



6 A NEW IMPERIAL STATE: SUI AND TANG

MOST WRITERS HAVE CELEBRATED the Sui and Tang periods as a grand culmination of earlier developments in Chinese society and culture. The sequence of a short-lived Sui regime (581–617), which accomplished the task of reunification, and a long-lasting Tang empire (618–907), which consolidated and expanded the institutions of state and society, is often compared to the Qin–Han period many centuries before. Sui and Tang constitute the middle empires, reasserting Chinese power, prestige, and cultural superiority after the dark interval of the period of division. The triumphal narrative of Sui–Tang history devotes considerable attention to the impact of Tang institutions and culture on neighboring peoples in East Asia and to the cosmopolitan culture of the great empire itself. Tang as the center of the East Asian world is a common metaphor. For many later Chinese writers the Tang epitomized exemplary government (the reign of Taizong), brilliant verse (with such famed poets as Li Bo and Du Fu), and the peak of such arts as calligraphy and figure painting.

All of the assertions sketched above are true to some degree. From a Sinocentric point of view, the Sui–Tang age is a great episode in the long history of Chinese civilization. But the Tang state was only sometimes successful in expanding its borders and projecting its power. The reign of Taizong (r. 626–649), which elicits nearly universal admiration, was followed by the very different reigns of his successors Gaozong (r. 649–683) and the

much vilified Empress Wu (r. 690–705). The terror at court under Empress Wu and the great disruptions of the mid-eighth century (including the so-called An Lushan rebellion) that concluded the reign of Xuanzong (r. 713–756) are the antithesis of a glorious age, as is the sad spectacle of the late Tang reigns when court and capital lost power to regional military rulers. Claims of high cultural achievement notwithstanding, the Tang was also an age of great turmoil and widespread suffering, of wrenching changes in social institutions, and the twilight of an aristocratic class that had dominated society during the period of division. Much celebratory writing about Sui and Tang glides over these low points, as depressing as any in Chinese history.

STATE AND SOCIETY

Reunification came over a period of years. In retrospect it can be seen as beginning with the rise of Yang Jian in the Northern Zhou (550–581) and the efforts of that state to unify the north by exterminating the rival Northern Qi (550–577). The process accelerated with the usurpation of the Zhou throne by Yang (in 581) and his subsequent campaigns against the south, leading to the eventual defeat of the Chen court in Nanjing in 589. Yang was a member of the northern aristocracy, a military and civil power elite that ruled from the Northern Wei period onward, and a group of

6-1 Western Pure Land
Wall painting, north wall,
Cave 217, Mogao chapels,
Dunhuang, Gansu. Tang, late
7th–early 8th century CE

families that claimed pedigrees from both Han and non-Han ethnic stock. His defeated southern peers were aristocrats too, but most often were descended from displaced Han Chinese families that had fled south with the collapse of the Jin in the early fourth century. While the two elites shared many things, after more than two centuries of division and conflict they regarded each other suspiciously as mutually inferior. Part of Yang Jian's strategy to create a strong empire was the selective coopting of southern elites and their cultural practices. The court culture that took shape in Sui and early Tang times was heavily indebted to southern traditions in such realms as court etiquette, ritual, calligraphy, and poetry. Thus while the most powerful families of the Sui and early Tang were hybrid northern lineages, their cultural models became those of the Han Chinese southern courts.

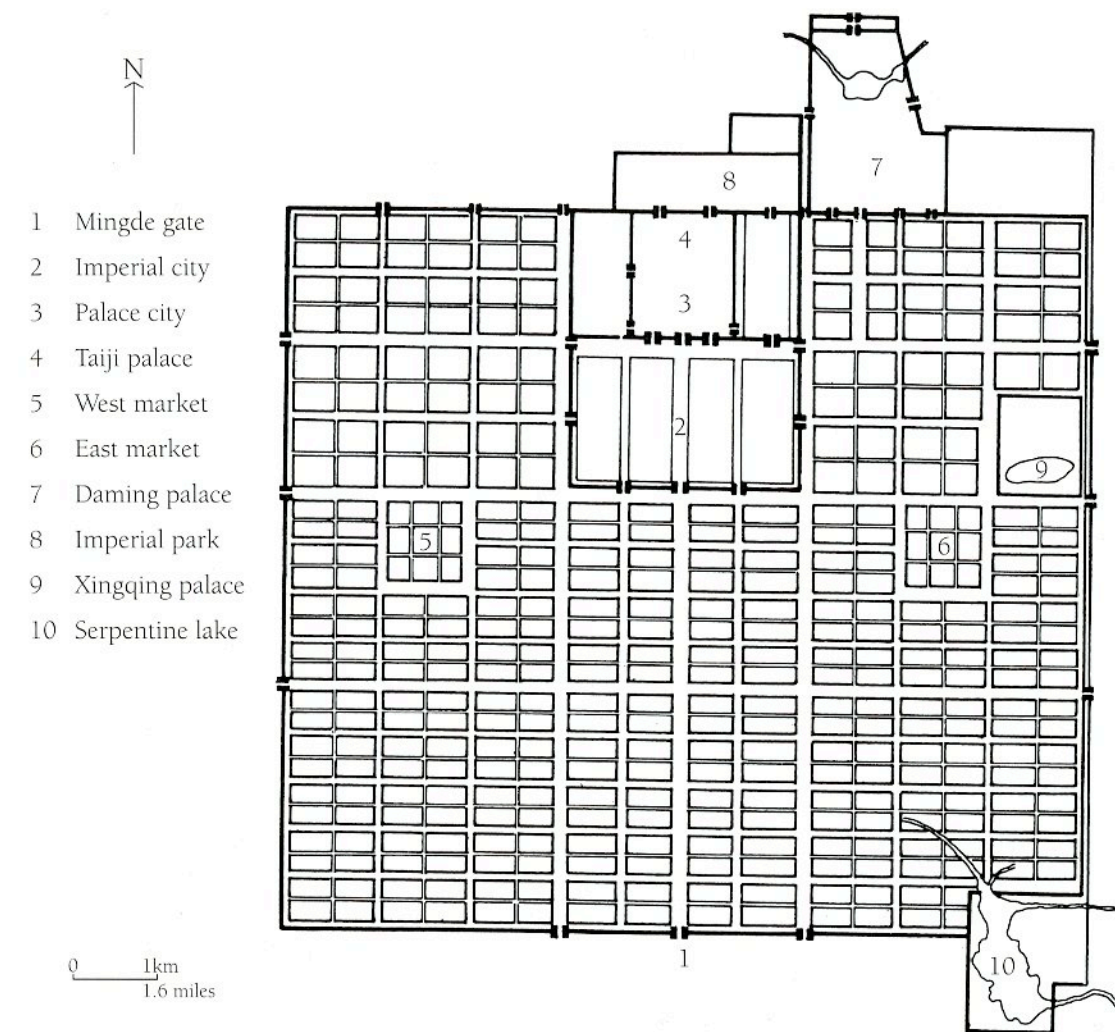
The founding of Tang was viewed, at the time, as yet another episode of usurpation among these northern militarist aristocrats. The Tang founder, later called Gaozu (Li Yuan, r. 618–626), was a general who betrayed his emperor and snatched power as still other rebels tore apart the Sui. His ability to quell the other potential claimants laid the foundations for a lengthy dynasty. But he had little opportunity to enjoy his successes. His second son, later known as Taizong (Li Shimin), in fact usurped his father's throne, murdering two brothers, including the heir, in the process. Taizong is often called the "second founder," and indeed the contributions of his era were fundamental. The era of good government over which he presided became a model in later political discourse. A wise and conscientious emperor able to take command of civil and military challenges, working in concert with and even heeding the advice of his high ministers, was a powerful ideal for later scholar-officials.

Many of the trajectories of Tang society and culture were established in the Sui and early Tang. In the mid-seventh century the centralized regime imposed order on a nation of some 50 million people through an imperial bureaucracy of 13,500 officials. These officials were educated men drawn mainly from old lineages of the northwest and northeast who traditionally enjoyed favored social status. Although civil service examinations began

during the seventh century, their main impact on governance seems to have been in unifying the ideology of the power elite and the opportunities created for provincial notables to enter capital politics. The military was drawn from the general population in a system of limited, rotating service first devised under the Northern Dynasties, and its maintenance did not create a significant burden for the state. Over the period, the population shifted rather dramatically toward the fertile and productive Middle and Lower Yangzi macroregions, leaving the Northwest and North relatively underpopulated. Land was registered and redistributed in the Tang, and the idealized system described in received texts may have been reasonably well enforced, based on the testimony of primary documents from such areas as Dunhuang and Astana. Taxes were based on both head counts and land holdings. Although coinage was made a state monopoly, payments in kind (grain and cloth) still accounted for most state revenues. Public works enhanced the economic integration of the empire, most notably the canals linking the southeast to the Yellow River basin, to points north, and to the capital district.

A New Capital: Daxing cheng and Chang'an

Once again the imperial capital was sited in the Wei River valley of the Northwest macroregion. The Sui founder declared the existing city of Chang'an, ancient capital of the Han and seat of the defunct Northern Zhou rulers, to be unsuitable for his new capital. He chose a site southeast of the old city for what was to become the largest city in the world in the seventh and eighth centuries. This area for Daxing cheng, named after the Sui founder's fief, was regarded as geomantically auspicious: Dragon Head Ridge occupied the northeast corner, the Wei River flowed beyond it to the north, and the high mountains of the Zhongnan range rose to the south. The plan was the most ambitious ever attempted: a walled city, roughly square in plan, measuring 6 miles (9.7 km) east to west and 5.3 miles (8.6 km) north to south (FIG. 6-2). The walls enclosing this vast area, considerably larger even today than the modern city of Xi'an, were as much as 39 feet



6-2 Plan of Chang'an in the 8th century CE

(12 m) thick, raised by the pounded-earth technique used since high antiquity. Three gates each in the east, south, and west walls, an acknowledgement of the canonical prescriptions of the "Royal City" plan (see FIG. 3-6 above), controlled access to the city. Altogether fourteen major thoroughfares ran east to west and eleven from north to south. Most streets were in the order of 130–225 feet (40–70 m) wide, although the roads beside the walls were smaller. On the other hand, two major avenues were appreciably larger. The main artery leading from the principal south gate (Mingde Men) north to the imperial city was 490 feet (150 m) wide, divided into five lanes, and was flanked by drainage ditches and rows of locust trees. Similarly, the great thoroughfare connecting the northern gates of the east and west walls also delimited the southern boundary of the palace and was as much as 720 feet (220 m) wide. These two arteries were the greatest "public" spaces

within the city the Tang renamed Chang'an, in honor of its Han ancestor.

Located in the northern third of the city were the compounds known as the Imperial City (Huang cheng) and Palace City (Gong cheng). The former was a rectangle straddling the city's axis, about 9200 feet (2800 m) wide by 5900 feet (1800 m) deep. Unlike in earlier imperial capitals, all the organs of government were concentrated here in a compact grid: the three central ministries of state and the six boards, plus the Ancestral Temple and Altar of the Soil. Tang officials appointed to the imperial service were thus at the beck and call of the court, their immediate neighbor on the north. At the same time, they were walled off from the residential quarters that dominated the city proper. The palace, in turn, was a rectangle of similar scale, with the same width but only 4900 feet (1500 m) deep north-south. It stood across the 720 feet wide thoroughfare mentioned above,

which served as a kind of palace square for vast assemblies and processions. The Son of Heaven's palace (the Taiji Gong) occupied most of this area, shifted slightly east of the axis, and was flanked by two lesser establishments, including the palace of the heir on the east. Immediately beyond the north city wall was the Imperial Park (Xi Nei Yuan) for the recreation of the imperial family. The disposition of the Imperial and Palace Cities at the north-central termination of the city axis is indebted to the plan of Ye, the Eastern Wei and Northern Qi capital (see FIG. 5-2 above).

The main arteries of the city, stretching from one gate to its opposite number, anchored a grid that subdivided the remainder of the city into 110 wards (*fang*). Those in the south measured about 1620 feet (500 m) square. Contained by walls and divided internally by crisscross grids ending in gates on each side, they were designed to accommodate most of the city's population. In fact, the southernmost wards were never fully built up, and many blocks remained cultivated fields or open land. The wards that flanked the Imperial and Palace City complex, however, were significantly larger and were intended, it is supposed, for aristocratic residents. The imperial court took over one of these wards and in the eighth century it became the favored residence of Xuanzong, his Xingqing Palace. Still two more areas were removed from residential use: the east and west markets (*Dong shi*, *Xi shi*) placed at the north edge of the residential wards, each about 3600 feet (1.1 km) square. The most notable aspect of the Sui-Tang city design is perhaps its attempt to regulate all aspects of urban life, especially the coexistence of imperial court and general population. This plan segregated the palace and court bureaucracy and the main features of the city served their needs. Other residents were managed as citizens of wards that shut their gates at nightfall. The markets served both the northern aristocratic and southern residential quarters of the city without disrupting the formal southern approach to the palace center. The Son of Heaven, moreover, was able to enjoy a less cified atmosphere simply by passing out of his palace to the north. With one million inhabitants in the seventh century, Chang'an was not only the

largest urban center in the world, it was also the most efficiently planned and awe-inspiring metropolis of its time.

