with them the

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‘western’ religion of Buddhism and openness to trade with the west. The amalgamation of the two cultures was to profoundly influence the following dynasties.

With regard to pottery, two important artistic and technological developments occurred during this period as a result of their rule. The first was the use of elaborate moulding techniques, often incorporating elements of Buddhist or Central Asian nature — moulded stucco decoration was ubiquitous in Buddhist temples throughout Central Asia. The second was the development of the fritted glaze, where the lead flux was applied already fixed in the form of powdered glass. This glaze has a glassier more transparent appearance than the earlier raw-lead glaze and is more stable. It was also able to carry metallic colouring agents like copper and iron more easily. The small amber glazed flask (No 1) dated to the Northern Qi is a superb example showing both these features and predicts what is to come. The fine and detailed moulding of the flask shows a deftness which had never been achieved in pottery before; the flask shape is inspired by central asian pottery while the decoration of apsaras are Buddhist in inspiration. The amber glaze is already close to that seen on later *sancai* pottery. A larger flask of the same form and style was excavated from the tomb of Fan Cui (A.D. 575), together with several white glazed vessels decorated with green splashes. These are generally considered the earliest prototypes of *sancai* pottery.

The experimentation with glaze and form continues into the Sui dynasty, as shown in the conjoined amphora with twin dragon handles in the collection (No 3), which is identical in form with an excavated example from a Sui tomb. A novel shape particular to this period, it seems to be an imitation of a western metalwork prototype, but could well be a complete re-invention of an existing form as no metalwork of this shape has been discovered to date. It must be noted that *sancai* tomb wares are not found in the Sui, there being a preference for straw glazed or painted tomb figures. Yet it was also during this period that the Gongxian kiln, near Luoyang, gained prominence, beginning to produce higher fired white stoneware as well as *sancai* pottery.

The Sui was to last only 29 years, and by the beginning of the 7th century, the partially foreign Li family had founded the Tang. It may be a coincidence that *sancai* pottery soon became popular again, or it may be a result of the ‘foreign’ taste appearing at court. Certainly, the Tang was the most cosmopolitan of all Chinese dynasties, with foreign trade the backbone of the economy. In its heyday, the capital city Chang’an was the most populous city in the world, with a population of two million, a fifth of which were foreigners.

The earliest excavated Tang *sancai* pottery comes from the tomb of Zheng Rentai (A.D. 664) which yielded a blue glazed finial of a cover. Although there were also many figurines in the tomb, they were all painted rather than glazed. The use of the blue glaze was a display of wealth as the blue is thought to have been obtained by grinding blue glass beads coloured by cobalt imported from the middle-east. By the middle of the Gaozong Emperor’s reign (A.D. 650-683) *sancai* pottery was already fashionable as funerary objects and small *sancai* glazed vessels start to appear, such as the ones excavated in the tomb of Li Feng (A.D. 675) and the small rhyton excavated from the tomb of Li Hui (A.D. 684). The green glazed rhyton with a buffalo head in the collection (No 7) seems to also date from this period.

Towards the beginning of the 8th century during the reign of the Empress Wu (624-705), the use of *sancai* pottery in burials exploded, to the extent that by 712, minister Tang Shao submitted a memorial to Emperor Ruizong stating that the use of life-like funerary objects

‘..... must finally lead to the squandering of wealth....if not suppressed can only cause the greatest extravagance. It is therefore my wish that all persons below noble rank should follow the official regulations, refraining from making a display of the funeral effigies along the streets and doing so only in the tomb’

The majority of the pieces in the collection can be dated to this period of florescence, when the use of *sancai* was no longer confined to the nobility. The decoration and artistry displayed on these objects can be astounding, with elaborate moulding coupled with the lavish use of multiple colours, including the expensive imported cobalt blue. Not only was the body material much finer and purer than before, the use of engraving and wax resists to create patterns is especially well controlled and effective. This is particularly evident in the two ‘lion’ pillows (Nos 29 and 30) and the tripod tray (No 15). The sensitivity and naturalism in the modeling of the blue glazed musician (No 33) must rank it as among the most beautiful Tang figures we have seen. We should remember that these pieces were not just made to be consigned to dark burial chambers, but were displayed for days prior to the interment on the street with great pomp as a show of wealth and status, so in a sense were made for the living as much as for the dead.

It is worth noting that at the peak of *sancai* production, many different kilns throughout China were making these pieces. However, the main production appears to concentrate around Luoyang (specifically the Gongxian kilns) and Chang’an (in the Tongchuan kilns north of modern Xi’an, as well as the newly discovered Liquanfeng kilns to the west). Although some scholars argue that the two kilns produced different types

of wares, with Gongxian concentrating on vessels and smaller finer objects while Xi'an produced large human figures and animals, we can not be absolutely sure of this. Certainly, from the excavated materials it appears vessels were more common in the Gongxian kilns, and in the Liquanfang kilns more fragments of figurines were found, but both kilns appear to have been making a wide range of items. Since Chang'an was where the foreign population congregated, it is not unreasonable to assume that many of the foreign figures were made there. If indeed Gongxian was where most of the finer vessels were made, it would appear that a very large proportion of items in the Sze Yuan Tang collection should have been made there. Gongxian was undoubtedly a major production site for *sancai* pottery, its prominence having been increased by its production of architectural pottery such as roof tiles for the enormous building projects that went on in Luoyang after Empress Wu elevated it to the status of a 'sacred city' (*shendu*) becoming the *de facto* capital between 657 and 705.

In the past there have been debates whether *sancai* wares were solely made for the purpose of burial. The archeological record shows that peak in the use of *sancai* funerary wares lasted only 50 years until the mid 8th century. The An Lushan rebellion (755) which ravaged much of Northern China and caused economic havoc has often been cited as a reason for the decline of the production of *sancai* tomb pottery. However, even in tombs dated before the rebellion, such as that of Yang Sixun (A.D. 740) we see human figures carved out of marble and tomb spirits with paint and gold leaf rather than glazed. Thus, it seems that fashion rather than economic and social decline was the cause of the disappearance of *sancai* pottery from tombs.

Certainly in the years following the rebellion to the first quarter of the 9th century we see a radical reorientation of *sancai* from tomb to utilitarian pieces. This may have been a response to rising competition from the Yue kilns and the Xing kilns. Evidence for these developments appeared in the discovery of the Belitung shipwreck in 1998. An Arabian ship carrying over 60,000 ceramic artefacts from Guangzhou to the Abbasid Empire in the early 9th century, it remains the single most significant discovery of Tang ceramics. Although most of the cargo was low value Changsha ware, a small group of high value wares were placed at the stern. There, along with exotic Xing ware nose drinking cups and fine Yue ware covered boxes, were a group of green splashed wares which were proved by trace element analysis to have been made in the *Gongxian* kilns. These pieces have in turn been compared to shards discovered in *Gongxian* which were inscribed with the character *ying* suggesting that they were made for tribute to the court. Thus it would seem that these low fired green splashed *sancai* pieces, shared the status of the much higher fired Xing and Yue wares. This could be explained by the long association between the

Tang court and this kiln. Two pieces from the Sze Yuan Tang collection (Nos 41 and 42) correspond closely to the Belitung *Gongxian* wares and may have been made for the Tang court during in the 9th century.

The fall of the Tang dynasty did not bring about the end of the *sancai* tradition. Among the greatest works of art known from the Liao dynasty are a set of *sancai* glazed Luohan figures said to have come from a cave in Yixian in Hebei province. Thought to date from the end of the 10th century, until recently they were lonely masterpieces, a continuation of a tradition that was thought long extinct. However, in 1983 a kiln producing *sancai* was discovered in Longquan near Mentougou in the suburbs of Beijing. Among the discoveries were a half life-sized Buddha and two bodhisattvas. These three figures all have long thin torsos, and their thick moulded clothing are closely related to that of *luohans*. The blue glazed luohan in the collection (No 39) may be part of this group too, with its expressive unglazed face. However, the slightly heavier modeling of the garment and the intense blue glaze suggests a late Tang date for this very rare figure.

Regional, as yet unexcavated kilns are also thought to be responsible for Liao *sancai* utensils that are the luxury objects for the Qidan semi-nomadic rulers of China at the time. Multiply glazed wares seem to be confined to pieces used for scholarly purposes or ritual, such as the inkstone (No 50) and what may be a mortar (No 49) which may have its origins in similar Xing wares dating to the late Tang.

The dazzling invention of form and brilliant glazes of *sancai* left an indelible mark on the ceramic traditions of China. During the Northern Song, we see *sancai* wares being included in the repertoire of a number of famous kilns. Among them is the large model of a shrine dating from 999 excavated from the crypt of Fahai Temple produced by the Cizhou kilns. There are also shards of *sancai* wares found among the non-official wares manufactured by at Qingliangsi at Baofeng, where imperial Ru wares were made. The green and amber glazed parrot (no 51) is very similar to one excavated in the vault of the Jingzhi Temple, which is thought by some scholars to be a product of the Ding kilns, based on similar fragments of parrot ewers being found at the kiln site.

Thus it would seem that the skills that the Chinese potter learned in making elaborate wares for the tomb, with easily formed low fired clays, were soon transferred into the production of high fired stoneware and porcelain. The technology for producing brilliantly coloured glazes by the addition of metallic oxides also had its roots in *sancai*. And so although some scholars have considered *sancai* a detour in the inexorable evolution of porcelain, the most current scholarship shows its essential role in the history of Chinese ceramics.

引言

三彩陶，顧名思義，是以多種釉色裝飾點綴的陶器。‘三’有‘多’之意，不僅指常見的黃、綠、米三色，還包括了藍、赭等較少見的顏色。三彩陶對中國藝術影響根深碇固，很難想像它竟直到十九世紀末，才被挖掘隴海鐵路的工人在洛陽邙山發現，被當作破爛流落到北京琉璃廠，過了多年才因大師王國維及羅振玉的振臂疾呼而受到重視。

三彩陶不僅是因為它絢麗的釉彩、華美的造型而引人注目，更因為它讓我們得以藉之一窺大唐盛世耀眼奢糜、萬邦匯集的風采，讓我們對這一個黃金時期有更多的認識。不管是在私人收藏或博物館中，三彩陶都是眾人矚目的焦點。異國風情的器皿與胡人裝扮的商旅顯現了唐人對舶來品的偏愛，而在一個個樂師、文官、舞者、馬球員陶俑身上，一千多年前遙遠的唐代宮廷生活變得栩栩如生。

然而，儘管它是如此的迷人，我們對它的認識卻直到不久之前還是一知半解。Margaret Medley 在1981年第一本唐朝陶瓷的英文專書中，就因出土研究資料的稀少而感歎三彩陶器斷代的困難。當時的她只能用風格演變的推論來斷定它們的年代。今非昔比，二十世紀後期是中國考古學的黃金時期，對三彩陶的研究也不例外。從許多重大的考古挖掘中，我們可以較清楚地看到三彩陶器演變的過程。雖然我們的認知還非全面，許多問題還有待回答，但是我們已經可以為三彩陶在漫長的中國藝術史中找到定位。

