

Buddhism

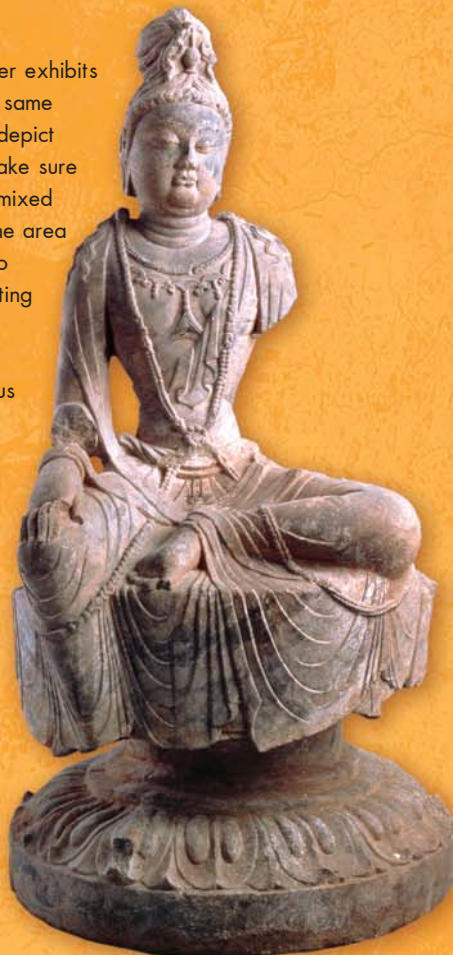
Buddhism had already introduced into China from India in the 1st century AD. At the time of the Tang dynasty it was very widespread and gradually became the main religion. At the same period, though, some of the people followed other religions.

Exhibit 109 is a statue of the founder of Buddhism. He was called the Buddha, which means the *Enlightened One*, because he devoted his life to the search for personal calm. He taught that you could attain *nirvana*, or supreme perfection, by denying worldly desires. Notice the tranquil expression on his face. It shows that he has attained

His long ears remind us of his earlier life, when he was an Indian prince called Gautama Siddhartha and wore heavy precious earrings. He was born in 563 BC. Also notice the projection on the top of his head, which symbolises sacred knowledge.

Try to find other exhibits that have the same features and depict the Buddha. Make sure you don't get mixed up! In the same area there are also statues depicting other sacred

figures of Buddhism, the Bodhisattvas. You'll recognise them from the luxurious clothes and jewellery they're wearing. Bodhisattvas are usually shown as attendants of the Buddha, often in pairs, forming a holy trinity with him.



The temporary exhibition
China under the TANG: a golden era (7th-10th c.)
was organised by the Byzantine & Christian Museum
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Ministry of Culture, and the National Museum of China.
The artefacts on display come from the collections
of the National Museum of China, the Henan
Provincial Museum, the Longmen Grottoes Research
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Text and editing: Stathis Gotsis, Panos Vosnidis
Design: Vassiliki Sotiriou
Translation: David Hardy
Proof-reading: Jasmin Moysidou
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Byzantine & Christian Museum
Vas. Sophias 22, 106 75 Athens
Tel: (+30) 210 7211027
Fax: (+30) 210 7231883
e-mail: protocol@bma.culture.gr