No Tang buildings stand today within Chang'an (modern Xi'an), with the exception of several masonry pagodas (see, for example, FIG. 6-14). A few segments of the Sui-Tang walls still remain visible above ground, and the city grid survives in areas of the modern city. In fact it is possible to walk along major roads, especially within the Ming-period (1368-1644) wall, that follow the paths of their Tang-period antecedents. The foundations of much of the Tang city were destroyed long ago in rebuilding, but areas that have not been occupied over the later centuries often have well-preserved Tang sites. For example, archaeologists excavated one of the Tang city gates in the 1970s and it was sufficiently well preserved to allow informed reconstructions. This is the Mingde Men (Gate of Brilliant Virtue), the principal south gate on an axis with the Imperial and Palace Cities located some 3.1 miles (5 km) further north. Built in the 580s by the Sui, we know that the gate house was renovated in 654. Its design is credited to Yan Lide, brother of the painter Yan Liben discussed below (see page 210). Unlike the other gates on the east, north, and west sides with three openings each, this structure had five portals. The center opening was apparently reserved for the emperor and used only on those occasions, such as annual sacrifices, when he left the city. The flanking interior portals were designated for pedestrians, while the two outer portals were given over to wheeled traffic.

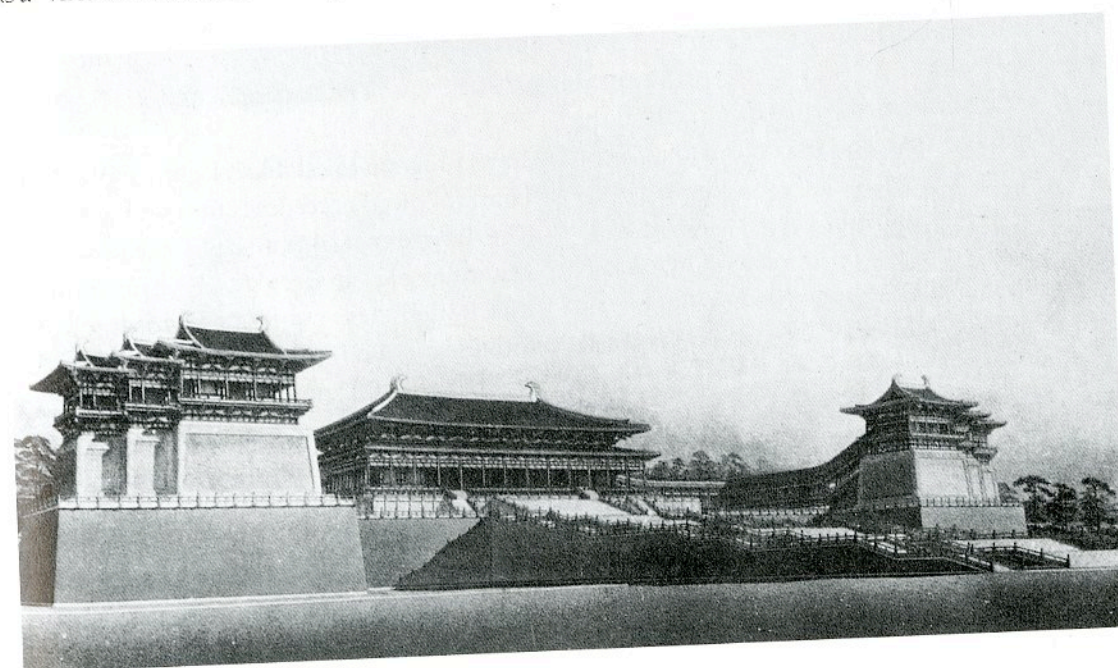
The Imperial Park immediately north of the new capital was developed with additional palaces in the reign of Taizong. One of these, known ultimately as the Daming Gong (Great Luminous Palace), has become the best evidence available for large-scale imperial architecture. More than thirty foundations survive north of modern Xi'an as protected sites on the national register. Begun in the 630s, work was suspended until the 660s, when the Daming Gong was made the primary residence of the emperor. The palace occupied the high ground of Dragon Head Ridge and so, it is said, provided a warmer, drier, healthier environment for the Son of Heaven. It also allowed

a commanding view of the city that stretched away to the south. Unlike the Taiji Gong, the original Sui-Tang imperial residence, the Daming Gong was divided into a formal front area of halls of state aligned on an axis and a much larger informal rear palace, with several dozen buildings around a man-made lake in a landscaped park. Although its builders sacrificed the prime axial position of the Taiji Gong that symbolism dictated, they gained a superb physical setting for the life of the imperial court.

The conflation of archaeological work, textual research, and the imaginative restorations of contemporary scholars has generated new knowledge of the Daming Palace, as with the Mingde Men. In this instance, literary evidence is sufficient to supply some of the details of the front hall of state, the Hanyuan Dian (FIG. 6-3), and one of the largest halls of the rear precinct, the Linde Dian. The restorations proposed for the timber-frame halls themselves, moreover, are derived in large measure from extant structures of the Tang period, notably the East Main Hall at the Foguang Temple on Mount Wutai (Shanxi; see FIGS. 6-11 and 6-12). (For the principles and some details of this system, see "The Timber-frame System," page 196.) Although the renderings are inevitably only as good as the arguments behind them, the Hanyuan Hall in particular can now be counted as a "virtual monument" of Tang architecture that

affects how we judge the earlier and later history of imperial halls.

The Hanyuan Hall was used for the grandest ceremonial occasions such as the accession of a new sovereign or the New Year's ceremony. The yard stretching from the south palace gate to this hall was almost 2000 feet (600 m) in length. At the rear was a triple ramp comprising a broad central staircase and two narrow flanking ones. These rose more than 33 feet (10 m) to the level of the hall itself. In making this ascent, court officials were overshadowed by towers built on high pedestals at each side, their superstructures linked to the main hall by covered galleries. This scheme of flanking towers descends ultimately from Qin-Han gate towers, *que* (see FIG. 4-7 above), but has a more immediate precedent in the main south gate of sixth-century Ye. In conception this hall is a grand gate leading to the other great halls of state. Its distant echo is the Noon Gate (Wu Men) of the Ming Forbidden City in Beijing. The flanking towers, although smaller in scale, were higher than the main hall, and their roofs were almost on a level with the main hall's roof. The structures surrounding the Hanyuan Hall itself served to enhance its physical presence, its volume, and visual impact, as well as serving as a convenient stage for a great array of imperial guards and attending civil officials. The main hall stood on a double terrace surrounded by stone



6-3 Hanyuan Hall at the Daming Palace, Chang'an
Late 7th-8th century.
Rendering by Fu Xinian

6-4 Anji Bridge

Zhao County, Hebei. Sui,
c. 595–605 CE



balustrades. At eleven bays wide, it presented a huge facade with its massive hipped roof and secondary eaves. The open porch across the front and a thick wall of earthen construction at both ends and across the rear defined the interior space. With central columns removed in the interior, this hall became a large rectangular space for the court's business. The columns were probably in the order of 30 feet (9 m) tall, and the spans between columns were more than 16 feet (5 m). All of the smaller features of this immense structure are lost except to the imagination. Tang-period wall paintings, stone carving, and the testimony of extant wooden halls, however, suggest a repertoire of materials, forms, and details.

Not all examples of Sui–Tang architecture were of timber-frame construction. Indeed the oldest architectural monument from the period is the “Great Stone Bridge” erected during the period 595–605 under the Sui (FIG. 6-4). An early inscription credits this bridge to a Sui official and engineer named Li Chun, otherwise unknown. For this site in modern Zhao County (Hebei), Li and his associates designed a flattened or segmental arch span of 122 feet (37.5 m). Unlike round arches known elsewhere (such as bridges and aqueducts of ancient Rome), this span rises a mere 23 feet (7.23 m) in spite of its considerable length—a ratio of 5:1. Segmental arches save building materials in the bridge, as well as in the approaches to it, while also maintaining a low

road bed. The designers also incorporated a pair of small, round arches at the two ends of the bridge, again reducing material and weight, and permitting the span to withstand the pressure of high flood waters, which pour through the arches rather than push against a solid wall. Another notable feature of this project is the use of twenty-eight adjoining arches for the span. Although some of these arches did collapse over the centuries, the bridge as a whole remained standing. The integration of sound structural logic and pleasing design manifested in this most durable span is strong testimony to the sophistication of its architects and engineers.

The Imperial Tombs

In its program to establish legitimacy the Tang court followed precedents first set by the Han. The Tang imperial tombs are one of the best examples of a modernized, hybrid tradition that nonetheless could claim to descend in orthodox fashion from the first empire. All but two of the Tang emperors were buried in the Wei River valley. Their eighteen necropolises stretch from the Qianling of Gaozong in the west for about 62 miles (100 km) eastward. The tombs are sited on the valley's high second terrace, far from the flood plain and well above the first terrace utilized by the Han emperors. Unlike the former, fourteen of the Tang tombs are

“mountain burials” in which a natural mountain serves as the mound, a practice initiated in the Han period but used only once for a Han imperial tomb. The remaining four tombs have, in traditional fashion, earthen mounds with four sides and a flat summit. The grandest of the Tang establishments dwarf all the tombs that predate them: for example, the Zhaoling of Taizong (d. 649) enclosed 23 square miles (60 sq. km), an area larger than that of Chang'an. Unlike under the Han, mausoleum tombs were not built to supply revenue and labor for the tombs.

In plan the Tang necropolises explicitly paralleled the imperial capital itself (see FIG. 6-2). At the core was a walled compound surrounding the mound or mountain, equivalent to the Palace City. Here the most important structure above ground was the Offering Hall dedicated to the deceased sovereign. As in the palace, gates controlled access from each direction, but the south gate served as the formal approach. An area

comparable to the Imperial City, also walled and gated, extended southward from the gate. Here was a symbolic court assembly of over-size stone figures and animals flanking the processional path (see FIG. 6-6) in eternal attendance on the emperor. The remainder of the necropolis, equivalent to Chang'an's residential wards, lies still further south beyond another gate. Satellite burials of high officials and close relations were assigned here, again within an encircling outer wall. The most populated of the Tang sites in this respect was the Zhaoling, where two hundred satellite burials have been documented.

The program of large-scale sculpture that flanked the path (*shen dao*) of the “imperial city” compound became standardized only after the early reigns. The Tang scheme was considerably more elaborate than surviving examples from the Southern Dynasties (see FIG. 5-3 above) and such evidence as we have for Northern Dynasty practices. The best example is perhaps



6-5 Qianling spirit path
Qian County, Shaanxi. Tang,
c. 683 CE

6-6 Spirit path official
Qianling
Stone, height 15' (4.6 m)



the Qianling (FIG. 6-5), dedicated to Gaozong (d. 683), where the Imperial Way extends for over 600 feet (1 km). A pair of faceted columns stands at the south, between tall gate towers built on natural hillocks some distance to each side, then come a pair of winged horses, a pair of auspicious birds (ostriches?), and five pairs of saddle horses. Leading up the slope thereafter are ten pairs of officials (FIG. 6-6). Civil bureaucrats hold their tallies of rank, while military officers grasp their swords. This frozen assembly waits on the emperor as his entourage might have done in life when he prepared to exit the palace. Pairs of stone lions crouch at the inner precinct gates, which again were fronted by towers built around earthen cores. At the Qianling there is an additional feature: sixty-one stone figures identified by inscriptions on their backs as emissaries from subordinate states of the Western Regions (see FIG. 6-5). Aligned in rows, they face onto the small plaza between the gate towers and lions.

Until an imperial tomb is opened, we must rely on the burials of imperial princes and princesses for our understanding of tombs below ground level. The epitaph found within the tomb of Prince Yide (Li Chongrun, d. 701, reburied 706) designated it a *ling* (imperial burial). At 330 feet (100 m) in length, it is the largest Tang tomb yet opened. Its plan is derived from practices established during the Northern Dynasties, such as the Northern Qi tomb of Lou Rui in Shanxi (see pages 157–158). A lengthy, steep ramp descends from ground level, its walls covered with murals. Air shafts punctuate the length of this ramp. In both walls at these points are commodious niches for burial goods, notably figurines. When the ramp ends, a corridor sealed by stone doors leads inward toward two chambers. This corridor is also the location for the epitaph slab with its cover. Each chamber is vaulted and decorated with more murals that evoke the ambience of a palace hall and populate the interior with appropriate serving staff. The rear chamber contains the sarcophagus of the deceased, a massive stone container that resembles a tile-roofed building and is covered with engraved designs. Most of the imperial tombs have been looted, but the Qianling itself may have escaped this fate. Its excavation would presumably provide a full record of the design and appurtenances of an emperor's tomb.

Scenes from Court Life

Murals in tombs built in the capital region during the seventh and eighth centuries epitomize elite life in vivid detail. We encounter the honor guard of a Tang heir assembled before the vermilion gates of his mansion (see FIG. 6-9). In another instance, the murals depict the encounter of Tang officials and foreign emissaries (see FIG. 6-36 below), a pictorial counterpoint to the stone figures of the Qianling noted above. The personal army of a prince rides across the countryside on one side of a tomb ramp (FIG. 6-7), while mounted warriors play polo opposite. As we pass from the ramp into the corridors of the tombs we encounter guards, eunuchs, and serving women. Here is a cross section of the Tang court, from dwarfs to older women who are veterans of the

palace (see FIG. 6-8). The placement of such figures within the successive portions of the tomb explicitly enforces the parallels between this underground abode and the palaces of the living. Executed over hundreds of square yards of wall surface in the largest tombs, these murals are the best surviving evidence for the work of Tang court painters. Datable and well preserved, commissioned by the highest levels of society in the capital, this evidence eclipses other bodies of Tang painting considered below.

The honor guard of Prince Yide is an army of guardsmen, cavalry, and chariots marshaled before the crenelated walls of the prince's mansion (FIG. 6-9). Soldiers with swords at their belts stand at attention before their mounts. Each horse has its own groom controlling the reins. Men with quivers at their side comprise the bowmen of this detachment. Red-cloaked civil officials fill in the rear ranks, sandwiched between the horses and large chariots of the prince, each with canopies and pennants unfurled. The painters repeated a selection of stock types in order to create this scene, yet at the same time they introduced enough minor



6-7 Hunting scene

Wall painting, Tomb of Prince Zhanghuai, Qianling, Qian County, Shaanxi. Tang, c. 706–711 CE

A Tang prince's personal cavalry improve their equestrian skills by playing this Tibetan pastime. Above the broad border band that separates the wall from the ramp, a few rocks and trees, larger boulders, and folds in the earth suggest the rudiments of a landscape setting.