這次我們展出的這一批三彩陶器，不獨有偶地，也是在過去三十年間，出土文物頻繁出現之時所收藏。思源堂堂主，不但已經因為其青銅收藏而享有盛名，更有機緣收藏到這批陶器，其中包含許多珍貴稀有的品種，是三彩陶五百多年來演變的精彩提要。

三彩陶的起源要從五、六世紀北朝的鮮卑族說起。鮮卑雖非漢人，卻積極實行漢化政策，著漢服，說漢語，行漢禮。同時他們引進了西來的佛教，並鼓勵對外貿易，使得胡漢文化交相融合，對後來的朝代影響極深。

在陶器藝術及技術的發展上，這段時期有兩個重大的演變。第一是繁複的陶塑技巧的發展，糅合了佛教及中亞的風格 — 這是受到散布中亞的佛寺中隨處可見的泥塑裝飾所影響。第二則是熟釉的發明，將生釉中的鉛料以含氧化鉛的玻璃粉取代，使釉色更透亮、穩定，並且更能溶合銅、鐵等著色劑。藏品中的北齊黃釉印花小扁壺便是這個時期的產品，明顯展現了這兩個特點，預見未來的發展。這個扁壺上印花紋飾精細，是前朝陶器上所未見，器形有希臘風格，而紋飾上的飛天則是佛教的題材，身上黃釉也接近後來三彩陶的黃釉。北齊范粹墓中出土了一件器形較大但風格一致的扁壺，同墓中還出土了幾件白釉綠彩陶器，這些現在被認為是三彩陶的濫觴。

新釉色及器形在隋朝的持續發展，可以在藏品中的綠釉雙腹龍柄瓶上看見，與一件在隋墓中出土的白釉龍柄瓶器形相同，是隋朝特有的品種。它的造型似乎是沿襲金屬器而來，但是同類的金屬器並未見出土例子，所以也可能是從既有的器形上演變出來的全新造型。隋朝墓葬中並沒有發現過三彩陶器，出土的陶器均是以草灰釉或彩繪裝飾為主。但是在這個時期洛陽附近的鞏縣窯開始興起，燒造高溫白釉器，也是後來製造三彩陶器的大窯口之一。

隋朝國祚僅二十九年，七世紀初時，有半個胡人血統的李氏家族建立了唐朝。不知是巧合，或是因為唐朝對於胡風的偏愛，三彩陶逐漸風行了起來。唐朝是所有中國朝代中最為胡漢融合的時代，對外貿易更是唐朝經濟主幹。唐長安在最盛時，是當時世界上最大的城市，有兩百多萬居民，而外國人佔其中五分之一。

唐三彩出土最早的例子是一個藍釉的蓋紐殘片，發掘於鄭仁泰墓（664年）。雖然墓中也出現許多人俑，但是它們都是以彩繪為飾。藍釉是當時非常名貴的釉料，據說是由中東進口的鈷藍色玻璃珠研磨成粉調色的。唐高宗（650－683）中期，三彩陶器已經開始出現在墓葬中，如李鳳墓（675年）中小型的三彩器皿，及李徽墓（684年）中的三彩龍首杯。藏品中的綠釉牛首杯，應該就是這個時期

的作品。

八世紀初期在武后的統治下，三彩陶在墓葬中如雨後春筍般增多了起來，以致到睿宗時已經到奢侈氾濫的地步。當時右司郎中唐紹便曾上疏道：

‘…比者，王公百官，競為厚葬，偶人象馬，雕飾如生，徒以炫耀路人，本不因心致禮。更相扇動，破產傾資；風俗流行，下兼士庶。若無禁制，奢侈日增。望請王公以下送葬明器，皆依令式，並陳於墓所，不得衢路舛行。’

藏品中大部份的器物都是這個興盛時期的作品，而三彩陶器此時似乎不只局限在王公的墓葬，連一般富裕士庶人也在使用。這些器物以繁複的陶塑工藝搭配多樣的釉彩，包括進口的藍釉，其裝飾與藝術性令人歎為觀止。不僅坯胎比之前更為白細，劃花及蠟防施釉手法也到了非常高明的程度，對釉的發色控制良好，呈現美麗的圖案。這在藏品中的兩件獅座枕頭及寶相花三足盤上最為顯著。另外，藏品中的藍釉胡人吹排簫坐俑表情細膩，姿態自然，是三彩陶俑的絕品。我們當注意的是，這些器物並非一做好便送進了黑暗的墓室之中，而是在葬禮之前幾天都擺設在街上供祭弔者及行人觀賞，是財力及地位的象徵，也可以說它們不但是為死了的人，也是為活著的人而作的。

值得注意的是，三彩陶在全盛期時許多地方都有燒造。但是主要的幾個窯口則是集中在洛陽附近的鞏縣（如黃冶窯），長安（如醴泉窯）及其附近的耀州（如銅川黃堡窯）。雖然有的學者認定這幾個窯口燒造的品種不同，如鞏縣專燒器皿及精美的小件器物，而長安附近的窯口則燒造大型的人俑、馬、駱駝等，我們並不是能完全肯定這個看法。黃冶窯出土的器皿確實佔大多數，醴泉窯也挖掘到許多的大型陶俑，但是其它的品種也有出現。長安因為是外國人口聚集之地，或許可以推論多數胡人俑是在此處燒成。而如果鞏縣真的是以燒造小型精美的器皿為主的話，那麼思源堂藏品中大多數應該都是鞏縣燒造的作品。不論如何，鞏縣的確是三彩陶器燒造的大窯口之一，它的興起應該與高宗、武后定都洛陽（657－705），又將洛陽封為‘神都’，在此大興土木，因而需要大量的屋瓦牆磚等建築用陶器有關。

許多學者並爭論三彩陶是否只是作為明器一個用途？三彩陶在唐朝大明宮遺址及幾個寺廟中都曾發現，並且又作為外銷商品，因而它的用途不應該只限於墓葬，有些也當作日常用品。三彩作為墓葬明器，其最興盛

的時期只有五十年左右。安史之亂常被用來解釋三彩陶俑在墓葬中絕跡的肇因，然而，我們在安史之亂前十年便發現三彩已經從墓葬中消失了。楊思勳墓（740年）中的人俑便是以大理石雕成，而鎮墓獸則是彩繪貼金陶俑，這些都比三彩陶的成本來得高，因此我們可以推斷三彩消失墓葬中是風氣使然，而並非是社會經濟衰退所造成。

安史之亂後到九世紀前期，三彩從墓葬明器逐漸轉型為日常用品。或許這是為了與越窯、邢窯等窯口競爭的一個發展。這個發展的證據在唐代沈船黑石號上可見。黑石號是一艘阿拉伯商船，承載六萬多件陶器及商品，在前往中東的阿巴斯帝國途中在印尼沿海沈沒。雖然船上大部份的陶瓷是普通的長沙窯器，但是有一批貴重的陶瓷與其它的珍貴物品一起放在船艙。這批陶瓷包括了邢窯酒杯及越窯粉盒，還有一批白釉灑綠彩的陶器。這批陶器經過化驗證實應該是鞏縣的製品，而且與鞏縣窯址出土，帶有‘盈’字款的殘片相似，所以有可能是進貢宮廷的用品。因此這批低溫燒造的白釉綠彩陶器，與邢窯越窯等高溫燒造的瓷器同樣被重視，也顯示了唐朝宮廷與鞏縣窯間長久的關係。思源堂中有兩件與黑石號上發現的白釉灑綠彩器相似的壺，可能便是九世紀時進貢宮廷的御用器皿。

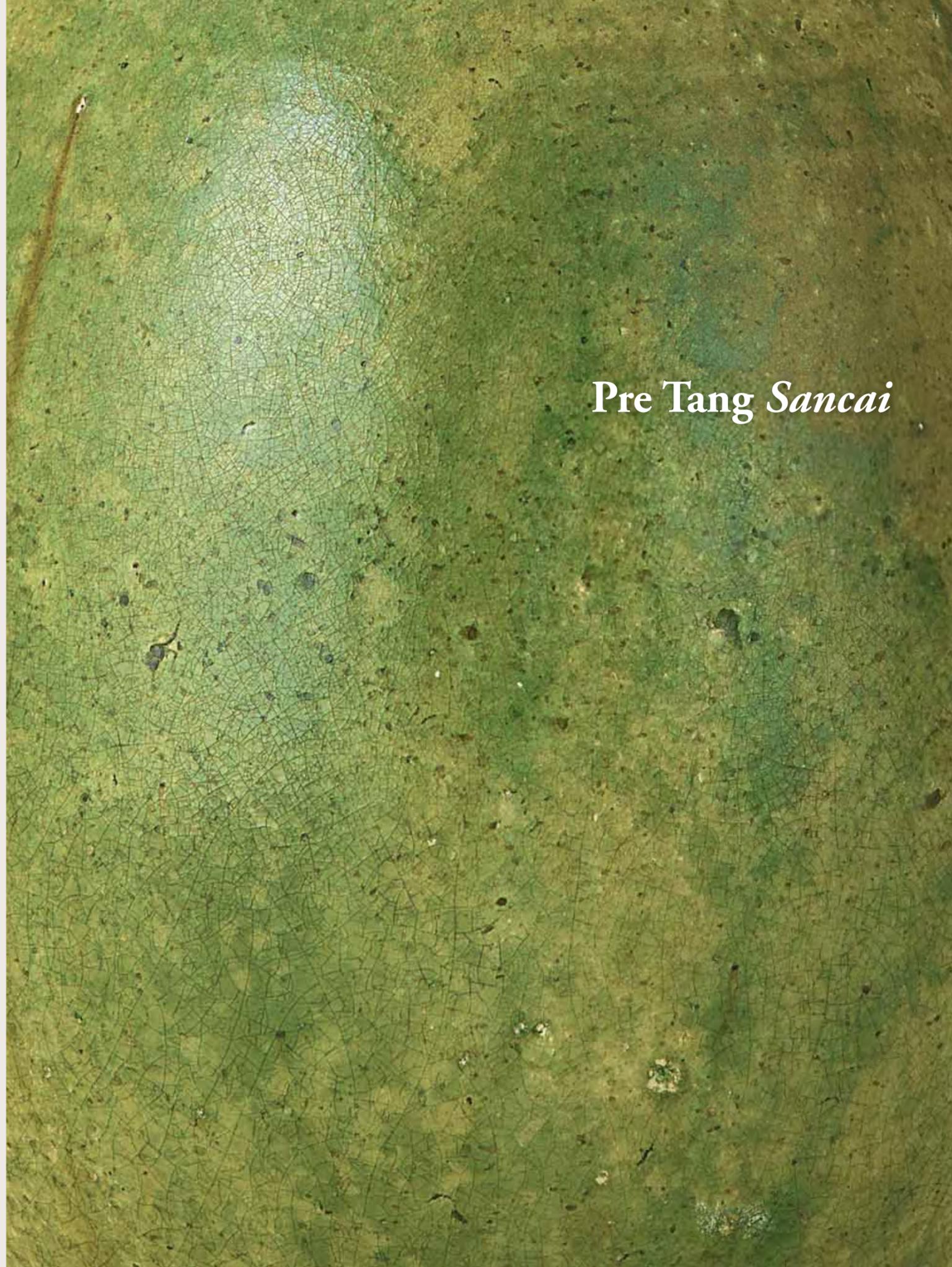
唐朝滅亡之後，三彩的發展並未完全斷絕。遼代最著名的雕塑作品，便是本來藏於河北易縣八佛潭的一組三彩羅漢像。它們被斷定是十世紀末的作品，直到最近都被認定是曇花一現的大師級國寶，是一門失傳藝術的延續。然而，在1983年，北京附近的龍泉門頭溝發現了一個遼代燒造三彩陶的窯址，出土了一件半人身的佛像及兩件菩薩像，與易縣羅漢的造型風格相近。或許藏品中的藍釉羅漢坐像也是屬於這個傳統的作品，但是從它的風格及藍釉的使用來看，可能斷代時間要推到唐後期以上。