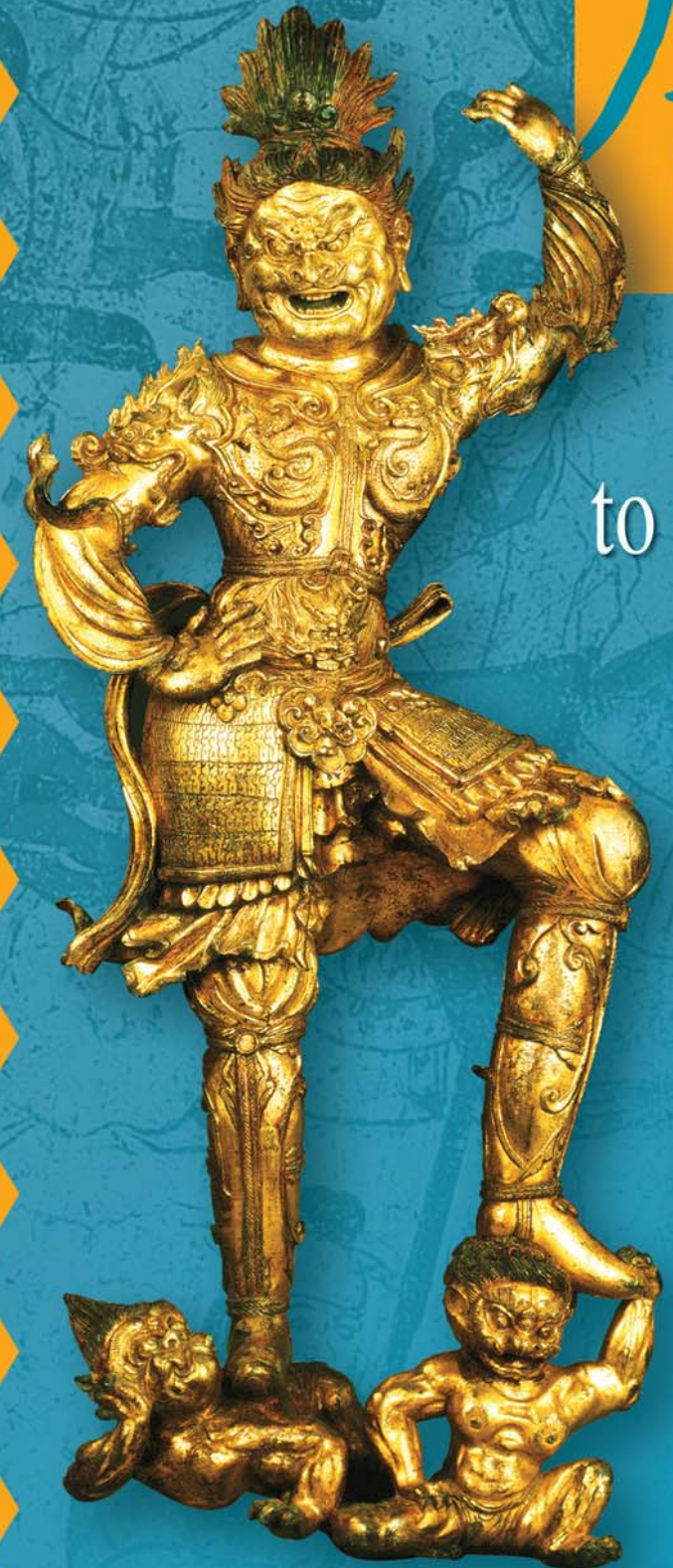
Educational Programmes Office:
Tel: (+30) 210 7231985



MINISTRY OF CULTURE
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A visit to TANG China



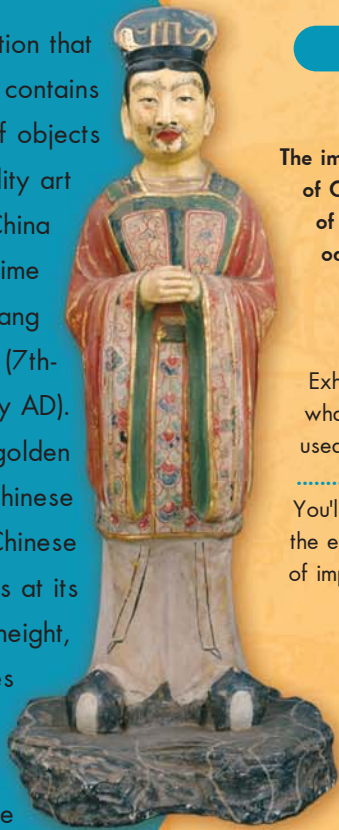
Educational activity
to accompany the
temporary exhibition
*China under the TANG:
a golden era
(7th-10th c. A.D.)*

10 July to
31 August 2006

This pamphlet belongs to
who visited the Byzantine & Christian Museum on 2006

The exhibition that you'll see contains a selection of objects of high-quality art made in China at the time of the Tang dynasty (7th-10th century AD). This was a golden age in Chinese history: the Chinese empire was at its greatest height, its boundaries had been extended, and its influence spread throughout the whole of Asia.