6-8 Female attendants

Wall painting, Tomb of Prince Zhanghuai, Qianling, Qian County, Shaanxi. Tang, c. 706–711 CE



6-9 Prince's guard

Wall painting, Tomb of Prince Yide, Qianling,
Qian County, Shaanxi, Tang, c. 706 CE



variation—a sideways glance, an implied silent interaction—so that the groupings are never wooden. Figures and horses occupy a semblance of shallow space. Much attention has obviously been given to overlapping and to keeping track of obscured feet and limbs. At the same time the implied ground is tilted as if the figures are arrayed on a steep incline. More to the point, the painters depicted the rear ranks at the same scale as the front, without worrying what their composition might signify about a viewer's position. The emphasis on large figures is played off against an even larger setting: the walls and towers of the palace and the ridges and peaks of a mountainous terrain. Near and distant space is accounted for, if nothing in between.

Less crowded but even more ambitious is the hunting scene in progress (see FIG. 6-7) on the east wall of the ramp in the tomb of Prince Zhanghuai (Li Xian, d. 684). Five riders carry pennants snapping in the breeze, while below them another group of four also gallop at breakneck speed. Together the groups form a composition enclosing empty wall surface, a strong suggestion of a real space that they both occupy and define. All the horses and riders are distinct, and they are shown in various poses: profile and three-quarters, both frontal and reversed. The riders' poses depict different ways of sitting in the saddle or holding the reins. This variety creates a cinematic impression, as if we were looking at separate frames of the figures in action. Seen together they illustrate many of the stages in the movements of horse and rider. This hunting scene unfolds against white wall surface, but nearby are earthen ridges and clusters of rocks. Also scattered over the wall are more detailed renderings of the landscape, enough to show we are outside the prince's royal mansion. Landscape motifs are not scaled with attention to the riders. Setting here is a minor note within a painting focusing instead on dynamic action.

Within the front chamber of this same tomb we find a large panel devoted to moments in the life of serving women (FIG. 6-8). One woman wrapped in a shawl stands before a thin tree in a garden of the prince's palace. At center, a young woman wearing the leggings and cloak of a man seems to be pondering the cicada on the tree trunk,

her attention drawn no doubt by the insect's noisy drone. At left a third woman (not shown) strikes a more active pose, extending both arms as she cocks her head at a bird in flight and scratches her scalp with a hairpin. These women are large figures drawn from stock types, individualized to a degree by attribute or pose, and displayed within a minimal setting. Most of the corridor and chamber walls are given over to such renderings of single figures and small groups. The woman and eunuchs shown on these walls are certainly not persons of status or individuals with names. Rather they are ornaments tied to the status of others, marking the position of the deceased within the social and sumptuary hierarchy of the imperial family. We have many examples in lesser tombs of smaller numbers of such servants and attendants. It is fair to suppose the emperor's own tomb had even more.

STATE PATRONAGE OF THE DHARMA

The *dharma* flourished in Sui-Tang times. Although established during the preceding centuries among both northern aristocrats and southern elites, in this period Buddhism assumed a more pervasive role within Chinese society. Much of its impact can be traced to the pro-active policies of the Sui and Tang emperors. Grand gestures like the dedication of 111 relic pagodas by the second Sui sovereign in 601–604 were not exceptional. The prestige and wealth of the imperial court propelled projects such as the translations carried out by Xuanzang (c. 596–644) or the "Great Image Niche" at the Longmen chapels (see FIGS. 6-17, 6-18, and 6-19). Buddhist temples in the two Tang capitals were centers of social and intellectual life, and the focus of the greatest public festivities of the age. Leading painters of the day made their names by executing murals in these metropolitan establishments. Especially devout imperial clan members were responsible for the extraordinary richness of the reliquary deposits unearthed in recent years at the Famen Temple, west of Chang'an (see FIGS. 6-15 and 6-16). Indeed, the success of the Buddhist community was also

The Timber-frame System

The East Main Hall of the Foguang Temple (see FIG. 6-12) tells us more about timber-frame construction than any other evidence prior to the Song period (960–1279). Timber-frame halls are divisible into three tiers: the foundation block, the column grid, and the bracket tier with roof frame. Foundations changed little over time. Builders used pounded earth, stone column bases, facings of stone or brick, and tiled flooring from the early imperial era, if not earlier. The column grid, on the other hand, became more sophisticated during the centuries leading up to the time of the Nanchan and Foguang halls. Columns rested on their stone bases without any attachment; dead weight held them in place. For larger structures, the spans of columns reached 16 feet (5 m), and the height of the column and width of the span were roughly equivalent. Columns were spaced at variable intervals, so that the central bay on axis would be widest, flanking bays slightly reduced and end bays smaller still. The columns themselves were tilted inward slightly to create an impression of upright alignment. For the same reason the columns become slightly taller as they move away from the center bay. Builders tied adjacent columns together with beams at floor level and with one or more beams at their heads. The network of columns reinforced itself both laterally and in depth. It served as a stable but also flexible support for the brackets and roof frame with their considerable weight.

Extant buildings document a few basic approaches to the plan. At the Nanchan Temple, the hall is small enough to permit the builders to eliminate all interior columns. The columns form a perimeter circuit only. At the Foguang Temple hall, however, columns are

arrayed in five parallel rows. The third, or middle, row is reduced to two columns at each end. The four columns subtracted create a large space for the altar and the people before it. A similar principle was in use at the Hanyuan Hall of the Tang imperial palace (see FIG. 6-3). The subtraction of interior columns and the ability to place screen walls at any row allowed designers to create a variety of spatial zones, such as an open porch, gallery, or other interior configurations. Such alternative plans were more thoroughly explored during the Song, as for example, at the Hall of the Holy Mother at the Jin Ci (Taiyuan, Shanxi).

Certainly the most complicated part of a Tang hall was its tier of bracket clusters, *dougong*, pegged atop each column, which transmitted the weight of the roof onto the stone bases in the foundation. In larger halls such as that at Foguang Temple, clusters were also placed in the middle of each bay on a tie-beam. These intercolumnar clusters supplanted the inverted V-posts and “camel humps” of earlier periods. The Chinese terminology for brackets designates their components: *dou*, “blocks,” and *gong*, “arms.” A large block cradles the two lowest arms crossing at right angles in slots prepared for them. These lateral arms are generally short and terminate in two smaller blocks that carry the tier above. The lowest-level transverse arms projecting at right angles from the wall plane, however, are actually extensions of interior beams that span the bays within. Likewise the second-tier lateral arm was actually a segment of a tie-beam crossing from column to column. Relief carving on this beam imitates a separate arm. Thus each successive tier of blocks and arms knits

the structure together in two dimensions, laterally above the columns and transversely into beams at ceiling level. The several stacked tiers of arms typical of Tang building practice achieve two other purposes. They elevate interior beams well above the heads of the columns. They also extend in cantilever fashion transversely away from the column, both forward and backward. On the exterior this projects the eaves away from the wall, while on the interior this shortens the span between columns.

Roof frames are less complex. Trusses are created using one or more tiers of beams atop the transverse tie-beams inserted within the bracket clusters. A ceiling may or may not be dropped in at this level; at the Foguang East Main Hall, one is present. When a ceiling is in place, the beams above are generally more irregular in shape and less finished than those below. Inverted V-struts atop each truss carry the ridge pole. The use of purlins at intervals from the ridge downward allowed great flexibility in the roofs of Tang structures. Running parallel to ridge and facade, the purlins carried short rafters placed perpendicular to the ridge. Variations in the spacing and height of purlins permitted a roof line of variable slope, unlike the rigid truss used in much European timber-frame construction. The material used for the roof covering was always fired ceramic tile, sometimes glazed. However, the tiles were set in a thick bed of mud built up above the rafters and boards laid across them. The weight of the mud contributed more to the ponderous roof than the tiles themselves.

the root of its most serious setback, the proscription of the 840s under Wuzong. Court officials argued that the foreign teachings were inimical to the interests of the state and the teachings of the sages. The court turned out members of the clerical orders, closed a great percentage of the temples, and confiscated their wealth.

The Tang was an age of “international Buddhism.” In addition to the famous sojourn in India of Xuanzang, the age witnessed the peregrinations of many other Chinese, Indian, and East Asian pilgrim monks. These travels invigorated Chinese Buddhist centers, establishing living links with the still flourishing Buddhist “universities” of South and Southeast Asia. Indian monks came to Chang’an and left a legacy of esoteric (*mizong*) philosophy and practice. Pilgrims from the east, the Japanese islands and Korean peninsula, also visited, studying with leading Chinese figures of the day and recording their experiences. Meanwhile, important developments in Buddhist thought and practice originated in China, notably the teachings of the Meditation School (Chan, Japanese Zen).

Temples and Pagodas

The Buddhist temples that were built in remote corners of the empire are the oldest extant architectural monuments of China (compare FIG. 5-14 above). All the great temples of the two capitals suffered repeated calamities during and after the Tang period, and only a few of their masonry pagodas survive (see below). In spite of the proscription of the 840s, at least one wooden-frame temple hall escaped destruction in the mountains of modern Shanxi, and three more structures of late Tang date are also known in this province. These halls were created as ensembles of architecture, sculptural imagery, and painting. Their requirements as the abode of potent divine images and as the settings for sacred rituals determined their plans and other features. We know enough about other sites and the larger tradition of timber-frame construction to use these Buddhist halls as good evidence for lost structures of the imperial palace and other institutions as well (compare rendering of Hanyuan Hall, FIG. 6-3).



6-10 Main Hall, Nanchan Temple
Mount Wutai, Shanxi. Tang,
c. 782 CE

Four timber halls have been dated to the Tang, the oldest being the Main Hall of Nanchan Temple on Mount Wutai, Shanxi (FIG. 6-10). An inscription on a roof beam dates construction to 782, and the same date is posited for the seventeen clay images on the altar platform. This is a modest hall only three bays across and three deep. As a result of the elimination of interior columns, a large open space surrounds the altar. The large outdoor “moon terrace” on the south, built at the same level as the hall, supplemented this area. Thus worship could include both assembly in front of the altar and circumambulation within the hall. The hall faces south and has high, cantilevered eaves that extend out from the wall—a design that admits maximum light and warmth in the winter months while casting deep shadows during the heat of summer. The walls are solid masonry, pierced only by the door and lattice windows of the facade, an accommodation to the northern climate and mountain setting. Inside, the roof framing is completely open so one can see the several beams crossing from front to rear that support the trusses for the ridge. The central image also takes advantage of this enhanced space. Its mandorla extends into the roof above the height of the walls. While it is likely that much of this framing is original or very early in date, the hall was remade several times over the centuries.

The most important Tang hall is considerably larger and occupies a rather more impressive setting at the tree line, high on Mount Wutai. Called

**6-11 East Main Hall,
Foguang Temple**
Mount Wutai, Shanxi. Tang.
c. 857 CE



**6-12 Structural system of
East Main Hall,
Foguang Temple**

While the complexities of the timber-frame structural system are challenging, its goals are straightforward: an efficient supporting frame of timbers, both vertical columns and horizontal tie-beams and bracket arms, must carry a roof extended as widely as possible to create optimum shelter and usable interior space.

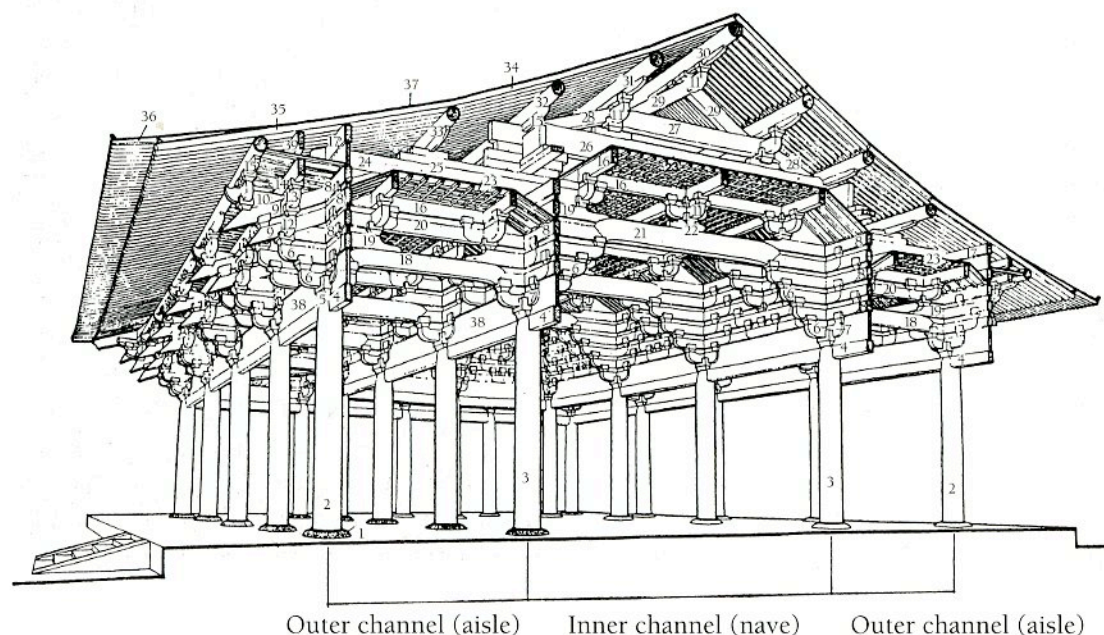
- 1 - plinth
- 2 - eave column
- 3 - hypostyle column
- 4 - lintel, tie-beam
- 5 - bearing block
- 6 - transverse arm
- 7 - bracket arm
- 8 - tie-beam
- 9 - cantilever arm
- 10 - "nose"
- 11-13 - bracket arms (variable lengths)
- 14 - Lohan tie-beam
- 15 - *timu*
- 16 - ceiling panel tie-beam
- 17 - tie-beam
- 18 - exposed tie-beam
- 19 - half-camel hump support
- 20 - tie-beam
- 21 - 4-rafter exposed tie-beam
- 22 - camel hump
- 23 - lattice ceiling panel
- 24 - rough (hidden) tie-beam
- 25 - support
- 26 - 4-rafter rough tie-beam
- 27 - cross-beam
- 28 - strut
- 29 - inverted V-brace
- 30 - ridge purlin
- 31-33 - purlins
- 34 - rafter
- 35 - eave rafter
- 36 - flying rafter
- 37 - roof board

Foguang (Buddha Radiance) Temple, this establishment dates from the Northern Wei and was a well-known site for pilgrims to the holy mountain of the *bodhisattva* of wisdom, Manjusri (Wenshu in Chinese). The East Main Hall (FIGS. 6-11, 6-12) here is thought to date from 857, based on a stele inscription. It is seven bays wide and four deep, some 110 by 57 feet (34 by 17.6 m) and occupies a terrace cut from the slope behind it, so there is little room either in front or behind. The East Main Hall looms above the lower temple precinct, facing west, a single eave hall with hipped roof. Its flying eaves have probably been trimmed back and so no longer project as far as they once did. The facade is articulated as two end bays with windows and five center bays with doors. Again, thick masonry walls seal the other three sides, save for small window openings in either end. The huge

roof, giant bracket sets carrying the eaves, and broad facade make this an imposing hall, a kind more common in capital temples and palace precincts. If it is today regarded as the epitome of Tang architecture, the honor is honestly earned, not merely a fluke of preservation.