遼三彩還有其它的幾個地方發現窯址，燒造器皿供給契丹王朝的貴族使用。多彩的器皿似乎是以文房用具或供器為主，如藏品中的一件陶硯，是從邢窯的一個品種演變而來。

眩目多姿的三彩陶器對後世的陶瓷發展影響深遠。在宋朝，許多窯口都繼續燒造低溫彩陶。如北宋法海寺塔基出土的一件三彩舍利塔，及寶豐清涼寺汝窯窯址出土的許多三彩陶殘片。藏品中的綠釉鸚鵡形執壺與靜志寺遺址地宮出土的一件黃釉執壺非常相近，被學者認定是定窯的產品，與定窯窯址出土的同類執壺殘片相似。

因此我們可以看見，陶工把製作三彩陶中所發展的陶塑工藝，逐漸轉移到製作高溫瓷器的製作之上。在釉上加氧化金屬以調色的技術，也是從燒造三彩陶器所來。雖然有些學者將三彩視為中國陶藝向瓷器製作發展，漫長路程上的一個旁支，最近的考古發現證明了它在中國陶瓷史上承先啓後的重要地位。

Pre Tang *Sancai*



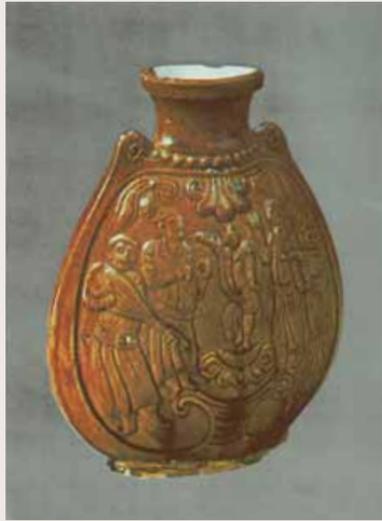


Fig. 1

1 A SMALL AMBER-GLAZED 'MUSICIANS' FLASK

黃釉印花小壺

NORTHERN QI DYNASTY, 6TH CENTURY 北齊

The pear-shaped flask standing on a short foot with a short, ribbed neck, its shoulders drilled for suspension. The front and back of the flask moulded with a central foliate motif below a mask roundel, and flanked by two *apsaras* playing *pipa* and two further celestial musicians above playing flutes, glazed all over in amber-coloured glaze.

11.7 cm. high

This is a very rare and early example of moulded pottery made with a fritted glaze and was probably made in the Xiangzhou kilns near Anyang, Henan province. Compare another larger flask (fig. 1) of similar form and also in yellow glaze, excavated in the tomb of Fan Cui in Anyang. A small flask also moulded with four musicians and with an added dancer in the centre (fig. 2), is in the British Museum. The roundel in the centre and the design of the foliage is obviously a Central Asian influence, such as can be seen on the clay fragment (fig. 3) found in the Tokuz Saray Buddhist Monastery, dated to the 6th century.



Fig. 2

2 A SMALL GREEN AND SANCAI-GLAZED 'DOUBLE PHOENIXES' FLASK

綠釉加三彩印花雙鳳紋小壺

TANG DYNASTY, 8TH CENTURY 唐

The flattened oval-shaped body standing on a spreading base and below a waisted neck, the shoulder applied with two lug-handles; moulded on the front and back with two confronting phoenixes against a spotted ground, glazed overall in green, with the wide mouth-rim accentuated in splashes of blue and amber.

11.5 cm. high



Fig. 3





3 A GREEN-GLAZED CONJOINED AMPHORA 綠釉雙腹龍柄瓶

SUI DYNASTY, 7TH CENTURY 隋

The amphora with two conjoined ovoid-shaped bodies each standing on a spreading base. Sharing a single, waisted neck, rising to an upturned, flaring rim. The shoulder applied with two high arched handles, each terminating with a dragon's head at its join with the mouthrim. The vessel glazed overall in a green glaze.

18.5 cm. high

Although the unusual shape of this amphora appears only to have existed in the Sui period, it is the prototype for the later single-bodied amphora that became very popular in the Tang period and onwards. A white-glazed amphora of similar shape was excavated in the tomb of Li Jingxun at Xi'an (fig. 4).

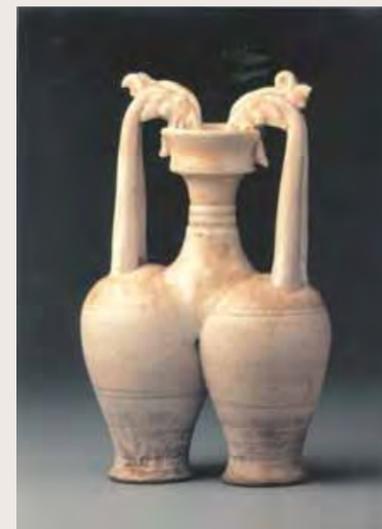


Fig. 4



4 A GREEN-GLAZED STEM CUP 綠釉高足杯

SUI DYNASTY, 7TH CENTURY 隋

The circular cup with rounded sides standing on a spreading foot and rising to a wide flaring mouth. Moulded with two strings around the sides, and with a subtle bulge around the middle of the stem. The high-fired grey stoneware body covered overall with a green glaze, which has degraded through burial.

8 cm. diam.

Compare a similar green-glazed stem cup (fig. 5) in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

5 A GREEN-GLAZED LONG-NECKED VASE 綠釉長頸瓶

SUI/TANG DYNASTY, 7TH/8TH CENTURY 隋/唐

The vase with an oval-shaped body below a waisted cylindrical neck rising to a wide flaring rim, glazed overall in a thin green glaze stopping irregularly around the unglazed base.

23 cm. high



Fig. 5



6 A SMALL GREEN-GLAZED 'FOREIGN BOY' WINE VESSEL
綠釉胡人形小酒尊

TANG DYNASTY, LATE 7TH/EARLY 8TH CENTURY 唐

The vessel modelled as a young boy kneeling on an oval base holding a sack. The neck of the sack held in his right hand, with the opening forming the mouth-rim, and its bottom supported by his left hand. He has short cropped hair, and simply delineated eyes, as if smiling. The vessel is covered overall in green glaze stopping irregularly above the base.

7.5 cm. high

Vessels modelled as foreign figures holding sacks, with Hellenistic influence, started to appear in the 7th century. These were used as wine containers, probably because grapes and grape wine were first introduced to China via Central Asia and these vessels reinforced the exotic nature of this luxury drink, which was very popular at the Tang court. A white-glazed figure of a boy holding a sack with a similar haircut was excavated in the tomb of Duan Boyang near Xi'an, dated to A.D.667, showing that these vessels were already popular during that time (fig. 6).



Fig. 6



Fig. 7



Fig. 8



Fig. 9

7 A GREEN-GLAZED 'BUFFALO' RHYTON 綠釉牛首杯

SUI-TANG DYNASTY, 7TH-8TH CENTURY 隋/唐

The cup of horn shape, its tip moulded with the head of a horned buffalo with its snout turned skyward, as if mooing, and the sides moulded with four trotting legs. The rim moulded with a band of rope pattern between studs. The cup is glazed overall in a green glaze.

11 cm. wide

It appears that in the 7th and early 8th century rhyton cups inspired by metal ware prototypes were particularly fashionable. One of the first recorded excavated *sancai* piece was a dragon-head rhyton in the tomb of Li Hui dated to AD. 684 (fig. 7). The rhyton that is closest in style to the current piece is probably the green-glazed duck rhyton in The Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities in Stockholm (fig. 8). Compare also the white-glazed stoneware lion-head rhyton in the British Museum (fig. 9), which is also dated to the late 7th/Early 8th century.



Tang Sancai





8 (3 views)

9 (3 views)

8 A SMALL RECTANGULAR SANCAI-GLAZED 'DOUBLE-DUCKS' PILLOW

三彩雙鴨紋小方枕

TANG DYNASTY, 8TH CENTURY 唐

Fired on three spurs, the pillow is incised on the top and bottom with a medallion of two ducks picked out in green and straw-glaze and surrounded by circles in amber, all reserved on a green-splashed ground within an alternating amber and straw-glaze border. The sides decorated in a mottled three-colour glaze.

11 cm. wide x 9.5 cm. deep x 4.8 cm. high

9 A SMALL RECTANGULAR SANCAI-GLAZED AND MARBLED PILLOW

攪胎三彩小枕

TANG DYNASTY, 8TH CENTURY 唐

Fired on three spurs, the pillow is made with slabs of marbled clay on the top, bottom and the two shorter sides and with plain clay on the two longer sides. The top and bottom decorated in green, amber and straw-glaze with a lozenge-shaped pattern and the sides decorated in diagonal stripes.

11 cm. wide x 8.5 cm. deep x 4 cm. high



10 (2 views)



11 (2 views)



12 (2 views)

10 A SMALL RECTANGULAR SANCAI-GLAZED 'DOUBLE CRANES' PILLOW

三彩雙鶴紋小方枕

TANG DYNASTY, 8TH CENTURY 唐

The top of the pillow is slightly concave, incised with two cranes picked out in green and amber against a green-splashed ground, between mottled amber ends on the left and right; the sides are decorated similarly in mottled amber glaze terminating irregularly around the unglazed base.

12 cm. wide x 9.5 cm. wide x 5.5 cm. deep

11 A SMALL RECTANGULAR BLUE AND AMBER-GLAZED PILLOW

藍黃彩小方枕

TANG DYNASTY, 8TH CENTURY 唐

The top of the pillow is slightly concave, incised and decorated with four lozenge-shaped rosettes interspersed with smaller rosettes on a blue-glazed ground, the sides decorated with mottled amber glaze terminating irregularly around the unglazed base.

12.5 cm. wide x 10 cm. deep x 5 cm. high

12 A SMALL RECTANGULAR SANCAI-GLAZED 'GUARDIANS' PILLOW

三彩劃花天王紋枕

TANG DYNASTY, 8TH CENTURY 唐

The top of the pillow is slightly concave and incised with two guardian figures picked out in amber and green against a splashed-green ground; the sides are decorated with dripping amber glaze terminating irregularly around the unglazed base.