✓ At the same period, the Byzantine empire was facing many problems. Internal conflicts and external enemies troubled Byzantium from the 7th century onwards. This difficult period, which cost Byzantium the loss of many of its territories, lasted until the middle of the 9th century.



Palaces and administration

The imposing imperial palaces at the capital cities of Cha'ang and Luoyang, capture the majesty of the emperor's power. Imperial officials occupied a major place next to the emperor.

Exhibit no. 10 is a model of an official. Look at what he's wearing and write down the colours used in the decoration:

You'll see a lot of models of different figures in the exhibition. They were all found in the tombs of important people.

In exhibit no 15, you'll see a woman wearing red and dancing. Look at the other figures of women in the same area.

What do you imagine they're doing?

As you can see, they all have elaborate hairdos and a well-groomed appearance. Find a few exhibits connected with cosmetics.

Women held a special place at the Tang court. One of them Wu Zetian even managed to become empress!



Exhibit no. 30 is a porcelain vase from the 9th century. It is a distant forefather of delicate modern porcelain pits, because porcelain was invented in China. There are several other luxury items near it. Write down the materials they're made of:



✓ If you want, you can see valuable Byzantine vases from about the same period in the permanent display of the museum. They're on display in unit 11.2. *Crisis and Change*.

Towards the West

At the time of the Tang, there were intense diplomatic relations and trade between China and central and western Asia. For the Chinese, these areas, like the Byzantine empire, were the West.

Exhibit no. 49 is a clay figurine found in a tomb at Xi'an. It depicts a camel-driver on a squatting camel. Caravans with thousands of camels travelled the silk road, crossing the kingdoms of central Asia and the Persian empire before reaching the shores of the Mediterranean. They brought precious goods and returned with merchandise that was exotic in the eyes of the Chinese.



Look at figurine no. 50. He is a camel-driver from central Asia. At the time of the Tang, there were contacts with foreign peoples, and many foreigners lived in the two capital cities. This created a cosmopolitan atmosphere that affected the customs of the imperial court itself.

Try to find other clay figurines of people that prove there were foreigners in Tang China



Find cup no. 65. Its relief decoration of rosettes and medallions reveals the influence of the art of central Asia.

Gold coin no. 61 has a depiction of the Byzantine emperor Herakleios (610-641) on one side and his son Constantine III on the other. It was found at Xi'an in China. It's not a genuine Byzantine gold coin (*solidus*), though! It's an accurate imitation made about a century later. The distant Byzantine empire seems to have had an attraction for the upper class society of the Tang.



✓ To see a genuine Byzantine *solidus* of Herakleios, all you have to do is visit the permanent display in the museum. It's in unit 11.1. *Authority and administration*, along with coins of other Byzantine emperors.



Life after death

When you come to exhibits 74 and 75, don't be scared! The fierce figures of Lokapalas, the *heavenly kings*, wearing military uniform, should be here, because they were thought to be protectors of the Buddhist religion. They stood in temples and tombs.

Near them are twelve strange figurines found in a tomb. They are Chinese zodiac signs. These ones have the body of an official and the head of an animal. At the time of the Tang, zodiac signs were placed in tombs to protect the dead person from evil. Try to find your own Chinese zodiac sign. Note that every birth year corresponds with a particular sign.

Year of birth:

Chinese zodiac sign:



Find the showcase with two groups of clay figurines of musicians. Do you know the instruments they're playing?

These clay items were found in tombs, like most of the models of humans, animals and objects in the exhibition. They accompanied the dead person to look after his needs in the next world. What was the need served by the figurines you've just seen?



Exhibit 93 is a clay model of a cashbox. It, too, was found in a tomb. Why do you think it was put there?

Find exhibit 123, which dates from the 8th century and is made of gilded bronze. Do you recognise the figure? It is a wearing and standing on two demons.