Little from the great Buddhist temple complexes of this medieval period survives. The exception is masonry pagodas, with dozens of examples extant. Two functional types can be defined: (1) burial pagodas, used to inter the ashes of eminent Buddhist monks, far and away the most numerous; and (2) relic pagodas, erected to house some trace of the revered past, whether of the Buddha himself or of another holy person, place, or thing associated with them.

Burial pagodas are generally smaller in scale, constructed of solid masonry. They are often placed away from the heart of a temple, often in plots set aside for that purpose (*ta lin*, "forest of pagodas"). Some of these pagodas are fictive architecture, reproducing the columns, bracket clusters, eaves, doors, and windows of true timber-frame structures. The burial pagoda of Master Jingzang (d. 746) at Huishan Temple (Dengfeng, Henan; FIG. 6-13) is an early example of the eight-sided plan that became common in post-Tang times. The main story features a detailed rendering of frame construction, down to simple bracket clusters atop the fictive corner columns, and inverted-V struts, a carry over from the period of division. The eaves are created from corbeled

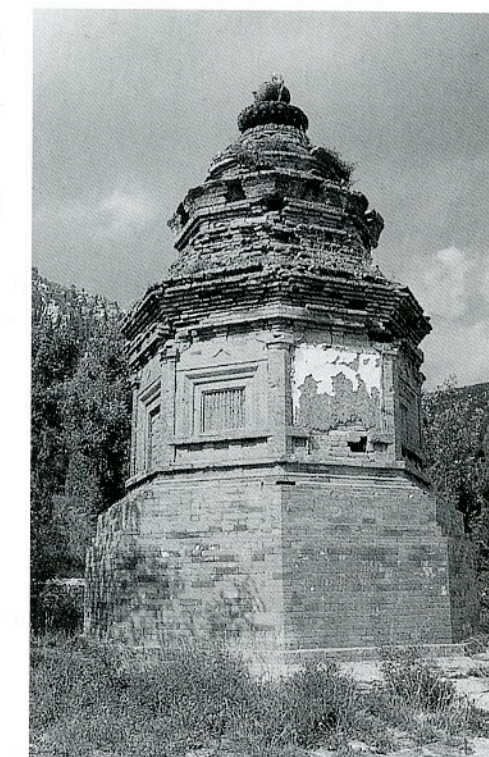


courses of brick, while the spire is an elaborately carved lotus supporting a flaming jewel. The brickwork of this structure captures some of the most advanced features of timber construction from the Tang.

Relic pagodas (*sheli ta*) often dominate a major courtyard of a temple. As architectural types they may be classified by their plan and prototypes. Single-story structures such as the Simen Pagoda (Licheng, Shandong), dated 611, derive from the so-called Asokan *stupas* now known only from miniature bronze examples and wall paintings at Dunhuang. This is a square stone structure topped by a pyramidal roof rising to a spire; each wall features a single doorway. Within, a central pillar permits the installation of four Buddha images facing the doors and a circumambulation path. Other one-story pagodas are more ambitious. The outstanding example, probably of the first half of the seventh century, is the Xiuding Temple pagoda near modern Anyang (Henan). This pagoda is renowned for its mantle of deeply carved and molded tiles that, like a canopy, drapes the walls. The evocation of a canopy is most direct in the upper tiers of this decoration, where a valance adorned with hanging beads encircles the eave. Below is an array of Buddhist beings, including animals and guardians, each rendered on a diamond-shaped tile.

All timber-frame, multistory pagodas built prior to the eleventh century have been lost. Surviving masonry examples are of square plan and differ primarily in how closely they adhere to one of two prototypes: the multistoried Han tower type (*lou*), or the close-set, multiple-eaves type first seen at the Mount Song pagoda (see FIG. 5-14). Both types may have hollow interiors in which wooden stairs and landings allowed the pious to ascend. The best-known example is the "Great Goose" Pagoda (Da Yan Ta) of Xi'an at the temple dedicated to his mother by Tang Gaozong and rebuilt by Empress Wu c. 701-704. Rising from a base 82 feet (25 m) square to a height of 210 feet (64 m), this is the grandest monument to survive from Tang Chang'an. Builders gave the tapering mass of this brick tower minimal surface detail, mainly elongated pilasters that carry a simple tie-beam with only blocks above. Other examples

derived from the *lou* type in the capital region include the burial pagodas erected for Shandao and Xuanzang, in which more detailed framing is provided. The now lost Yongning Temple pagoda (see FIG. 5-13) was an early example of this same tradition. The close-set eave variety derived from Indic *sikhara* towers is best known from the so-called "Little Goose" (Xiao Yan) Pagoda (FIG. 6-14), also within the bounds of ancient Chang'an. The four-sided structure, erected c. 707 for the Qianfu Temple, is a hollow masonry mass that actually split open in one great sixteenth-century earthquake and then closed up during a later tremor. The tower has a gently curving profile of thirteen (originally fifteen) stories; its spire



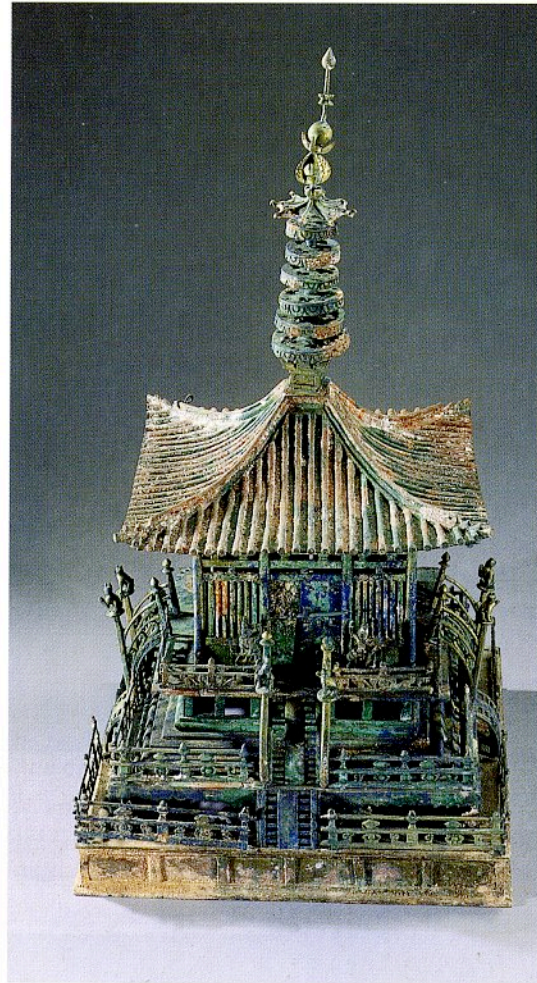
**6-13 Jingzang pagoda,
Huishan Temple**
Mount Song, Dengfeng,
Henan. Tang, c. 746 CE



**6-14 Xiao Yan pagoda,
Qianfu Temple**
Xi'an, Shaanxi. Tang.
c. 707-709 CE. Height
164' (50 m)

6-15 Reliquary in form of a pagoda

Tang, late 7th–early 8th century CE. Bronze, height 21" (53.5 cm). Famen Si, Fufeng, Shaanxi. Famen Si Museum



6-16 Set of reliquary caskets

Tang, 871 CE. Silver and gold, height 2¾–9¼" (7.1–23.5 cm). Famen Si, Fufeng, Shaanxi. Famen Si Museum

Originally comprising eight layers (the outermost wooden box decayed beyond restoration), these caskets preserved a "true body relic" of the historical Buddha (Sakyamuni), one of four in China during Tang times, and the only one to survive natural and human calamities down to modern times.

is also missing. Like the Mount Song pagoda, "stories" between eaves are miniaturized. Similarly, the first story is unusually tall and may once have been wrapped around by a gallery of frame construction. At 164 feet (50 m) in height, it is the second great Tang monument to survive in the capital.

The reason why these imposing structures were built should not be forgotten. Relics from

the holy realm of Indian Buddhism were highly esteemed in the Tang period, and at least four temples claimed to have body relics of the historical Buddha. Only one of these relic deposits has survived to our times—the finds made in the underground chambers of Famen Temple west of Chang'an (Fufeng County, Shaanxi). The collapse of a Ming pagoda on this site in 1981 presented archaeologists with an extraordinary opportunity to investigate the Tang-period foundations and crypt. The Tang pagoda, built not later than 874, had been a large square building with six bays to a side. Its appearance may well have been similar to that of a bronze reliquary (FIG. 6-15) recovered from within a stone coffer in the front chamber of the crypt. The crypt's underground chambers are among the earliest examples of their kind. In earlier periods, pagodas had simple stone coffers at the center of the pagoda base. Here, instead, is a series of connected passages and chambers over 65 feet (20 m) in length at a depth of 20 feet (6 m) below grade, accessible by stairway and passage. Stone doors similar to those in the imperial tombs discussed above facilitated removal of the Buddha relic for parading.

Archaeologists found four relics altogether in the 1987 excavations. Yizong had dedicated one of these, found in the rear chamber, in 871. The eight nested boxes used to house the relic (FIG. 6-16) are made from gold and silver, and utilized a variety of decorative techniques including chased designs and applied semiprecious stones and pearls. Lavish gifts of silver vessels and other gear, much of it made in palace workshops, accompanied this relic. Yet another relic recovered in a floor niche in the same chamber was a bone housed inside jade and rock-crystal coffins.



Why were these four relics gathered here? The answer may lie in the court's reaction to the proscription of Buddhism in the 840s. The largesse of the imperial dedications and donations may in fact be atonement for the damage done to the *dharma* in the decades before. Relics from other venues seem to have been consolidated at Famen Temple at this time, making it the preeminent repository of its kind in China.

The "Great Image Niche" at Longmen

The *Flower Garland (Avatamsaka) Sutra* is the longest of all the Mahayana texts and the most difficult. Its teachings are complex, a relatively late development within mature Buddhist thought. One of the text's key doctrines is the concept of the "three bodies of the Buddha" (*trikaya*). Rationalizing and synthesizing previous systems of thought, the *Flower Garland Sutra* posits: a "Body of Transformation" bound by space and time (such as Sakyamuni, who lived in a specific place and period); a "Body of Bliss" not limited in time but bound in space (such as Amitabha, the Buddha of the Western Pure Land); and a "Body of *Dharma*," a transcendental essence of the Buddha nature, not bound either by space or time. The idea that Sakyamuni was a manifestation of a transcendental Buddha nature had very ancient, Indian roots, but the power of the *Flower Garland Sutra*'s teachings was their ability to order previous articulations of Buddhist belief within a totalizing framework. The greatest monument of Tang imperial patronage is a huge open niche (FIG. 6-17) devoted to the transcendental Cosmic Buddha (Vairocana; Lushena) of the *Flower Garland Sutra*.