12.5 cm. wide x 9.5 cm. deep x 5 cm. high



Fig. 10



Fig. 11



Fig. 12

The Sze Yuan Tang Collection contains several fine rectangular pillows of relatively small sizes. Rather than miniature versions of regular pillows, some scholars have suggested that they might have been used for taking pulse in Chinese medical consultations. Whatever their uses, these are often particularly finely made, combining several different decorative techniques on one piece, such as wax reserve glazing, moulding, marbling and incising, to create a dazzling effect and the examples in the collection are no exception. Popular motifs on these pillows are figures, mandarin ducks or lozenge-shaped rosettes. These motifs are well represented in the examples in the collection. Compare a pillow incised with foreigners on a camel (fig. 10) in the Metropolitan Museum, New York, which also features lozenge-shaped rosettes and two pillows incised with motifs of double ducks, both in the Tokyo National Museum (figs. 11 and 12).





13 A CIRCULAR BLUE AND SANCAI-GLAZED TRIPOD DISH

三彩加藍釉寶相花三足盤

TANG DYNASTY, CENTURY 唐

The tray with a flat base rising to a gentle flaring wall and an everted rim, standing on three short cabriole legs. Incised in the centre with a circular roundel containing a rosette encircled by petals. The roundel surrounded by alternating larger lotus leaves and smaller lotus buds on stems, growing in clockwise swirls. The decoration is picked out in green, amber, blue and straw-glaze reserved on a blue ground.

29 cm. diam.

14 A CIRCULAR SANCAI-GLAZED TRIPOD OFFERING TRAY

三彩鴨紋三足盤

TANG DYNASTY, 8TH CENTURY 唐

The tray with a flat base rising to a gentle flaring wall and an everted rim, standing on three short cabriole legs. Incised in the centre with a circular roundel containing a goose in flight betwixt three cloud scrolls. The roundel is surrounded by alternating larger lotus leaves and smaller foliate stems, growing in clockwise swirls. The decoration is picked out in green and amber and reserved on a straw-glazed ground.

28 cm. diam.

15 A BLUE AND SANCAI-GLAZED TRIPOD DISH

三彩加藍釉寶相花三足盤

TANG DYNASTY, 8TH CENTURY 唐

With shallow rounded sides standing on three cabriole legs rising to a wide everted rim, the dish is finely incised in the interior with a hexagonal rosette surrounded by linked spade-shaped feather scrolls. The motifs are decorated in amber, green and blue and reserved on a stippled amber and straw-glazed ground. The wide rim is glazed in dark green, while the underside is glazed in amber stopping irregularly around the unglazed base exposing the earthenware body.

24 cm. diam.

There are three offering trays in the Sze Yuan Tang Collection, two of which have blue-glazed details. These offering trays probably derived from metal ware prototypes, as shown on a silver and gilt-decorated tripod tray, excavated at Bafuzhuang in Xian. These trays also appear as high-fired celadon and white wares, such as the Yue ware example (fig. 13) dated to the Sui period in the Kurokawa Collection.



Fig. 13





Fig. 14

16 A QUATREFOIL *SANCAI*-GLAZED FOOTED DISH 三彩四足葉形杯

TANG DYNASTY, 8TH CENTURY 唐

With rounded sides and modelled standing on four lug-shaped feet, each section of the dish moulded into a fleur-de-lis. The interior of the dish glazed in green, amber and straw, while the underside and the feet are in amber.

16 cm. wide

Compare a dish of similar form but decorated with a spotted design (fig. 14) in the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities in Stockholm.

17 AN ALABASTER QUATREFOIL FOOTED DISH 雪花石四足葉形盤

TANG DYNASTY, 8TH CENTURY 唐

With rounded sides and carved standing on four rope-twist feet, each section of the dish shaped as a fleur-de-lis. The stone softly polished and of slightly translucent milky white tone.

14.5 cm. wide

18 A SET OF EIGHT BLUE, AMBER AND STRAW-GLAZED SWEETMEAT DISHES

三彩加藍釉印花小碗一套八件

TANG DYNASTY, 8TH CENTURY 唐

The set of dishes comprising a circular dish and seven octafoil dishes. The circular dish moulded on the exterior with an eight-petal rosette surrounded by feathered scrolls; while the octafoil dishes are moulded on the exterior to imitate the underside of a leaf. All similarly glazed on the interior with radiating blue and amber bands divided by straw-glazed spots, continuing over the rim to the exterior.

The largest 10.5 cm. wide

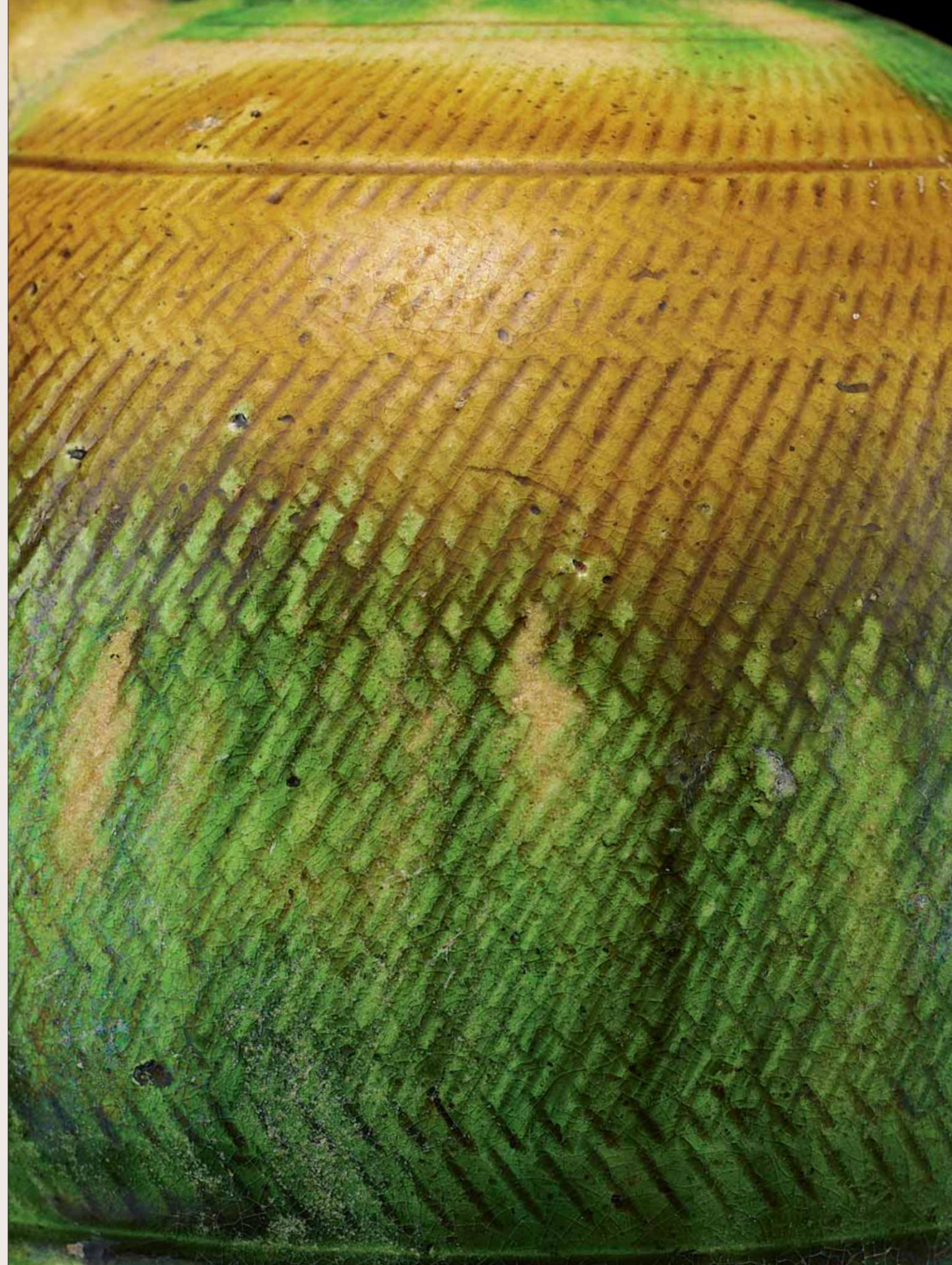


19 A SMALL *SANCAI*-GLAZED EWER
黃綠彩蓆紋執壺

TANG DYNASTY, 8TH CENTURY 唐

The ewer with a ovoid body standing on a short foot, below a wide flaring neck, applied with a short cylindrical spout and a high arched handle. The body decorated overall with engraved hatching and glazed predominantly in green with amber highlights, stopping irregularly around the base exposing the earthenware body.

13 cm. high





Compare an ewer decorated using similar techniques (fig. 15), excavated in Shanxian in Henan. It appears that ewers with this type of decoration are very rare. This technique seems to be the pre-cursor to the combed decoration found on the stonewares of the Five dynasties and Northern Song Period.

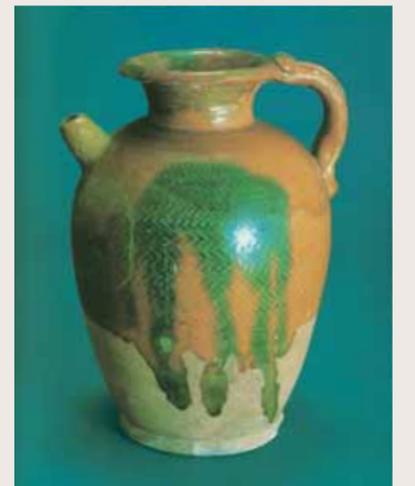


Fig. 15



20



21



22



23

20 A SMALL BLUE-SPLASHED SPITTOON, *ZHADOU*
白地藍彩渣斗

TANG DYNASTY, 8TH CENTURY 唐

The spittoon is of squat globular shape with a small foot and a waisted neck rising to a upturned dish mouth. It is covered in a straw glaze and decorated with spots of blue highlights.

8 cm. high

21 A SMALL BLUE-GLAZED JAR
藍釉罐

TANG DYNASTY, 8TH CENTURY 唐

The globular jar is standing on a short foot and has a short neck flaring to a lipped rim. It is covered overall in an intense cobalt blue glaze stopping irregularly above the base to expose the earthenware body.

12 cm. high

22 A SMALL BLUE, AMBER AND STRAW-SPLASHED JAR
三彩加藍釉罐

TANG DYNASTY, 8TH CENTURY 唐

The squat ovoid jar with a short foot and a short, waisted neck flaring to a lipped mouth. It is covered in a mottled blue, amber and straw glaze stopping irregularly above the base exposing the earthenware body.

9 cm. high

23 A *SANCAI*-GLAZED PEAR-SHAPED SPITTON AND COVER
三彩渣斗連蓋

TANG DYNASTY, 8TH CENTURY 唐

Of squat pear shape with a short foot and a waisted neck rising to a dish-shaped mouth with upturned rim, the spittoon covered with a mottled green, amber and straw glaze stopping irregularly above the unglazed base. The cover is of recessed circular shape with a cone-shaped finial.

11.5 cm. high



Fig. 16

24 A SMALL *SANCAI*-GLAZED LONG-NECKED VASE 三彩長頸尊

TANG DYNASTY, 8TH CENTURY 唐

The vase with an ovoid body standing on a high spreading foot and below a tall cylindrical, flaring neck. The body applied with three spade-shaped rosettes around the shoulder and three six-petalled rosettes around the body. It is covered overall with a mottled glaze of green, amber and straw, terminating irregularly around the unglazed flat base.

