

PAN

AMSTERDAM

PAUL RUITENBEEK CHINESE ART



SANCAI-GLAZED POTTERY FIGURE OF A HORSE

Tang dynasty (618-907)
52 cm high, 46 cm wide

The horse is naturalistically modelled, standing on a rectangular base, the head slightly tilted to the left. The mane is covered in cream glaze, whereas the body is applied with a rich amber glaze falling onto the hooves. The finely modelled saddle is left unglazed and bears traces of pigment. The head and body of the horse are decorated with sancai-glazed trappings suspending oval appliques, each finely moulded with a mythical beast encircled by a floral border. There is an aperture at the rear for insertion of real hair.

PROVENANCE

Formerly in a Japanese private collection

Shogado, Tokyo

The present horse represents the 'heavenly horse', tianma, from the West, its ornaments reflecting Persian influence. According to legend, Emperor Wu (140-86 BC) of the Han dynasty, in search for immortality, needed celestial horses to carry him to heaven. Zhang Qian, his envoy in the West, reported the presence of extraordinary horses and, in order to acquire them, the Emperor launched a military expedition in 101 CE.

During the Tang dynasty, among aristocrats, horses from the West were still considered highly valuable means of transportation, and indispensable for ceremonial processions and imperial hunts. Pottery horses such as the present type would have thus functioned as important status markers within the Tang funerary culture. For a further discussion on this subject and a highly similar example of approximately the same size, see Mae Anna Pang, *An Album of Chinese Art from the National Gallery of Victoria*, 1983, pl. 25, pp. 80-81.