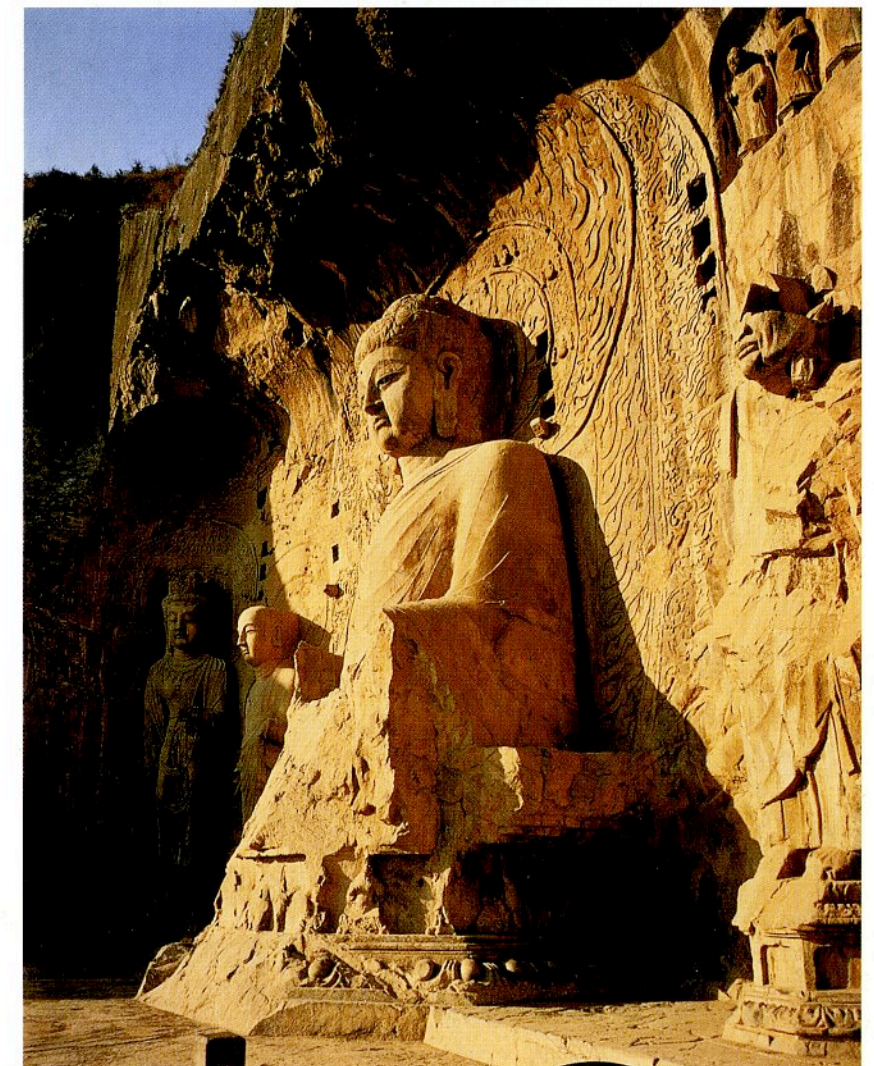
This Great Buddha, dedicated in the 670s at Longmen, by custom has been called after a now defunct Tang temple, Fengxian Si, once located south of the cliff-face grottoes. The eighth-century inscription found on the Buddha's pedestal supplied a better name for this ensemble: "Great Image Niche" (*Da xiang kan*). The same inscription supplies two dates. In 672, Empress Wu donated 20,000 strings of cash, and in 675 the project was completed. These dates should not be taken to mean the entire project was accom-

plished in a mere three years. Chinese scholars claim twenty-plus years as more plausible, and indeed this same inscription mentions the emperor Gaozong (r. 650–683) as patron. It seems most likely that the 672 donation was intended to enable completion of the work and establish the virtue of its donor, Empress Wu. In addition to details of dates and donations, the inscription also names the clerical advisors to this grand project and the court bureaucrats charged with its execution.

Of the many colossal images carved in China, the Great Vairocana Buddha at Longmen deserves a privileged place. The main images are carved in high relief from the walls of a huge artificial platform excavated from the rocky cliff. This area measures some 98 by more than 130 feet (30 by 40 m). Surely much of the time and effort expended was devoted simply to removing the

6-17 Great Buddha (Mahavairocana), Fengxian Temple

Longmen, Luoyang, Henan. Tang, completed c. 675 CE. Limestone, height 55'9" (17 m)



6-18 A *bodhisattva* and Ananda, Fengxian Temple

Longmen, Luoyang, Henan, Tang, completed c. 675 CE. Limestone, height 35' and 43'5" (10.65 and 13.25 m)



limestone, which was in any case a prime material for steles and other architectural uses. The lines of an eave are clearly visible in the walls above the figures, as are slots for beams added after the original construction. Smaller disciples and *bodhisattvas* (heights 35 and 44 feet—10.5 and 13.4 m—respectively) attend the Buddha at the center of the back wall (height 55 ft, 17 m). On each side wall are guardians, one an armored heavenly king, the other a bare-chested guardian. Coming into the area defined by these huge

figures, a visitor is transfixed at the intersection of their downcast gazes. The Vairocana Buddha sits on an octagonal throne. The front fall of drapery is largely destroyed but may have featured patterned folds cascading over lotus petals. Upper arms, chest, and head are intact and have benefited from a recent renovation. Vairocana's body is scarcely revealed; graceful arcs of drapery hang from each shoulder across the chest. The facial features are wide and plump. The eyes themselves are deeply carved under half-open lids. The full hair above the forehead and the extended ears with their thickened lobes frame the face. In contrast to the gravity and austerity of the image, its halo and body mandorla are full of animated detail, including airborne *apsaras* with musical instruments and fluttering scarves.

Not all of the attendant figures are well preserved. Those against the back wall stand on pedestals similar in basic structure to the Buddha's throne. The *bodhisattva* and the young disciple Ananda have stocky bodies and large heads (FIG. 6-18). The disciple's plain robe and smooth features contrast with the finery of the *bodhisattva*, who stands in a broken pose with the weight shifted slightly off one leg. This stance and the contrasting raised and lowered arms impart subtle movements to the several scarves and strands of jewelry. The patterns of the skirt are also more energized. Great attention has been given to other details such as the chest muscles, strands of hair at the shoulders, and crown. If these attendants are pacific and passive, the four guardians of the side walls are their menacing, active counterparts. Only the north wall figures are intact (FIG. 6-19). The forward guardian thrusts back one leg and swings his arms into a martial pose. Huge, broad shoulders twist above the hip-shot waist. Neck muscles and tendons strain as he rotates his head and glares down at those who approach. The heavenly king on this wall carries a miniature *stupa* in his right hand, an attribute that probably identifies him as Vaisravana, the Guardian King of the Northern Quadrant. Vaisravana is "at ease" on the left side of his body. The other leg and arm are at right angles, holding down the head of a vanquished earth spirit and lifting the *stupa*, respectively. Like the bare-chested guardian, the Guardian King

glares from a furrowed brow with beady eyes. The much-damaged guardians of the south wall had similar, complementary poses.

Court patronage of the Flower Garland school is well documented during the mid-seventh century. But other layers of association accrued to this project and its iconography. As the Cosmic Buddha, Vairocana is the source of the entire phenomenal universe. Everything in every time and place is actually a manifestation of his Buddha essence. The parallel to the role of the Son of Heaven within the Chinese world order is not exact, but the comparison favors the status of the imperial house. Moreover, the Buddhist concept of a "wheel-spinning king" (*cakravartin*) is also implicit in this imagery. A royal patron who promotes the *dharma* by "spinning the wheel of the Law," a patron who is himself a manifestation of the Buddha, made this image. Empress Wu promoted a newly discovered *Great Cloud Sutra* that prophesied the eminent appearance of a Chinese *cakravartin*, and few could doubt that she was to be that ruler. Thus the "Great Image Niche" is a forceful statement of the identity of the divine and imperial orders, and of the virtues of the ruling Son of Heaven.

Tang Chapels at Dunhuang

Of the many cave-chapel complexes patronized during the Tang period, none is better preserved and more deserving of close study than the Mogao chapels at Dunhuang. The Sui-Tang chapels at this desert site number about 360. Most are outfitted with a medley of sculptures and murals. In plan, the Tang chapels have two square chambers, the rear under a four-sloped ceiling rising like a canopy to a recessed square coffer at the center. (Many of the front chambers are partially or totally destroyed.) The entrance leading to the rear chamber usually faces a sculptural ensemble set into a raised, shelflike niche. Typical ensembles of this period are a pentad of the Buddha, two disciples, and two *bodhisattvas*, such as that on the back wall at Longmen, often with two additional sculpted guardians outside the niche. The side walls are often given over to large-scale panels with unified mural compositions. The dominant sub-



6-19 Guardians of north wall, Fengxian Temple

Longmen, Luoyang, Henan, Tang, completed c. 675 CE. Limestone, height 34'6" and 32' (10.5 and 9.75 m)

ject matter is the several devotional cults associated with Pure Land Buddhism, especially representations of the "Western Pure Land" of Amitabha (see FIG. 6-1), and various compositions with Avalokitesvara, the *bodhisattva* "who attends the sounds of the world" (see FIG. 6-23). Other Buddha Pure Lands are also represented, as are such important narratives as the encounter of Manjusri and the layman Vimalakirti.

For all of their majesty and high craft, the sculptures of the Great Image Niche at Longmen are incomplete. Tang artists finished images with a full palette to represent the tones of flesh and fabric. A fine example of these effects is the ensemble of Cave 328 at Dunhuang (FIG. 6-20), dated to the

late seventh or early eighth century, within decades of the Longmen images discussed above. This is a pentad originally accompanied by four kneeling attendants clad like *bodhisattvas*. (One was removed by Harvard curator Langdon Warner, one of several scholars to disturb the Dunhuang site in modern times.) All the images are covered with white pigment over their flesh, while their robes and skirts are painted various shades of brown, red, and green. Gilt covers the borders of the drapery. The niche is painted with elaborate scenes: another Buddha ensemble is shown on the ceiling above the heads of the three-dimensional figures, and additional disciples and *bodhisattvas* appear on the three walls. The overall effect is as lifelike as any Tang critic could ask and qualitatively (both in materials and execution) as high a level as any patron could hope for.

The seated *bodhisattva* to the proper left of the Buddha (FIG. 6-21) assumes a relaxed pose,

usually compared to the "royal ease" of Indian kings. One leg hangs pendant, while the other is tucked into the body. This is a tall figure with a long waist and chest, bearing narrow shoulders. The proportions of the neck and head are also less thick-set than on the Longmen *bodhisattvas*. Even seated, this figure is as tall as the standing elder disciple Kasyapa nearby. The monk clasps his hands in a reverential pose (the *anjali* mudra of adoration) so that his heavy cloak hangs evenly from the forearms, framing the arcs of the body drapery. Unlike the *bodhisattva*, Kasyapa betrays his mortality in his intense facial features. The two types are a study in contrasts: human with superhuman, worldly with otherworldly, mortal with divine, intense struggle with total confident mastery. The disciples painted behind the figures are given almost as much attention as their dimensional counterparts and are an opportunity for presenting varied facial types and different ages. These painted monks virtually step into the space of the niche and address the

6-20 Buddha ensemble
Cave 328, Mogao chapels,
Dunhuang, Gansu. Tang, late
7th–early 8th century CE



viewer from an assortment of poses. They appear to participate in the *sacra conversazione* of this ensemble.

Buddhist Themes at Dunhuang

Several first-hand accounts of the murals painted in the halls and precincts of the great temples of the Tang capital survive from the ninth century. Many famous names are represented among painters credited with these creations, and some of those "names" may have contributed important innovations in the evolving conception and elaboration of these subjects. The great proscription of the 840s, and the vicissitudes of timber-frame halls and temple precincts, doomed all of this great mural art. Already in the ninth century collectors would seek out fragments of these murals. Today other sources must stand for the great achievements of Tang Buddhist wall painting. The primary source is the murals of the Mogao chapels at Dunhuang. The range of subjects surviving here parallels themes identified in textual accounts, and datable examples span most of the Tang period.

The most "popular" trend within religious or devotional Buddhism during Tang times was the Pure Land (Sukhavati) school, whose teachings and imagery appealed to a cross section of Tang society. Many of the largest and finest

6-21 Kasyapa and a bodhisattva

Cave 328, Mogao chapels, Dunhuang, Gansu. Tang, late 7th–early 8th century CE. Height, 6'3" and 5'11" (1.9 and 1.8 m)

6-22 Sixteen Visualizations of Queen Vaidehi

Wall painting, north wall, Cave 45, Mogao chapels, Dunhuang, Gansu. Tang, 8th century CE



murals at the Mogao chapels from the seventh and eighth centuries derive from one of three texts associated with these teachings. The *Smaller Sukhavati* and *Larger Sukhavati* sutras, as their names suggest, seem to be simpler (and earlier) and more complex (and later) statements of a common core of ideas about the Western "Pure Land" (*jing tu*) of Sukhavati that was presided over by Amitabha Buddha. Most scholars think these texts developed in Central Asia independent of any ancient Indian, Sanskrit source. Their teachings concern the benefits of rebirth in Sukhavati, a realm bound by time and space; rebirth here is not extinction, *nirvana*. However, it is a realm purged of the lower orders of beings and a step closer to *nirvana*. Both texts stress the role of faith in achieving this rebirth, and the *Smaller Sutra* in particular emphasizes the efficacy of chanting Amitabha's name (*nien Fo*). The *Larger Sutra* portrays Sakyamuni Buddha preaching, whereby he gives a history to Amitabha as a reincarnation of a monk—*bodhisattva*, Dharmakara. This text also assigns prominent roles to Amitabha's two great *bodhisattva* attendants, Avalokitesvara (Guanshiyin or, more commonly, Guanyin in Chinese) and Mahastamaprapta (Dashizhi).

Fully elaborated compositions of these *sutras* are found in many Tang caves at the Mogao chapels. The north wall of Cave 217 is an early eighth-century example that has sustained remarkably little damage (FIG. 6-1). The central panel presents the key figures, but every part of the scene has been amplified. Amitabha sits on a large, tiered pedestal with standing and seated attendants on a tilted platform that occupies the center of the composition. Other platforms with railings and bridges linking them to the center hold the entourages of the two great *bodhisattvas*. Across the lower register is another stagelike area with musicians, dancers, and two additional standing Buddha figures. The top third of the scene presents an array of palatial halls, galleries, and towers. The strong rising orthogonal lines of the middle register platforms and the down-swept lines of the roofs and eaves above create a kind of vortex at the level of Amitabha's head. The visual emphasis is on the majesty of the three great actors

in this spectacle and on the brilliance of their Pure Land realm, points emphasized in the *Larger Sukhavati* text.