22 cm. high

Compare a related example in the British Museum (fig. 16), which has a similar form but with different applied designs.





25 A SMALL CIRCULAR SANCAI-GLAZED BOX AND COVER
三彩圓蓋盒

TANG DYNASTY, 8TH CENTURY 唐

Of cylindrical shape with a slightly domed cover and a short foot, covered throughout with a mottled green, amber and straw glaze stopping irregularly around the base to expose the earthenware body.

9 cm. diam.

26 A SMALL CIRCULAR GREEN-GLAZED MOULDED AND INCISED BOX AND COVER
綠釉印花圓蓋盒

TANG DYNASTY, 8TH CENTURY 唐

Of cylindrical shape with a domed cover and a flat base, incised and moulded on the cover with a rosette surrounded by *ruyi* lappets, and on the side of cover with further *ruyi*. Covered overall with a green glaze with three spur marks on the base.

9 cm. diam.



27 A BLUE AND SANCAI-GLAZED EWER
三彩加藍釉小執壺

TANG DYNASTY, 8TH CENTURY 唐

Flattened on one side, this small ewer has a rounded body, long cylindrical spout and overhead arched handle. The body is moulded with a shield-shaped cartouche containing small studs, glazed overall in a mixture of blue, green, amber and straw-coloured glaze stopping above the flat base exposing the earthenware body.

15 cm. high



28 A BLUE AND AMBER-GLAZED RELIQUARY

三彩加藍釉高足蓋罐

TANG DYNASTY, 8TH CENTURY 唐

The reliquary made in the shape of an ovoid jar standing on an integral high stem base bulging at the center, with a domed cover with a cylindrical finial topped by a knob. The body applied with four lappets, highlighted in blue and amber, the stem and cover glazed in amber, the main body unglazed.

28 cm. high

Compare a much more elaborate reliquary (fig. 17) excavated at Zhongbaocun, near Xian, which is fully glazed with a lotus base and applied with animal masks. The unusual decorative scheme on the current piece can be seen on another jar (fig. 18) in the Tokyo National Museum collection, which also features unglazed body with four applied lappets picked out in glaze.



Fig. 17



Fig. 18



29 A SANCAI-GLAZED 'LION' PILLOW

三彩獅座小枕

TANG DYNASTY, 8TH CENTURY 唐

The pillow of flaring decafoil form standing on the back of a crouching lion. The animal finely moulded with a curly mane, its tail flicked upwards, its head resting on its front paws and eyes wide open. The pillow is incised on the top with a rosette enclosed in scrolling foliage. The pillow is decorated skilfully with green, amber and straw-glazes.

13 cm. long

Pillows standing on animal bases seem to have gained popularity in the 8th century. Excavated materials have shown that these pillows were made both in the Tongchuan kilns in Xi'an and in the Gongxian kilns near Luoyang. A comparable *sancai*-glazed pillow with a crouching lion base was excavated in 1985 in Weinan county in Shaanxi province and is now in the collection of the Shaanxi History Museum (fig. 19). The museum also has a pillow with a rhinoceros base, which was excavated in the Tang strata of the Tongchuan kiln site. Three animal pillows were excavated in the Tang strata of the Gongxian kiln site, one with an elephant base, one with the head of a lion and one with a hare. The lion pillow from the Gongxian kiln is especially worthy of note, as the profile of the animal is very similar to that of the current lion, with its characteristic long, dog-like snout. Another pillow with a hare base and a similar decafoil form is in the Museum of Fine Art, Boston (fig. 20).

The rosette on the top of the pillow is first incised and filled with an iron-based glaze, it can be seen on a cup now in the Palace Museum Beijing (fig. 21). This unusual decorative scheme is the probable ancestor to the underglaze decoration of later periods.



Fig. 19



Fig. 20



Fig. 21







30 A SANCAI-GLAZED 'LION' PILLOW 三彩獅座小枕

TANG DYNASTY, 8TH CENTURY 唐

The pillow of octafoil shape standing on the back of a lion. The animal robustly modelled standing with legs splayed on a shaped slab, clutching a leopard in its fore paws and mouth; its eyes are wide open with a ferocious expression, its ears, eyebrows and mane well detailed. The top of the pillow is incised with foliate scrolls and decorated in a mixture of green, amber and straw-glaze, the lion in straw glaze with streaks of green and some amber highlights.

14.5 cm. wide

This superbly modelled pillow is one of the best examples of the animal-pillow group that have survived from the Tang Dynasty. Unlike the other pillows, which normally depict static animals, this pillow successfully captures the vitality and ferociousness of a hunting lion. Furthermore, the naturalistic modelling, is enhanced by the well controlled use of glaze, highlighting the features of the animal and adding drama to the scene. It shows how the potters of the 8th century had mastered the use of coloured glazing and were able to incorporate it successfully in their designs.

The lion is a sacred animal in Buddhism, and is regarded as the guardian of Buddhist law. Its roar is an analogy of the spreading of Buddha's teaching, as well as the quelling of evil. As lions are not indigenous to China, the Tang potters were unlikely to have seen one, even though there are records of lions being given as gifts to the Tang court. The Chinese character for lion, furthermore, is written with the particle for 'dog', indicating it is part of the canine family in the Chinese mind. It is therefore not surprising that when we see models of Tang lions, they often seem more canine than feline, such as this example in the Seikado Collection (fig. 22). It is difficult to say for certain which specimen of dogs was used by the potters as the model for the lion. It has been suggested that the Tibetan mastiff, a majestic ancient breed with lion-like mane, could be a plausible candidate, as it has many features that resemble the depiction of lions in the Tang period. The Tibetan mastiff is said to be a natural enemy to the snow leopards, and is used by the Tibetans to fight off these predatory cats, which often attack their herds. Perhaps the depiction on this pillow is a portrayal of this phenomenon. Certainly the scene is so well captured and full of tension that it seems likely to have been made by someone with a keen sense of observation, and not entirely from imagination.



Fig. 22



31 AN AMBER-GLAZED FIGURE OF AN EQUESTRIAN DRUMMER

黄彩骑马击鼓男俑

TANG DYNASTY, 8TH CENTURY 唐

Modelled seated on a horse, the musician sitting upright with his hands raised, wearing a round-neck robe, trousers, boots and a long cloth cap. The horse is standing foursquare on a rectangular slab, and moulded with harness, saddle and a drum on its left neck. The figure glazed overall with an amber glaze graduating to pale beige on the extremities. The head, saddle and the base are unglazed.

38 cm. high

Compare an identical equestrian model (fig. 23) excavated near Luoyang. These were probably part of a larger ensemble of a procession band in the tomb.

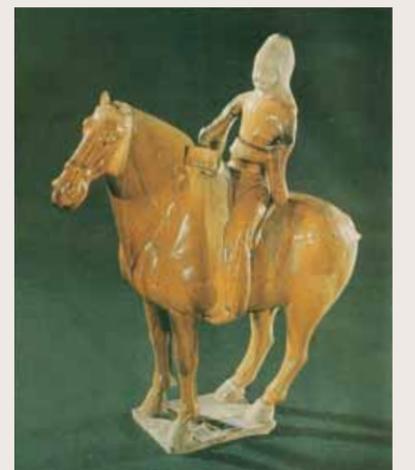


Fig. 23



32 A GREEN AND AMBER-GLAZED 'CARP' OIL LAMP

三彩鯉魚形小燈

TANG DYNASTY, 8TH CENTURY 唐

Modelled as a carp holding a lotus leaf in its mouth, the vessel glazed overall in green with amber splashes on the leaf and the head of the carp

13 cm. long

Compare an unglazed example (fig. 24), excavated in the Huangye kiln site in Gongxian, which is identical in its modelling with the current piece.



Fig. 24



33 A BLUE AND AMBER-GLAZED MODEL OF A CENTRAL ASIAN MUSICIAN

藍釉加黃彩胡人吹排簫坐俑

TANG DYNASTY, FIRST HALF OF 8TH CENTURY 唐

The naturalistically modelled figure is seated on a circular stool and flat base, with his hands holding up a set of *paixiao*, his legs relaxed and slightly splayed, and his head tilted to his right. His face wearing a high official's hat, long robes with starched lapels, and calf-length boots. He is expressively moulded with thick eyebrows, large rounded eyes, high nose and full lips, all set off by a full, well-trimmed beard. His robe is glazed exclusively in blue while the instrument and part of the base is highlighted in amber, and the head, hands, chest and legs left unglazed.

21 cm. high

This sculpture, unlike many of the more generic and formulaic depictions of foreigners found in Tang pottery figures, is beautifully and sensitively rendered. It is well proportioned, and its stance is natural and gives a calm and elegant appearance. The musician's face, although expressive, is at the same time well tempered and gentle, unlike the over-exaggerated facial expressions often found on depictions of foreigners (fig. 25). Furthermore, the musician is wearing an official's hat, not the common cloth cap worn by foreign figures, and is adorned exclusively with the expensive cobalt blue. It is very likely that we are looking at a master court musician that served at the important functions in the Tang court.

Music was a very important aspect in the Tang court life. At the peak of the Tang Dynasty, it is recorded that tens of thousands of people worked at Taichangsi, the department set up exclusively in charge of court music. Tang music, like its art, is multi-cultural, and many musical styles were performed at the court, including Indian, Korean, Kuchan and Sogdian, along side indigenous Chinese music. Many musical instruments were imported, such as the *pipa* zither, the harp-like *konghou* and the *dala* drum. Musicians typically went through vigorous training, and were graded according to their abilities. They had to pass examinations every ten years to ensure standards, and those that failed are dismissed. The grading comprised three levels, and at the top level were the 'seated musicians'. These were musicians



Fig. 25

with the most artistic capabilities and performed in small, seated orchestras of three to twenty people, mostly at important court functions and banquets. The second were the 'standing musicians', who performed standing in larger orchestras of sixty to a hundred and eighty people, as subordinates to the seated musicians. The last were the 'ceremonial musicians', who performed at large ceremonies which required sombre and less artistic music. Our musician, depicted seated here, clearly belongs to the group of the best performers.

Although our musician is foreign, the instrument that he is holding, a seven-reed panpipe, or *paixiao*, is indigenous to China. *Paixiao* is an ancient instrument that existed probably as far back as the pre-historic times. Two thirteen-reed panpipes dated to the Warring States period, were excavated from the tomb of the Marquis Yi of Zeng, and are the earliest excavated examples of this instrument. In the Tang period, it is recorded that *paixiao* had sixteen reeds. However, our musician, as well as the musician from the tomb of Xianyu Tinghui (fig. 26), plays a seven-reed variation. It is unclear whether this variety was used specifically for certain types of music, but from records we know that *paixiao* was widely used in both Chinese and foreign-style music at the court. The tomb of Xianyu Tinghui also contains pottery figures of an orchestra composed of foreign musicians seated on top of a camel (fig. 27), which are worthy of comparison to our figure. Xianyu Tinghui was a close confidante of Xuanzong Emperor, and was himself a foreigner. The Xuanzong Emperor was particularly interested and well versed in music, and was responsible for the composition of the fabled *Nishang yuyi qu*, 'The Music of the Rainbow Skirt and Feather Dress', which he supposedly composed by adapting Brahmin music popular at the court. It is very probable that a musician such as the current figure would have performed in one of these grand compositions by Xuanzong at his court.