A third text of the Pure Land school was the commentary written by Shandao (613–681) to the *Visualization Sutra* (*Guan Wuliangshou jing*). Shandao's text tells a narrative on the efficacy of "visualization" (*guan*), a mental discipline in which the devotee constructs the imagery of the Pure Land in the mind, step by step. This internal vision assembled in one's consciousness prior to death is a preparation, indeed a prerequisite, for rebirth in the Pure Land. Two vertical panels from the north wall of Cave 45 (mid-eighth century) lay out the narrative of the wrongly imprisoned King Bimbisara and his virtuous Queen Vaidehi (FIG. 6-22). The panel depicts the "Sixteen Visualizations" performed by the queen at Amitabha's instruction. Vaidehi is shown as a white-robed kneeling figure at both sides of each of the six registers; each episode is marked by a brown cartouche without text. The meditative stages take place outdoors in a verdant setting of sparse trees and rolling hills. The artist depicts the object of her visualizations before Vaidehi in each instance: the lotus tanks, jeweled trees, pedestal thrones, and pavilions to the great *bodhisattvas*, and eventually Amitabha himself. Missing from this panel are the final three visualizations, the three levels of rebirth with their visions of the Pure Land promised to believers. These scenes may have been displayed across the bottom of the wall, now damaged.

One of Amitabha's two great *bodhisattva* attendants assumed great importance in Tang times. The opposite, south wall of Cave 45 (FIG. 6-23), illustrates well the independent role of Avalokitesvara. This ambitious composition actually assembles three distinct aspects of Guanyin. At the center is a large, standing, iconic rendering of the deity under a canopy. Here the great *bodhisattva* is strictly frontal, bedecked with strands of jewels and sashes, a miniature Amitabha in the headpiece confirming the identity. Across the top is an array of small scenes of the "thirty-three manifestations of Guanyin." These scenes illustrate Guanyin's ability to assume various divine and human guises as described in the well known "Pumen Pin" (Gate

to Everywhere of the Bodhisattva Who Observes the Sounds of the World), the twenty-fifth chapter of the *Lotus Sutra*. At lower registers are similar multiple scenes. Here we see illustrations of the various ways in which Guanyin can intercede on behalf of believers who call the deity's name. As with the manifestations, cartouches explicitly label each small scene. It is the charge of the painter to illustrate each peril, whether sword-wielding bandits or a dangerous storm at sea, as required.

The conception of this mural is not out of step with the painted visions of the Western Pure Land seen above. In both cases, a central pictorial unit is iconic, while the flanking units are narrative. The wall is both a focus of devotion and a "visual text" for the edification of all who come before it. The common Tang-era term for these murals is *bian xiang*, rendered by Victor Mair as "transformation tableaux." Scholars have debated the interpretation of this term and its proper application. The similar term *bian wen* (Mair's "transformation texts") is found in the titles of some scroll texts recovered at Dunhuang, but these literary works seem to encompass both Buddhist and secular subjects. These texts may sometimes have been recited for an audience, and a few were even given illustrations that could in turn be viewed during performances. The similar terminology need not mean, however, that artists also created mural compositions as the visual accompaniment to recitations before an audience. Indeed, as Wu Hung has pointed out, the cramped surroundings and darkness of the Mogao chapels make this function impractical. The term *bian xiang* seems better understood as a reference to the "miraculous" or "illusory" nature of these pictorial renderings, and indeed of the great preaching episodes in which all *sutras* were spoken by Sakyamuni himself.

The "Sutra Cave"

From a Eurocentric point of view, the wonders of the Mogao chapels were "discovered" in the early twentieth century through the efforts of such redoubtable scholars as Aurel Stein and Paul Pelliot. Both came away from their visits with large quantities of medieval documents and paint-

ings acquired from a local monk who had stumbled upon a cache at the turn of the century. This cache was found in the "Sutra Cave" (Zang jing dong), now Cave No. 17 in the system of the Dunhuang Academy. This small chamber held an estimated forty-five thousand items gathered together from a great many sources in the Dunhuang region sometime in the eleventh century. The motivation for this project is not understood, but the result was a priceless sampling of the visual culture of the Western Regions. While some documents and *sutras* dating from the pre-Tang period were part of the cache, the bulk of the paintings and related materials date from the mid- and late Tang and subsequent Five Dynasties period. The paintings depict many devotional themes attested in records of the Tang period. In style and quality, they range from the most accomplished and up to date to the naive and old-fashioned.

A major devotional cult of the late Tang centered on the *bodhisattva* Ksitigarbha (Dizang), an intercessor deity who, like Guanyin, alleviated the sufferings of the faithful. Ksitigarbha's special charge was Buddhist purgatories and hells where the souls of the dead were held prior to rebirth. A scroll of the *Sutra of the Ten Kings of Hell* (*Shi wang jing*) vividly illustrates the accommodation of Indic and native Chinese concepts this subject required (FIG. 6-25). The illustrations depict the "courts" of the Ten Kings, such as Yama, the Indian god of death, and Taishan Wang, the Chinese deity of the underworld beneath Mount Tai. Heads and hands locked in stocks, hapless souls parade before each king at seven-day intervals after death. Like Chinese magistrates, the kings, seated at desks and assisted by clerks, scrutinize the records of the deeds of each soul. Most will be sentenced to rebirth in one of the "Six Realms": hell, hungry ghosts, animals, humans, titans, and gods. Only Dizang, here shown in his monk's attire, can penetrate this realm and rescue a soul from it. These illustrations are simple and direct picture storytelling, probably created earlier than the scroll itself, which is assigned to the late ninth or tenth century. Nonetheless, these scenes, along with those of Queen Vaidehi's meditations or Guanyin's manifestations,



6-23 Manifestations of Guanyin

Wall painting, south wall, Cave 45, Mogao chapels, Dunhuang, Gansu, Tang, 8th century CE

6-24 Sketch of a monk

Tang, late 9th–early 10th century CE. Ink on paper, height 18" (46 cm). The British Museum, London



testify to the strong interest in narrative illustration in Tang visual culture.

While most of the painted works recovered from the Sutra Cave are silk banners in color, many other items like the "Ten Kings" scroll are on paper. Some of these are clearly sketches or practice drawings done by painters active in the region. Other works are designs that preceded a mural, or aids such as pounces for transferring motifs to the walls. An ink drawing of a seated monk (FIG. 6-24) may or may not be a finished work. Executed in ink line alone, without either ink wash or color, this subject has close parallels in several small chambers at the Mogao site used for memorial images of monks, including Cave 17, where the local monk found the great cache. It may therefore be a design for such a project. On the other hand, the drawing is without mistake or emendation, unlike preparatory sketches. There is no reason to think, save for its lack of color, that it is not finished. Tang critics writing



6-25 The Ten Kings of Hell (two details)

Tang, late 9th–early 10th century CE. Handscroll, ink and pigment on paper, height 11" (28 cm). The British Museum, London

in the ninth century prized brushwork above all else; this monk may well have satisfied contemporary tastes.

ELITE LIFE AND ELITE ARTS

Sui and Tang society was aristocratic—a social order that was seriously affected by a variety of institutional, economic, and demographic changes. Late Tang society was markedly changed from its Sui and early Tang predecessors. Indeed, the differences were so profound that many scholars look upon this period as a great watershed in the history of Chinese society. The Tang

imperial clan was an aristocratic family with roots in Taiyuan (modern Shanxi), and the first two emperors (Gaozu and Taizong) were regarded as "first among equals" by their aristocratic peers. Their consorts and high ministers came from the same elite clans of the northwest that had dominated the societies of the Northern Dynasties and that had different ideals of manly and womanly behavior than their contemporary southern counterparts. Martial prowess and horse riding, for example, were far more important in the north than in the south. The fact that northern women assumed active roles in family life was not lost on observers from the south. Examinations to select capital and local officials probably did not affect

society as much as some historians have claimed, but it did widen the elite base of officials serving at court and in the capital. Great families from the "northeast" (modern Hebei, Henan, Shandong) became more prominent during the seventh and early eighth centuries. More gradually, so too did men from the clans of the "southeast" (the Lower Yangzi macroregion).

Early texts record portraits of important personages at least from the Han period; the seventh-century imperial court favoured this kind of painting. Still, we lack any credible extant works that depict specific emperors or empresses, or any other names of renown before the Song period. The handscroll known as the *Thirteen Emperors* (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston) is most likely an eleventh-century tracing copy of a Tang composition (FIG. 6-26). The attribution to Yan Liben (d. 673), although made as early as the eleventh century, is not buttressed by any Tang textual references. The first six figures with attendants are by a different hand than the final seven. The brief inscriptions that label each group may be later additions; in any case, scholars have established no clear rationale for the selection of the individual emperors. Nonetheless the scroll's designs are good evidence for an important figural type:

6-26 Att. to Yan Liben,
Thirteen Emperors

Tang, 7th century CE (11th-century copy). Handscroll, ink and pigment on silk, 20" x 17.5" (51 cm x 5.31 m). Museum of Fine Arts, Boston



the imperial personage with attendants. The image of Emperor Wu of the Northern Zhou shown here is a convincing statement of his social persona. The rendering employs a hieratic scale that diminishes the stature of accompanying figures. This is an old convention that can be found in designs from the period of division, including scrolls attributed to Gu Kaizhi and the donor reliefs at the Longmen cave chapels. The emperor himself is a heavy-set man with a considerable stage presence, stern in demeanor, and august in his mortar-board hat and finery. This kind of imperial costume is repeated on other figures in the Boston scroll, but other versions of dress are illustrated as well. The heavy-set imperial type seen here is also found in the Mogao chapels at Dunhuang in murals recording the encounter of Manjusri and Vimalakirti, such as that in Cave 220 dated 642.

No authentic portrayals of any Tang empress are available, although some scrolls linked to worthy painters such as Zhang Xuan (active early eighth century) and Zhou Fang (active late eighth–early ninth century) claim to represent denizens of the imperial court, including the famous Yang Guifei. Some of these compositions accurately reproduce Tang-period conventions



6-27 Att. to Zhou Fang,
Ladies with Flowers in their Hair

Tang, late 8th–early 9th century CE (10th-century copy). Ink and pigments on silk, 18 x 69" (45.5 x 175.5 cm). Liaoning Provincial Museum, Shenyang

for grouping figures, a repertoire of common poses and actions, and even some details of Tang fashion, such as hair, dress, and furniture. We illustrate a painting in Liaoning attributed to Zhou Fang (FIG. 6-27). Ellen Laing has demonstrated that this painting illustrates a scene on "Flower Morning," a spring holiday celebrated in Tang and later times. The actual date to be assigned to the figures is debated; some scholars regard their dress as tenth-century attire and date the painting no earlier. Moreover, the composition as it is cannot be analyzed as evidence for Tang conventions since the present handscroll is assembled from pieces of silk that may actually have been part of a different format originally. These caveats given, the figures are perhaps the best female images of early date among extant portable paintings. These ladies display many of the features of Tang taste and style admired in the poetry and other writings of the day. They are neither overly slim nor heavy. They wear high-waisted dresses without sleeves, and diaphanous wraps with large sleeves and long sashes that both mask and reveal

the dress. Gold hairpins and artificial peony blossoms in keeping with the holiday ornament high bouffant hairdos. These women epitomize Tang-style elegance and high fashion.

The considerable attention given to paintings of women distinguishes the figural art of this period. The fame of Zhang Xuan and Zhou Fang derives partly from their attention to women subjects. Even ignoring the many works attributed to them, depictions of women would still be prominent among authentic paintings from tombs and cave chapels. Several fragmentary screen paintings from the seventh- and eighth-century tombs at Astana, a cemetery site near Gaochang (in Turfan, Xinjiang), complement the evidence of murals and portable scrolls. A lady seated on a high couch placing a token on a game board (FIG. 6-28) is almost as elegant as the ladies on Flower Morning now in Liaoning. She wears a red costume with a gauze shawl or long scarf. Her makeup includes heavily rouged cheeks, a small painted forehead motif, and bright lips. On other fragments of this eighth-century screen well-dressed women

6-28 Lady playing weiqi
Tang, 8th century CE. Silk,
height 24¾" (63 cm). Astana
cemetery, Turfan, Xinjiang.
Xinjiang Museum, Urumqi

A game of "encirclement chess" (better known by its Japanese name, *go*) occupies a refined Tang lady, a theme also known from tomb murals and portable scrolls. The painter's interest in elaborate coiffure, heavy makeup, diaphanous scarves, and colorful textile patterns is similar to such works as the better known *Ladies with Flowers in their Hair* (see FIG. 6-27).



stand and watch idly, while two little boys in trousers play in the long grass to one side. The activities shown in such designs reflect the ornamental life of many women in Tang elite society. Privileged and pampered, they were nonetheless all too subservient to stereotyped roles and the whims of their menfolk. A brilliant entourage of household or palace women was as much a status symbol for a gentleman as his fine horses.

Cosmopolitan Life

Most features of the cosmopolitan life we associate with the Tang capital had roots in the Northern Dynasties. Luxury goods crafted in regions far west of China are not infrequently recovered from elite burials of the sixth century. The Sui–Tang

period differed in several respects, however. First, Chang'an was a magnetic center for the wealth and industry of a unified state whose ambitions and resources far surpassed those of regimes of the period of division. Early Tang society may have been relatively frugal, but by the eighth century a luxury life-style was well developed, and many historians regard the late Tang as a decadent age. Second, during the seventh century Taizong and Gaozong achieved control over the oasis states of the Tarim Basin. Tang intrigues helped splinter the Turkish empires, and a sizable Turkish population settled in the capital, as did a refugee Sasanian prince and his followers. The seventh century also saw the arrival of many other foreign visitors and resident merchants in the markets of the capital. All of these

Precious Metals

Silver vessels from the Byzantine and Sasanian empires and from Sogdia became increasingly common in the north by the sixth century. They must have continued to arrive in the capital during the seventh century as Taizong and Gaozong secured the Silk Road statelets that served as way stations between these West Asian cultures and Tang. Imported goods circulated from foreign royalty to their Chinese counterparts; they were probably not common trade goods. The actual transmission of such luxury items may have taken place in several ways: through direct embassies from foreign rulers to the Tang court; as gifts presented to emissaries sent from Tang; or as gifts offered by resident foreigners such as the refugee Sasanian prince who escaped to Chang'an in the seventh century.

Working silver and gold required hammering sheets of the metal out of ingots. This method was antithetical to Chinese traditions that relied on casting. The process of raising up a bowl or other shape around a form using a mallet and finishing the object through additional cold work is quite distinct from Shang and Zhou metalworking. Decoration on silver or gold vessels could be chased onto the surface by engraving lines and patterns into the soft metal. Major motifs were often raised by hammering from the back (*repoussé*), a technique which normally left only one face of the object presentable. Metal workers overcame this drawback by soldering pieces with *repoussé* designs onto vessels, thus hiding the worked underside. Gilding was common as a decoration technique, usually gold patches applied to silver. This technique had Chinese precedents in the flash gilding of Han times.

It is not until the late seventh and first half of the eighth century that Tang metalworking begins to depart from the vessel forms and decorative motifs of imported prototypes. There is a gradual increase in the number of types, and more types imitate forms already in use in other media. In addition to large quantities of serving dishes, saucers, and bowls, we begin to find other food serving types, tea and wine vessels in particular, as well as more unusual creations, such as spherical censers. The decoration of eighth- and ninth-century vessels elaborated both foreign and native prototypes, as can be seen in an eighth-century plate (FIG. 6-29) from a cache in Kuancheng (Hebei). This plate is nearly 20 inches (50 cm) in diameter, cut and hammered to form the six pointed lobes of its raised rim. The border of each lobe is filled with a floral and fruit spray. The center of the plate is taken up by a standing deer. Like the border motifs, it is in *repoussé* and gilded. The plate stands on three cast silver legs. This plate is remarkably similar to a well-known example in the Shōsōin, a storehouse in Nara, Japan, dedicated in the mid-eighth century in honor of the deceased emperor by his empress. The Shōsōin example differs in the pose of the deer, which looks back over its shoulder, and in the specific floral motifs that fill the border. Nonetheless one could claim that both plates emanated from the same workshop.

The latter half of the Tang was the high point of gold and, especially, silver vessel production. Tribute sent to the capital by officials and regional comman-



6-29 Plate with deer
Tang. Silver, diameter 19¾" (50 cm). Hebei
Provincial Museum

ders accounts for many objects. It is likely that the Hebei plate discussed above was actually made in the Lower Yangzi macroregion. By the late eighth and ninth centuries, the south was the major source of gold and silver tribute. Five "circuits" were famous for their wares: Jiangnan, Huainan, Jiannan, Lingnan, and Qiannan. The profusion of floral and bird motifs that characterizes late Tang silver can be traced to southern workshops active in this period. However, some tribute was in the form of ingots that were then worked by imperial artisans. Much of the silver found in the relic crypt of the Famen Temple bears inscriptions detailing its creation in the Wensi Yuan, the main workshop of the Tang palace. Imperial donors to the Famen Temple made offerings of censers, bowls, salt cellars, tea grinders, and a variety of other objects from their own pantries and serving sets.

developments enhanced the foreign presence inside Tang society, at least in the capital and other urban areas. Tang society therefore had both the means and the opportunity to enjoy exotic fashions and customs as never before, and to develop adaptations and spin-offs from the imported goods available to them. An infusion of non-native motifs and styles generally marked hairstyles, jewelry, costume, dance, music, food, drink, and the decorative arts. Traditional products such as glazed stonewares and silk textiles profited from a new vocabulary of forms and motifs. Craft traditions with relatively shallow roots, such as the working of gold and silver, also reached a new maturity.

One legacy of the Sui and early Tang consolidation of the economy was the growth in all kinds of ceramic production. The far greater number of kiln centers active by middle and late Tang times overshadowed the relatively small number of such centers presently known from the Sui. Production in the south continued to expand, with a strong emphasis on greenwares (celadons), especially in Zhejiang, where the Yue kilns were active. Production of white wares was centered in the north, in modern Hebei and Henan. While these macroregions were famous for distinct ceramic traditions, in fact individual production centers more often than not sold a range of wares with several different glazes. An example of such a multifaceted production complex was the Huangpu kilns in Tongchuan County (Shaanxi), the foundation for the Yaozhou wares of Song and later periods. The Huangpu site has revealed thick deposits with hundreds of thousands of sherds and wasters stretching along the bank of a river. Workshops were cut into the bank for forming and glazing the different wares, and many nearby kilns were used to fire the wares. The production included architectural pottery, three-color wares for mortuary use, and a range of celadons and painted wares for everyday use.

Although East Asian and Euro-American ceramics specialists have much debated the definition of "porcelain," it may now be safe to claim that true porcelains first appeared in the Tang period. The clay required, kaolin, had been known and utilized in North China since prehistory.

With sufficient refining and washing prior to potting, the particles were rendered exceptionally fine. Ceramicists added feldspar and flint to the clear silica glaze. The effect of high firing, in excess of 1250°C, was the virtual integration of the glassy surface coating with the body. The body itself became vitrified—like glass—and the bond between surface coating and fabric indestructible. The result is a body that is white, impervious to water, and resonant when struck. The remaining characteristic of European definitions of "true porcelain"—translucence—is not, however, common in Tang wares. Tang white wares are best known from kiln centers in the north, including Quyang (Hebei) and Gong County and Mi County (Henan).

Another Tang ceramic tradition that predicts the high achievements of Song and later times is that of Yue celadons. This ancient tradition, with its roots in Zhou times, flourished under the Southern Dynasties. Tang-period production was centered around such cities as Shangyu, Yuyao, and Ningbo (Zhejiang). The Yue kilns sent large quantities of their production to the Tang court as tribute. They also shipped their output overseas to Japan, Korea, and Southeast Asia from the port of Ningbo. Yue wares were used in food, tea, and wine service. The growth of tea drinking may have affected the popularity of celadons in particular; Yue tea bowls were already the highest ranked wares in the view of the *Tea Classic* (*Cha jing*, an eighth-century text). The local regimes that followed the demise of the Tang dynasty continued to patronize these centers and have been associated with a deluxe production called "secret color" (*mi se*) ware. Several pieces of this high-quality Yue ware were found in the crypt of the Famen Temple (see pages 200–201 above). A bottle must date from before the 874 investment of imperial gifts there and thus shows that the highest quality Yue wares predate the tenth century. Unlike Tang porcelains, this bottle has a grayish body and a hazy green glaze. Faint crackling appears in the glassy surface, the result of the different rates of cooling of body and glaze. Chinese connoisseurs highly prized both the depth of the celadon glaze and its crackle.

Calligraphy

In early Tang times the integration of cultural practices from north and south strengthened the state. Calligraphy was the preeminent art of the age. The emergence of the first "great masters" of this art in the Later Han (25–220) and Eastern Jin (317–420) periods accompanied the development of major script types. By the late sixth century, the tradition of the "Two Wangs" (see pages 174–176 above) was the outstanding source of models for serious calligraphers. High officials gathered around Gaozu and Taizong—Yu Shinan, Ouyang Xun, and Chu Suiliang in particular—presided over the institutionalization of this tradition in the new capital. In fact, Yu Shinan (558–638), a southerner and a student of Zhiyong, a descendant of Wang Xizhi, taught Taizong himself. Yu and Ouyang together instructed the sons of the capital elite in the academy. These ministers also acted as artistic advisors, authenticating works in the "Two Wang" tradition and supervising the production of meticulous tracing copies of autograph brush-written specimens (*tie*). Taizong's enthusiasm for Wang Xizhi is legendary. It is generally believed that he went to his grave in 649 with the *Lanting Preface*, the most famous work of Wang Xizhi (see FIG. 5-24 above).

Works by the early Tang masters show their debts to the tradition of the "Two Wangs" but also register conventions of the well-developed inscribed stele (*bei*) tradition of the north. Yu Shinan's regular script, as seen here in a detail from his *Stele for the Confucian Temple* (dated c. 627), perpetuates many formal traits of the Wangs' writing (FIG. 6-30). Even in a rubbing taken from an engraved stone, the qualities of the brush strokes and the freedom of writing are easily seen. The individual characters are buoyant, placed onto the surface with a sure sense of balance, confidently aligned on a common vertical axis, the horizontal strokes and segments tilted slightly toward top right. The thickness of strokes and the spacing required to construct each graph suggest a controlled, rhythmic process of writing. Individual elements, however, are varied from one writing to another. For example, the top "grass" radical is given a slightly different form in each of



6-30 Yu Shinan, *Stele for the Confucian Temple*
Detail of rubbing, Beilin, Xi'an. Tang, c. 627 CE



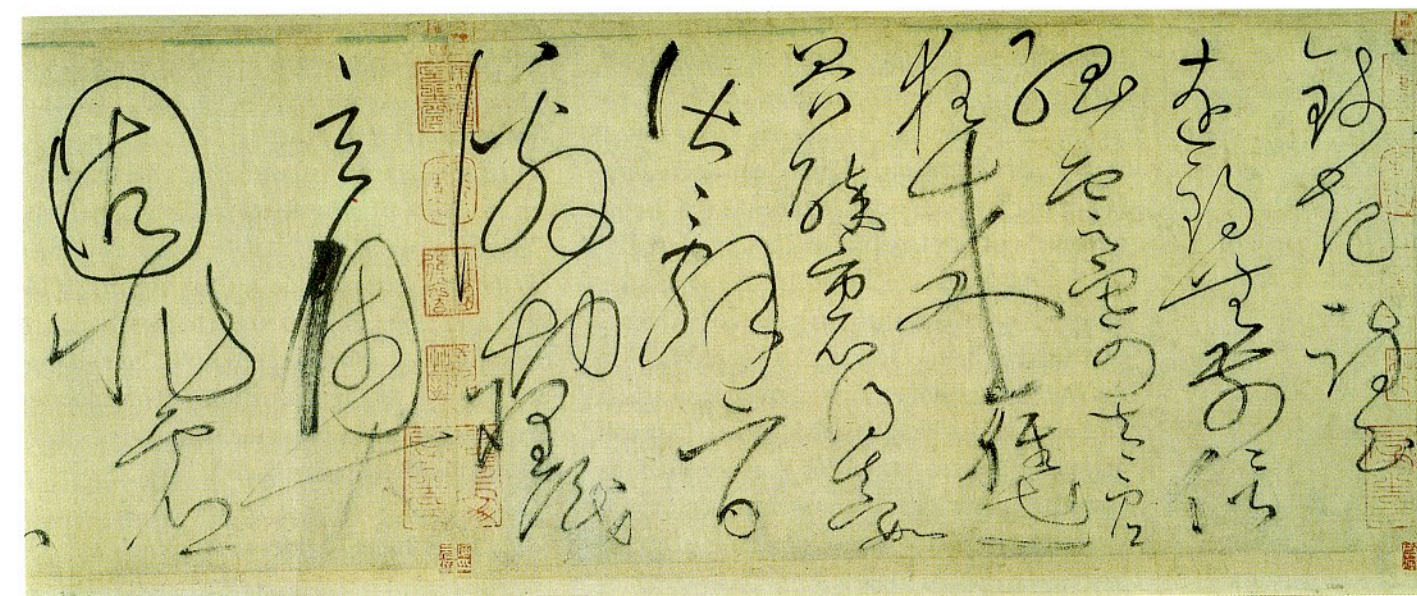
6-31 Yan Zhenqing, *Stele for the Guo Family Temple*
Detail of rubbing, Beilin, Xi'an. Tang, dated 764 CE

6-32 Emperor Xuanzong, *Stone Terrace "Classic of Filial Piety"*
Detail of rubbing, Beilin, Xi'an. Tang, dated 745 CE

three successive graphs at the left-hand column of this detail. This kind of regular script was the model for Taizong's own inscriptions.

By the eighth century, a revival of interest in the regular script of the northern tradition blossomed with such figures as Yan Zhenqing (709–785). Yan's graphs, however, are some steps removed from the reserved, graceful forms found in most sixth-century inscriptions. This detail from his *Stele for the Guo Family Temple* (dated 764) is representative (FIG. 6-31). Large individual graphs occupy most of the area of the imaginary boxes in which they are written. As a result the vertical columns and adjacent registers appear crowded. This is a brush style derived from chiseled epigraphic prototypes in which individual strokes are powerful and firm. The virility of these graphs sacrifices the suavity of works in the Wangs' tradition. Rhythm and a pliant brush tip are less evident. The virtues of boldness and contrasting thick and thin strokes have superseded the attractions of a graceful and mannered execution.