Fig. 26



Fig. 27



34 A SANCAI-GLAZED FIGURE OF A FEMALE ATTENDANT 三彩侍女立俑

TANG DYNASTY 唐

Modelled standing with legs slightly apart and hands clasped in front, the lady with a full, rounded face; her hair fashioned into a double-chignon and wearing a high-waisted open-neck dress with a green bodice and straw-glazed sash wrapped around her shoulders, above an amber-coloured skirt resting on her cloud-shaped shoes.

41 cm. high

Compare a figure with very similar modelling (fig. 28), excavated at Guanlin in Luoyang.



Fig. 28

35 A SET OF THREE POTTERY MODELS OF FOREIGNERS
胡人立俑三件

TANG DYNASTY, 8TH CENTURY 唐

Each figure modelled standing on a rectangular base, wearing long tunics fastened around the waist. All wearing cloth caps, with one in a glazed blue robe and with his right hand raised as if gesturing, the other two glazed in green and amber respectively, and with their hands clasped before their chest. Their faces expressively modelled, together with their caps and hands unglazed, exposing the earthenware body.

18.5 cm. high





36 A BLUE AND SANCAI-GLAZED MODEL OF LIONESS
三彩加藍釉獅子坐俑

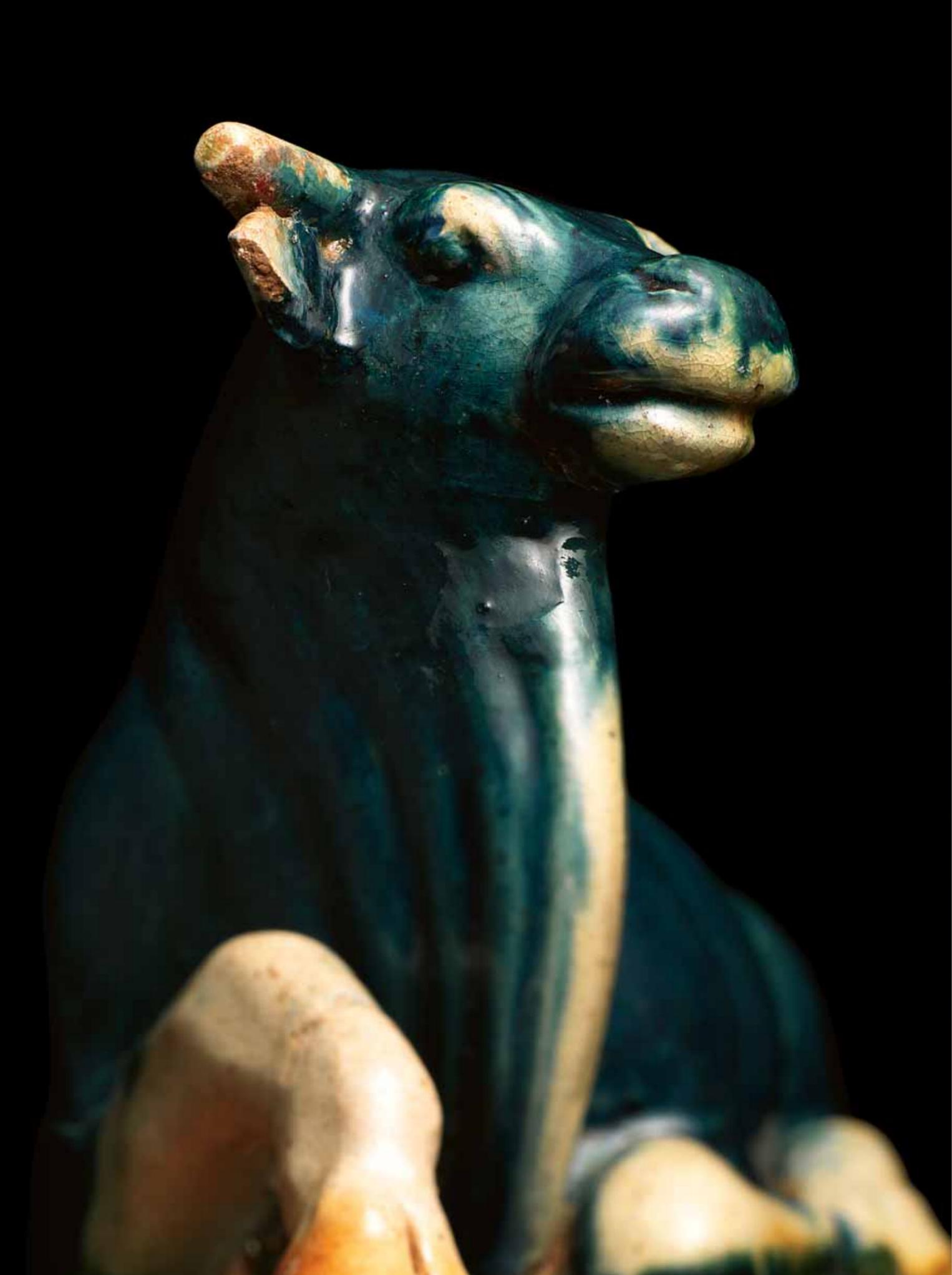
TANG DYNASTY, 8TH CENTURY 唐

Modelled seated on its haunches, the lioness turns slightly to its left, its right foreleg raised with paw open, as if ready to strike, and its left foreleg rests on the ground between its backlegs. Its ears are pricked up, eyes are squinting and mouth is open as if growling and has a cub suckling between its legs. It is wearing a bell attached to a rope around its neck, and the curly mane well is detailed. It is glazed primarily in blue with areas of amber highlights and green streaks.

17 cm. high

This lion compares closely to that in the Seikado Collection (fig. 22) except that it is the much more rarely seen female form.





37 A BLUE, STRAW AND AMBER-GLAZED MODEL OF A RECUMBENT BUFFALO

藍釉牛

TANG DYNASTY, 8TH CENTURY 唐

Modelled recumbent on a oblong base with its right foreleg outstretched, glazed in blue with straw-glazed highlights, the base glazed in blue and amber

18.5 cm. wide x 12 cm. high

Domestic animals were popular subjects in the Tang tombs, and are amongst some of the most charming and playful examples of *sancái*-pottery. The current buffalo is unusual in that it is depicted recumbent, while most of the buffalo we see are depicted standing. However, a seated mythical beast (fig. 29) in the Tenri Sankokan Museum Collection in Nara, Japan, has very similar modelling, with its left front leg tucked underneath, and right foreleg outstretched. Compare also the model of donkey (fig. 30) in the Shaanxi History Museum, which is blue-glazed like the current piece.



Fig. 29



Fig. 30



38 A MINIATURE BLUE AND SANCAI-GLAZED MODEL
OF A DRUM

三彩加藍釉小鼓

TANG DYNASTY, 8TH CENTURY 唐

Finely detailed with studs, drum nails and strings, its top decorated with splashes of green, amber and straw, while the body and base are further enhanced with blue.

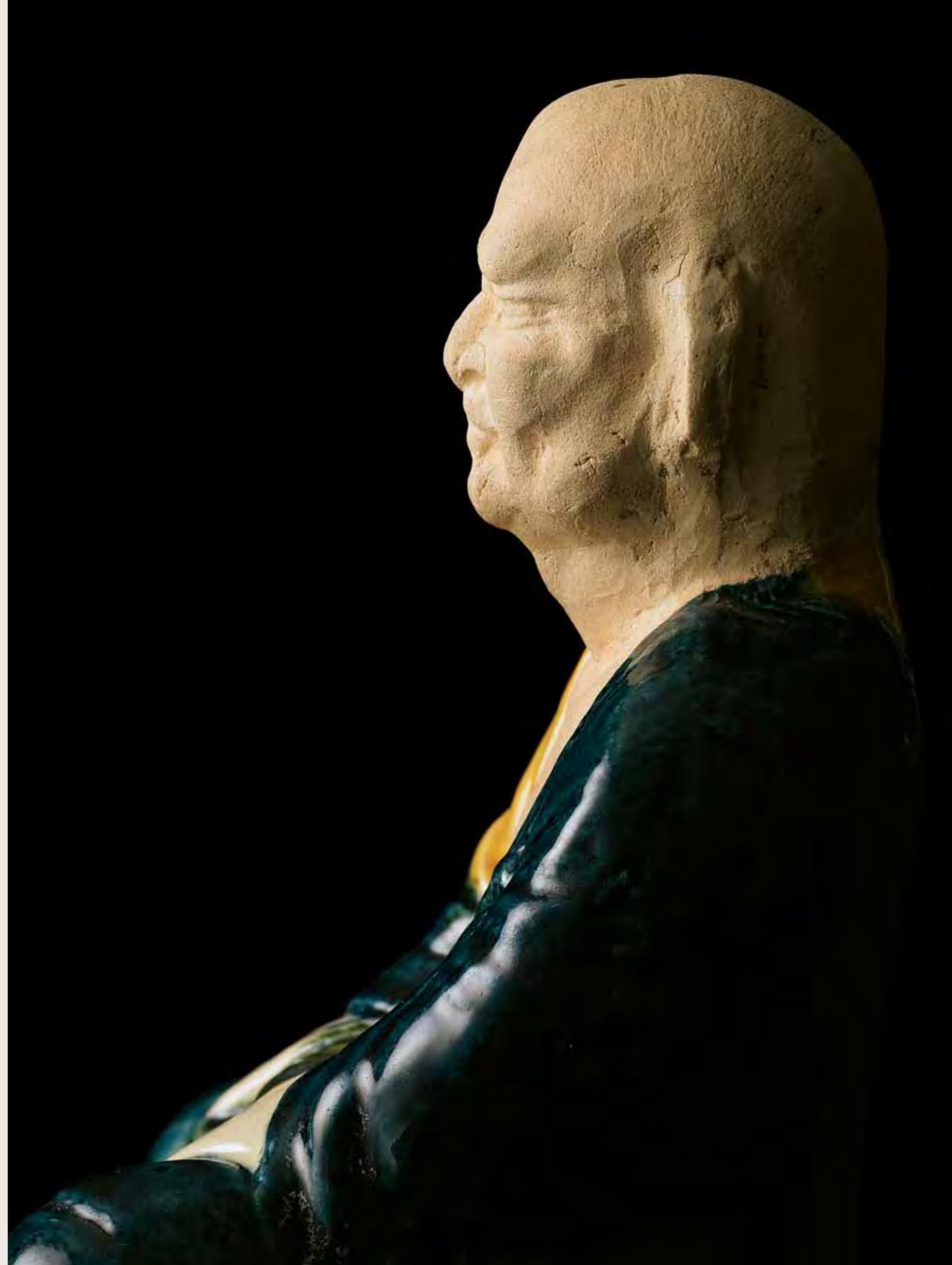
7.5 cm. high x 8.5 cm. diam.

39 A BLUE AND AMBER-GLAZED SEATED FIGURE OF
A *LUOHAN*
三彩加藍釉羅漢坐像

TANG DYNASTY 唐

The figure is modelled seated in *dhyanasana* with his legs folded, and his hands in meditation position. He is wearing a monk's loose robe, opening at the chest. His face is moulded with strong eyebrows, high cheekbones, a large nose and down-turned mouth. The robe is glazed predominantly in blue, his right side in yellow, with the head and chest unglazed.

19 cm. high





Given the widespread belief in Buddhism during the Tang dynasty, it is surprising that no Buddhist figures have been excavated from Tang tombs. Perhaps the Buddhist belief in reincarnation was not well reconciled with the Chinese preference for an afterlife well supplied with life's luxuries created in pottery. In any case this figure of a Buddhist saint has no equivalent, the closest comparable pieces being the famous series of *sancai* lohans chanting from the Liao dynasty found in Museums around the world including the Metropolitan Museum of Art (fig. 31). This figure is the probable ancestor to those larger much more elaborate ones, although its exact date is very difficult to determine.



Fig. 31

40 A SMALL BLUE AND AMBER-GLAZED 'TORTOISE' WATERPOT

藍釉加黃彩龜形水洗

TANG DYNASTY, 8TH OR 9TH CENTURY 唐

Modelled standing foursquare with its head stretching upward, the head and the shell of the tortoise are glazed blue and its legs, tail and underside are in amber; the shell of the tortoise is incised with a honeycomb pattern with the three central cells forming the opening to the hollowed body.

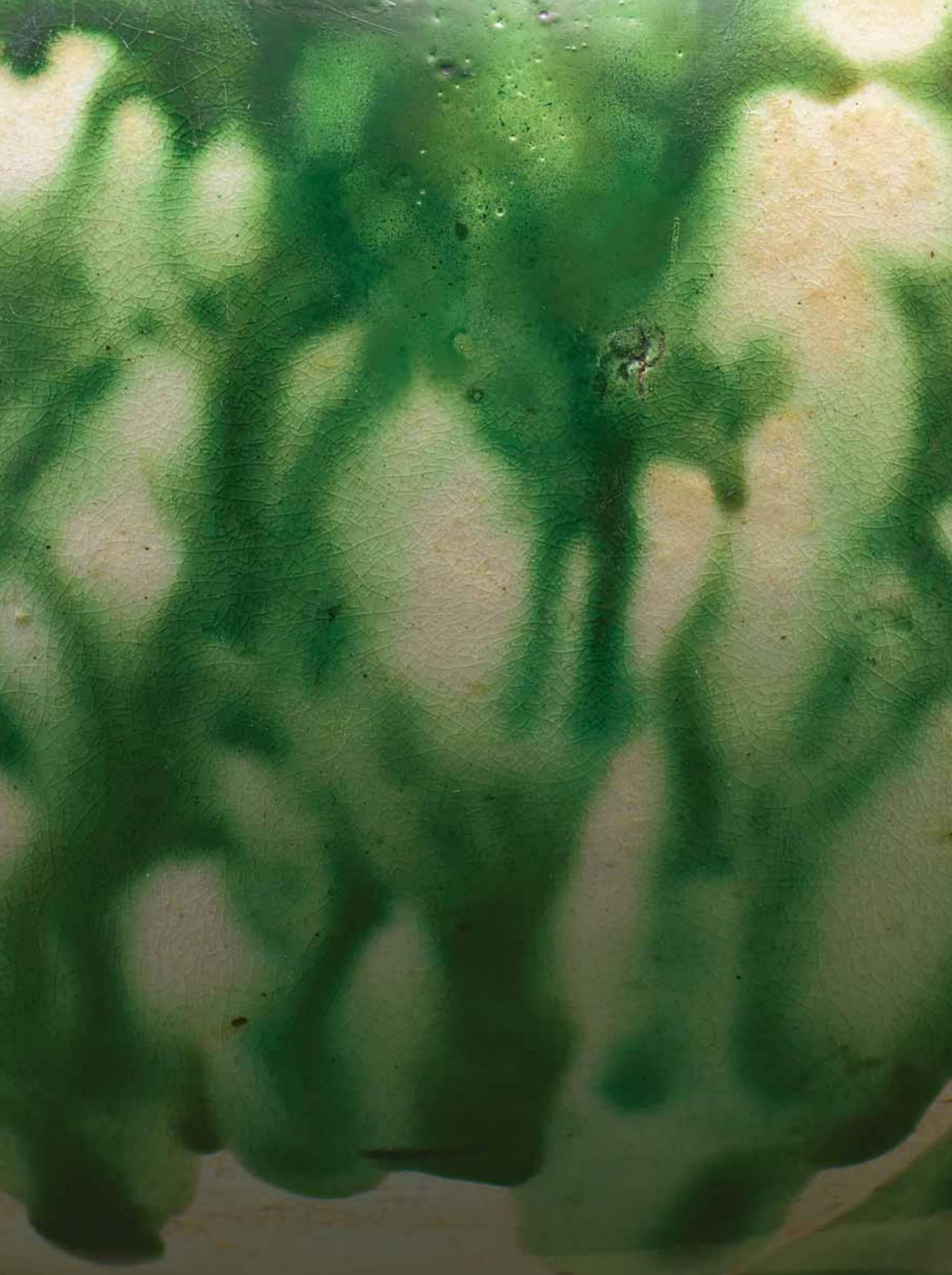
8.5 cm. wide

It is very rare to find objects that are related to scholar's desk in pottery, with the exception of ink stones which are known to exist from the Tang period. This waterpot with its beautiful blue glaze is especially unusual being one of the only known examples of sancai objects for the scholar's desk. No other waterpots of the same form and design appeared to have been published, although a blue-glazed model of tortoise (fig. 32) in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, has very similar modelling to the current piece.



Fig. 32





41 A SPLASHED-GREEN EWER
灑綠釉壺

TANG DYNASTY, 9TH CENTURY 唐

The globular ewer standing on a short footrim with a short flaring neck. Applied with a hexagonal spout and moulded with strings below the neck and around the upper body. The body covered in white slip and glazed overall with splashes of green glaze, terminating just above the base to expose the fine white body.

12 cm. wide



This ewer is of particularly fine quality, and its body material is much finer than many of the *sancai* pottery we have seen. It possibly belongs to the same group of green splashed wares excavated from the Belitung wreck, but some of its features are distinctly different, especially in the finesse of its potting and the treatment of its green glaze, which gives the effect of white spots on a green ground, rather than green splashes over white as on the Belitung examples. It could well have been made in a different kiln around the Gongxian area, but without further analysis it is difficult to be certain. No other ewers of exactly the same form and decoration appear to have been published, however a small green-splashed box and cover (fig. 33) with a very similar treatment to its glaze and fine body material was included in the *Tang Pottery and Porcelain* exhibition in the Nezu Museum.



Fig. 33



42 A GREEN-SPLASHED DRAGON-SPOUT EWER

白地灑綠釉龍注執壺

TANG DYNASTY, 9TH CENTURY 唐

The ewer with a long ovoid-shaped body below a flaring cylindrical neck and standing on a flat base. The body is applied with a moulded dragon spout, and the arched handle is modelled as a *chilong* dragon climbing over the rim. Glazed with a straw-coloured base with splashes of green, the glaze stopping midway down the body to expose the earthenware material.

18.5 cm. high

An ewer of very similar form was excavated from the Belitung wreck (fig. 34) and it appears that no other ewers of the same type have been excavated in China, making this an exceedingly rare piece. Compare an ewer of similar form and green-splashed glaze (fig. 35), but without moulded dragons on the spout and the handle, excavated in Xuezhuang in Henan province.



Fig. 34



Fig. 35





43 A SANCAI-GLAZED INCENSE BURNER
三彩四足香爐

TANG DYNASTY, 8TH CENTURY 唐

The cylindrical incense burner has a wide everted rim and is supported on six feet moulded as guardian figures, all resting on an integral dish-shaped base. It is decorated with a mottled green, amber and straw glaze, leaving the interior and the dish base unglazed.

13.5 cm. diam.

Compare another incense burner (fig. 36) which was excavated in Luoyang, and has a *bi*-shaped foot rather than a dish-shaped base.



Fig. 36



Fig. 37

44 A GREEN-GLAZED CENSER

綠釉貼花渣斗

TANG DYNASTY 唐

The censer with deep rounded sides rising to a flaring, lobed rim standing on a stepped base. Applied with four guardian figures around the base and decorated with alternating larger and smaller rosettes around the body.

13 cm. high x 13 cm. wide

Compare a brown-glazed example excavated in Haizhou, Yuncheng City in Shanxi, which seems to be slightly cruder in its execution. A nearly identical example (fig. 37), also of green glaze and with similar stepped base as the current piece is in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. This shape appears to have inspired later celadon-glazed *zhadou* with floral rim made in the Yaozhou kilns in the Northern Song period.





45 A GREEN AND RUSSET-GLAZED HAND WARMER
褐綠釉暖手爐

TANG DYNASTY, 8TH CENTURY 唐

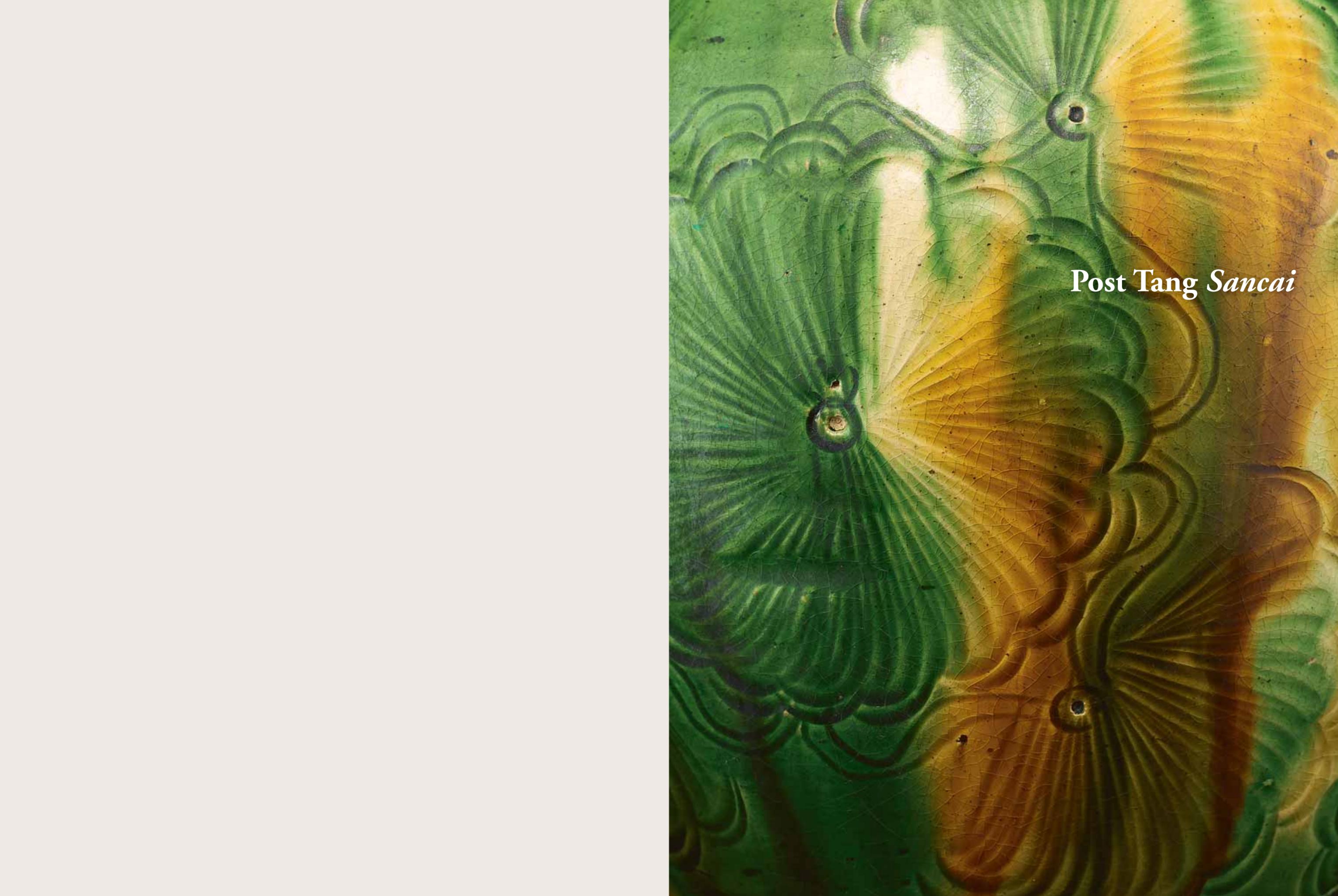
Shaped like an apple with in-turning rim, the warmer is pierced with two slim triangular slats alternating with a row of four thin rectangular slats. The vessel covered overall in a mottled green and russet brown glaze stopping irregularly around the unglazed base.