Both the emperors Taizong and Xuanzong were noted calligraphers. The latter produced one of the greatest monuments of his age in the so-called *Stone Terrace "Classic of Filial Piety"* (dated 745; FIG. 6-32). These stones stand today before the "Forest of Steles" (Beilin) in the former Confucian temple of Xi'an, China's oldest museum. The stele itself is unusual in being composed of four massive slabs 20 feet (6 m) in height that create a square pillar placed atop an elaborate base and topped with a cloud-bedecked cap. The *Classic of Filial Piety* (*Xiao jing*) was one of the most



widely read Confucian classics. Here it is written in the imperial hand with a commentary, also composed by the Son of Heaven, interspersed at intervals. To realize this project, Xuanzong chose clerical script, *li shu*, the preferred script type when the first "Stone Classics" were created in the Later Han (compare FIG. 4-3 above). The text thus is consciously presented in an archaic script that must have called to mind both the earlier Han project and the remote age of the sages credited with the teachings. In contrast to the modern

6-33 Monk Huaisu, *Autobiographical Essay*
Tang, 777 CE. Handscroll, ink on paper, 11" x 24'9" (28 cm x 7.55 m). National Palace Museum, Taipei, Taiwan

6-34 Att. to Zhan Ziqian, *Spring Outing*
Sui, early 7th century CE (later copy?). Handscroll, ink and pigments on silk, 17 x 31 3/4" (43 x 80.5 cm). Palace Museum, Beijing



running and regular scripts of his day, the graphs here are compact and plump with ample space all around. Some graphs have decidedly old-fashioned elements, such as the left-hand element in the graph *ming* ("bright") in column 2. The writing preserves such notable traits as the flaring terminals of strokes that angle downward to the left. It seems likely that Xuanzong and his tutors had access to the Han stones or rubbings taken from them. Thus they were engaged in the study of ancient models as an integral aspect of their own aesthetic practice. Other Tang calligraphers such as Li Yangbing investigated the potential of the even more archaic seal script, spurred on by such sources as the "Stone Drums" (see FIG. 3-2 above) and inscriptions carved for the First Emperor of Qin (see FIG. 4-2).

While it is highly unlikely that we have many autograph works from pre-Tang and Tang masters, excellent tracing copies were produced, often under imperial direction (compare FIG. 5-23). Some scholars believe that the most famous specimen of the "wild cursive" (*kuang cao*) script from the Tang, the *Autobiographical Essay* by the monk Huaisu (725–785), is a tracing copy (FIG. 6-33). Other authorities are convinced that it is a brush-written specimen from the monk's hand. Whatever the case, the writing on this paper handscroll is full of the quirks of brush compositions. Traces of the brush reveal when it was charged with ink and when the hairs became sufficiently dry to spread apart, leaving white streaks within a stroke. The execution is full of energy and broken cadences. Graphs vary in size and shape; nothing of an imaginary underlying grid is left. Being a fully cursive (or "grass") script, the graphs are linked to one another in series, several written out without lifting the brush tip. This entails considerable simplification and abbreviation, so much so that legibility is in doubt in many passages. To a modern-day viewer similarities to action painting may seem appropriate, but to critics of the day the work invoked metaphors to the way a swordsman brandishes his weapon or a dancer swirls her scarves.

Although writings about calligraphy began prior to the Tang period, this age produced many new critical and theoretical works. Several Tang

critics established a ranking system for evaluating calligraphers, the most enduring being that of the *Judgments on Calligraphy* (*Shu duan*) by Zhang Huaiguan (eighth century). Zhang classified calligraphers into three grades: *shen* ("divine, inspired"), *miao* ("marvelous, excellent"), and *neng* ("able, competent"). Within these grades, further distinctions were possible, such as "upper," "middle," and "lower." Ranking schemes were not the only aspect of calligraphy criticism and theory that was applied to painting. The qualities of fine brush writing were the very qualities most admired by Tang painting critics.

Secular Themes in Painting

Our two best textual sources for Tang painters and paintings were produced in the mid-ninth century: Zhang Yanyuan's *Record of Famous Painters through the Ages* (*Lidai ming hua ji*) and Zhu Jingxuan's *Record of Famous Painters of the Tang* (*Tang chao ming hua lu*). They devote attention to the personalities and achievements of painters who made their careers at court and in the capital temples. Zhu's text is the more informative in this regard. Some of the most familiar anecdotes of Chinese painting are first recorded here. Zhu also adopted Zhang Huaiguan's three-level ranking scheme. In this implicit competition Wu Daozi, the dynamic Buddhist mural painter of the eighth century, ranked well above all others as "divine class, upper rank." Zhu also appended another category at the end of his ranking: *yi pin* ("untrammelled class") to designate those painters whose works or methods were not susceptible to the usual norms of criticism. Wang Mo, "Ink Wang," for example, was known to paint while inebriated (a common condition of poets, calligraphers, and painters alike). More importantly, Wang would fling his long hair into the ink and then onto the painting. Zhang's *Record of Famous Painters through the Ages*, on the other hand, is an encyclopedia of ancient lore and recent historical material, arranged on the model of a dynastic history. It is virtually impossible to get beyond the accounts in these two texts—both what they say and what they omit—in any investigation of Tang painting.

The late Tang writers show a considerable interest in new subjects in painting, including landscapes. The father of Sui–Tang paintings of this subject was Zhan Ziqian (active c. 550–604?), a ranking court figure of the Northern Qi, Northern Zhou, and Sui. Early Tang critics regard him highly, but late Tang writers consider his work old-fashioned. A handscroll in the Palace Museum, Beijing (FIG. 6-34), gives visual evidence for Zhan Ziqian's efforts as a painter of "vistas with horses and figures." Entitled *Spring Outing* in a label written by the Northern Song emperor Huizong in the early twelfth century, this composition compresses a deep recession into the relatively confined handscroll format. The scene opens with a spit of land that moves up the painted surface toward a valley before a large peak wreathed in low-hanging white clouds. Horses and riders prance along the lower shore and also move into the middle distance toward a rustic compound nestled in the foot hills of the peak. A large river or lake opens up from the center of the scroll and recedes out of sight toward a highly placed horizon at top left.

On the near shore, an irregular triangle of land on the lower left, figures await a ferry.

The composition has both old-fashioned and reasonably sophisticated elements. Several techniques for invoking the illusion of spatial recession are emphasized: the diagonal expanse of water, the foreshortened landforms of the opening passage, the changing scale of land and trees in that same area, and the use of overlapping forms to suggest diminution. On the other hand, the meticulously drawn waves, the conventional forms for trees at several distances, and the fungus-like clouds all have an archaic, even decorative quality. However scholars choose to date the painting now in Beijing, it seems to be a good candidate for an early design, one linked in the twelfth century to the time of Zhan Ziqian. The techniques of brittle line and warm color for the land, especially the blue and green boulders that erupt from the brown earth, can be compared to the scenes from the *Lotus Sutra* found in Cave 103 at Dunhuang or to details visible above the crenelated wall of Prince Yide's tomb ramp (see FIG. 6-9).

6-35 Att. to Han Gan, *Night-shining White*
Tang, 8th century CE.
Handscroll, ink on paper,
13 3/8 x 12 1/8" (34 x 30.8 cm).
The Metropolitan Museum
of Art, New York (77.78)





Another subject of considerable interest to Tang patrons, critics, and painters was that of fine horses. Emperor Taizong had his best war horses memorialized in a design by Yan Liben for reliefs installed at his tomb, the Zhaoling. (Two of these are now in the University of Pennsylvania Museum, Philadelphia, while the other four may be seen in Xi'an at the former Confucian temple.) The most famous of all portable paintings attributed to a Tang artist depicts the *Night-shining White* (FIG. 6-35). The scroll shows only the emperor's famous horse, tethered somewhat unconvincingly to a post against a void. Important documentation for this work leads back to a tenth-century attribution to Han Gan, active in the early eighth century. The painting's title is recorded as one of Han Gan's own projects on behalf of Emperor Xuanzong. The painter has concentrated on the horse's powerful silhouette, the muscled chest, and the animation of the horse's eyes, nostrils, and mouth. Like the depiction of noble women, the painting of horses was a genre that flourished intermittently after the Tang period, a subject linked inextricably to the ethos of the imperial house.

BEYOND THE MIDDLE KINGDOM

The Sui and Tang capitals attracted visitors from throughout East, South, and Central Asia. Literary testimony to such visitors includes the travel journals of Arab, Japanese, and Chinese travelers, and such inscriptions as the famous Nestorian Stele of Xi'an, which records a small Christian community during the eighth century. The residents of Chang'an were not surprised that their city drew such diverse peoples. After all, Tang armies projected the power of the Son of Heaven into the Tarim Basin, the Korean peninsula, and the northern reaches of modern Vietnam. Chinese pilgrim monks and official travelers made the arduous journey to India and even further afield in the southern ocean. Xuanzang, whose *Record of the Western Regions* (*Xi yu ji*) supplies rich documentation about the peoples of the Silk Road

and India, was well received at court. Taizong subsidized his translation of *sutras*, but the emperor's true motivation may have been as much to gain strategic knowledge about geography.

Official or state-sponsored contact was conducted through embassies. From the Tang perspective, such embassies conveyed the desire of their rulers to submit to the Tang court. Received as loyal dependents of the Son of Heaven, the ambassadors were rewarded with munificent gifts and allowed trading privileges. Several representations of delegations are found in imperial edifices: the stone statues at the Qianling have already been mentioned. A number of pictures portraying foreign emissaries are credited to Tang painters in literary sources. The most authentic is the pair of murals from the ramp of the tomb of Prince Zhanghuai (FIG. 6-36), dated to the early eighth century. Three Tang officials in court attire huddle in deep conversation. Three differently clad foreign visitors wait nearby, although two have crept forward as if to eavesdrop (only one foreigner is shown here). The three foreign figures are distinguished by their facial features, prominent noses, and bald pate, and by their costume, such as a fur or feathered cap. A similar array of facial and costume types is seen among the dignitaries who attend Vimalakirti in the murals at Dunhuang. Tang representations such as the mural shown here were not derived from literary accounts. Foreign visitors plied the streets and lanes of Chang'an, and foreign residents traded from stalls in the capital's markets.

Many fine objects of foreign origin have been retrieved from tombs and caches of the Sui and Tang capital. The burial of one Li Jingxun (d. 608) in a nunnery west of the Imperial City documents intimate relations among the Sui–Tang aristocratic elite. The young lady was the daughter of a high court official of the Sui; her mother was a member of the imperial house of the defunct Northern Zhou; she was also therefore related to the Sui emperor. After her death at age eight (nine by Chinese reckoning), her grieving family provided a lavish burial that included a stone sarcophagus in the form of a miniature timber-frame hall. Her grave goods included fine glazed stonewares as well as unusual vessels of gold and even glass. The

6-36 Tang officials and foreign emissary

Wall painting, Tomb of Prince Zhanghuai, Qianling, Qian County, Shaanxi, Tang, c. 706–711 CE

Eavesdropping on three Tang officials' conversations, a foreign emissary awaits the results of his host's deliberations. To painters of the capital, foreigners were not uncommon, and models for this one and his two companions (not shown here) must have strolled the streets and markets of Chang'an.

6-37 Rhyton

Sasanian or Sogdian, 6th–7th century CE. Onyx, length 6" (15.6 cm). Hejiacun, Xi'an, Shaanxi. Shaanxi History Museum, Xi'an



most unusual of her funerary gifts, however, was a necklace of gold and precious stones. The polyhedron (multifaced) beads that make up the necklace are crafted from gold granules with ten miniature pearls each, an ancient craft practiced in South Asia. The precious stones are themselves mounted and carved in ways that suggest exotic origins. Assembly of the various components could have taken place in the capital. The necklace may well be an heirloom treasured in the family and then consigned to the grave of a beloved daughter.

The richest find of precious, exotic objects in the Sui–Tang capital was made in the fall of 1970. At a modern-day village called Hejiacun in the south-central part of Chang'an, two large ceramic crocks were found, stuffed to capacity with nearly a thousand objects of silver, gold, glass, and semi-precious stones. The cache initially was attributed to an imperial prince, a relation of Emperor Xuanzong, who may have fled the capital in great haste in the disruptions of the 750s. More recent analyses of the objects, however, suggest the date of the cache is actually later in the eighth or early ninth century. Moreover, a reexamination of the ward in question suggests the location of the cache need not be connected to the prince's mansion. The gold and silver objects offer a selection of types and styles available in the capital,

probably below the imperial level, from the sixth through the eighth centuries. A unique object from this hoard is a rhyton carved from variegated brown and white onyx in the shape of an antelope with a golden nose (FIG. 6-37). Several ancient cultures made this kind of drinking cup, which originated in Western Asia. The Hejiacun piece must be an import, perhaps a work of the sixth or seventh century from a Sasanian or Sogdian workshop. Like the necklace of Li Jingxun, the onyx rhyton from Hejiacun is an index of the cosmopolitan world of the capital consumer in the Sui and Tang periods.

The impact of Tang culture on the peoples whose embassies visited Chang'an is an important topic in its own right. The best known examples are the capital plans, Buddhist temples, sculpture, and pictorial arts of the medieval Korean and Japanese states. Wholesale borrowing is certainly a part of that story, but the result was not a uniform culture embracing all of East Asia in the seventh and eighth centuries. Korean and Japanese builders and artisans who worked for the Silla and Heijō courts imparted new ideas to their works. While the Heijō and Heian capitals in Japan were demonstrably indebted to Daxing cheng and Chang'an in their overall plan, by the same token the Japanese cities did not replicate the Chinese model; Buddhist halls and pagodas in Korea

and Japan exhibit features for which we lack any Sui–Tang (or earlier Chinese) source. Given these differences, works in Korea and Japan cannot be used as interchangeable surrogates for now lost Sui–Tang structures. By its very nature, borrowing is selective, driven by the needs and goals of the borrowers.

The Sui–Tang periods bear out some of the observations in the introduction to this volume about the dangers of using political chronology to discuss cultural history. The short-lived Sui was simply one of many northern dynasties ruled by hybrid aristocratic–military elites, and the Tang began as yet another instance. The consolidation and

elaboration of institutions in the mid-seventh century created a new kind of imperial state, one truly continental in scope and active internationally. That new state lasted barely a few decades before it was wracked by court intrigues. By the mid-eighth century, barely a century after the initial Tang consolidation, this same state was falling apart, and the restoration that eventually ensued was largely cosmetic. A new society emerged in the last century of the Tang period, one dramatically different from Sui and early Tang. The fiction of imperial and institutional continuity masks these and other profound changes that differentiate the first and second halves of this dynasty.