11.5 cm. diam.

Hand warmers of this type appear to be very popular in the Tang period, and were made in high-fired white wares, celadon wares as well as pottery. Compare another pottery example with mottled green and brown glaze (fig. 38) in the Nezu Museum, which has a beehive shape.



Fig. 38



Post Tang Sancai



46 A SANCAI-GLAZED JAR
黄绿彩划花罐

TANG/ FIVE DYNASTIES, 9TH-10TH CENTURY 唐/ 五代

The jar with an ovoid body and a short waisted neck. Carved around the body with large lotus leaf motifs below a band of scallop scrolls at the shoulder. The body is glazed overall in green with areas of amber and straw-glazed highlights. The glaze stops around the foot, exposing the white body material on the base.

17 cm. high



47 AN AMBER-GLAZED FLASK
 褐釉劃花盤口穿帶瓶

LATE TANG, EARLY LIAO DYNASTY, 10 CENTURY 晚唐/ 遼 十世紀

The flask has an ovoid body standing on a high spreading foot and below a tall cylindrical neck. The dish-shaped mouth has an upturned rim. It is moulded and applied with two linked strap-handles on either side. The body is decorated with palmettes suspending on jewelled chains, below bands of pendent leaves around the shoulder and at the base of the neck. The flask is fired on spurs, almost completely glazed in amber, only small areas of the foot exposing the earthenware body.

29 cm. high

Compare two very closely related examples, one almost identical (fig. 39), the other with different incised decoration (fig. 40), both excavated at Tuchengzi city, Inner Mongolia.



Fig. 39



Fig. 40



48 A SANCAI-GLAZED LOBED DISH
三彩印花花口盤

LIAO DYNASTY, 10TH CENTURY 遼

The oval dish is bracket-lobed with a flat base and a gently flaring profile rising to an everted rim. Incised and moulded in the interior with three roundels on feathered ground, and on the rim with a classic scroll. It is glazed predominantly in green, except the roundels and the well of the dish which is in amber and straw. The base is unglazed exposing the earthenware body.

29.5 cm. wide



49 A SANCAI-GLAZED OCTAFOIL STACKING DISH
三彩印花套盤

LIAO DYNASTY 遼

The lobed dish on a high conforming foot flush to the rim, with a shallow well and a stepped lip for stacking. The foot is moulded with cartouches each containing a peony flower head flanked by two leaves, separated by simulated bamboo borders. The interior and the leaves are glazed in green, the peonies and borders in amber, while the cartouches in straw-glaze. The base unglazed.

17 cm. wide

Compare two dishes of the same form (fig. 41), but glazed predominantly in amber, excavated in 1972 at Jiefangyingzi, Inner Mongolia.



Fig. 41



50 A CYLINDRICAL *SANCAI*-GLAZED POTTERY
INKSTONE
三彩印花魚池紋硯

LIAO DYNASTY, 10th century 遼

Shaped as a waisted cylinder with a recessed base, the inkstone is moulded in the centre with a shallow circular water receptacle decorated with two fish on a green-glazed wave ground, levelling towards the rim to an unglazed grinding surface, and surrounded by five fan-shaped cartouches, each decorated with an amber-coloured rosette between two green leaves; the waist similarly decorated with shaped cartouches containing rosettes; reserved overall in an amber glaze.

20 cm. diam. 8.5 cm. high

Compare another pottery ink stone of the same type but slight different in design (fig. 42), excavated at Jiefangyingzi in Chifeng City, Inner Mongolia. These ink stones were probably inspired by white-glazed hexagonal washers made in the Xing kilns in late Tang.



Fig. 42





Fig. 43

51 A GREEN AND AMBER-GLAZED 'PARROT' EWER

綠釉加黃彩鸚鵡執壺

NORTHERN SONG DYNASTY, LATE 10TH CENTURY 北宋

Robustly modelled as a parrot with its wings gathered and perched atop a conical platform, the spout of the ewer issues from the back of the parrot beside the high arched handle. The ewer is glazed overall in green with the crest, chin and the claws of the bird picked out in amber.

19 cm. high



Fig. 44



Fig. 45

This ewer owes its shape and design to a late Tang/Liao prototype, an example (fig. 43) of which was excavated in 1960 from Tomb no. 3 at the Tuchengzicity in Helinge'er county, Hohhot in Inner Mongolia. In 1969, another parrot ewer similar to the current example, but glazed all in amber, was excavated from the underground foundation vault of the Jingzhisi Pagoda in Dingzhou, Hebei province, and dated to the Northern Song period using accompanying inscribed tablet dated A.D.977 (fig. 44). These two excavated parrot ewers have long puzzled scholars as to their origins. They were obviously related, as the potting, glaze and body materials all show similar characteristics. Furthermore, other low-fired pottery vessels excavated in the Jingzhisi Pagoda, decorated with distinctive wave patterns, appeared to be related to pieces from another Liao tomb, the Niutougou tomb in Beipiao, also in Inner Mongolia. Were these pieces made in Mongolia, and travelled south, or were they made in the Ding kilns near Jingzhi Pagoda, and made their way north? The question is further complicated by the excavation of the fragments of a yellow-glazed parrot ewer, again similar in type, in Dongxidajie in Zhengzhou, Henan province, prompting scholars to claim that all these pieces were, in fact, made in the Ding kilns in Henan. Following the most recent excavation of the Ding kiln sites in 2009, where low-fired pottery fragments with characteristics similar to these piece were excavated in the Five Dynasties/Song strata (fig. 45), the consensus now is that these were mostly likely to have been made in the Ding kilns, however they also could have been made simultaneously in other kiln sites, similar to how *sancai* pottery were widely made by kilns all over China. In any case, this ewer shows the making of low-fired pottery remained an important tradition that was very much alive and evolving throughout the dynasties succeeding the Tang, and was widely influential in the history of Chinese ceramics.

THE CHRONOLOGY OF CHINA

中國歷代年表

新石器時代 NEOLITHIC PERIOD
c.6500-1700 BC

夏 XIA DYNASTY c.2100-1600 BC

商 SHANG DYNASTY c.1600-1100 BC

周 ZHOU DYNASTY c.1100-256 BC

西周 Western Zhou c.1100-771 BC

東周 Eastern Zhou 770-256 BC

春秋 Spring and Autumn Period
770-476 BC

戰國 Warring States Period
475-221 BC

秦 QIN DYNASTY 221-206 BC

漢 HAN DYNASTY

206 BC-AD 220

西漢 Western Han 206 BC-AD 8

新王莽 Xin (Wang Mang Interregnum)
AD 9-23

東漢 Eastern Han AD 25-220

三國 THREE KINGDOMS 220-265

魏 Wei 220-265

蜀漢 Shu Han 221-263

吳 Wu 222-263

晉 JIN DYNASTY 265-420

西晉 Western Jin 265-317

十六國 Sixteen Kingdoms 304-439

東晉 Eastern Jin 317-420

南朝 SOUTHERN DYNASTIES

北朝 NORTHERN DYNASTIES
420-589

南朝 Southern Dynasties

劉宋 Liu Song 420-479

南齊 Southern Qi 479-502

梁 Liang 502-557

陳 Chen 557-589

北朝 Northern Dynasties

北魏 Northern Wei 386-534

東魏 Eastern Wei 534-550

西魏 Western Wei 535-556

北齊 Northern Qi 550-577

北周 Northern Zhou 557-581

隋 SUI DYNASTY 581-618

唐 TANG DYNASTY 618-907

五代 FIVE DYNASTIES 907-960

後梁 Later Liang 907-923

後唐 Later Tang 923-936

後晉 Later Jin 936-946

後漢 Later Han 947-950

後周 Later Zhou 951-960

遼 LIAO DYNASTY 907-1125

宋 SONG DYNASTY 960-1279

北宋 Northern Song 960-1127

南宋 Southern Song 1127-1279

金 JIN DYNASTY 1115-1234

元 YUAN DYNASTY 1279-1368

明 MING DYNASTY 1368-1644

洪武 Hongwu 1368-1398

建文 Jianwen 1399-1402

永樂 Yongle 1403-1425

洪熙 Hongxi 1425

宣德 Xuande 1426-1435

正統 Zhengtong 1436-1449

景泰 Jingtai 1450-1456

天順 Tianshun 1457-1464

成化 Chenghua 1465-1487

弘治 Hongzhi 1488-1505

正德 Zhengde 1506-1521

嘉靖 Jiajing 1522-1566

隆慶 Longqing 1567-1572

萬曆 Wanli 1573-1619

泰昌 Taichang 1620

天啟 Tianqi 1621-1627

崇禎 Chongzhen 1628-1644

清 QING DYNASTY 1644-1911

順治 Shunzhi 1644-1661

康熙 Kangxi 1662-1722

雍正 Yongzheng 1723-1735

乾隆 Qianlong 1736-1795

嘉慶 Jiaqing 1796-1820

道光 Daoguang 1821-1850

咸豐 Xianfeng 1851-1861

同治 Tongzhi 1862-1874

光緒 Guangxu 1875-1908

宣統 Xuantong 1909-1911

中華民國 REPUBLIC OF CHINA
1912-

洪憲 HONGXIAN (YUAN SHIKAI)
1915-1916

中華人民共和國
PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA
1949-