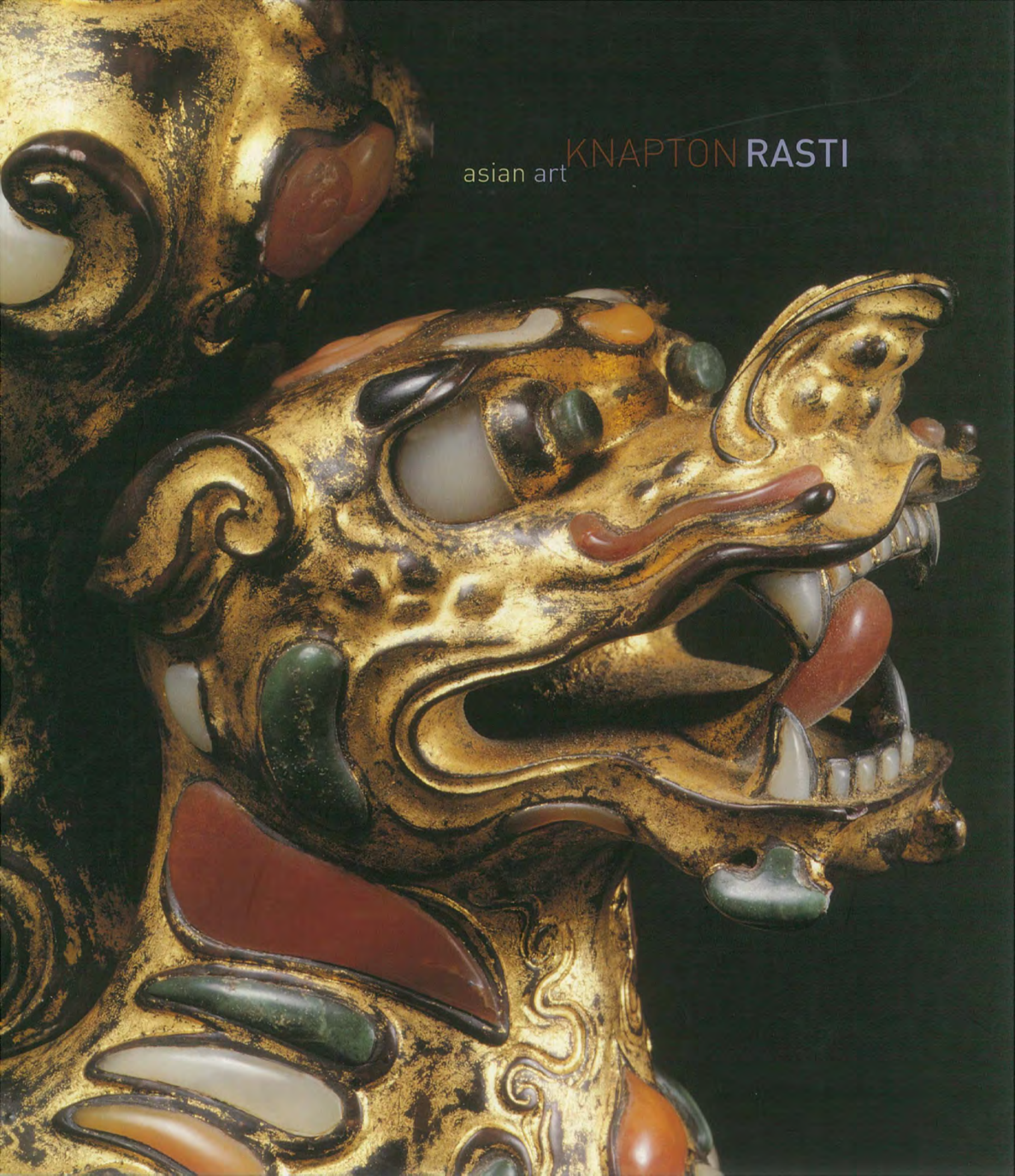


asian art KNAPTON RASTI





November 2005

Introduction

By the early thirteenth century Genghis Khan and his forces had annihilated the Xia dynasty that held sway in the north-western area of China and defeated the Jin army around Beijing. Up until 1225 the Mongols occupied an enormous territory that stretched as far as Samargand, Bukhara and northern Iran. Genghis's grandsons enlarged the Mongol domains to include the rest of China and Iran. His grandson Khubilai Khan (1215-94) founded the Yuan dynasty and in 1279 finally defeated the Southern Song dynasty to gain control over all of China. Further west, Khubilai's brother Hulegu (1217-1265) conquered the 'Abbasid dynasty, which ruled from Baghdad. He established the Ilkhanid dynasty in Iran in 1259-60. Herein lie the seeds of the exchange of cultural ideas and artistic endeavors that would result in some Muslim patronage of the Jingdezhen kilns during the reign of the Emperor Zhengde (1506-21).

The governmental offices the Mongols built up differed from their traditional Chinese models in significant ways. The new rulers did not restore the civil service examinations that had long been the only means of recruiting officials. This led to the deviation from traditional practice, that of the recruitment of non-Chinese for government positions. The Mongol Khans appointed Muslims from Central Asia and Iran to be fiscal administrators and in one case governor of a province.

In their social and economic policies, the Mongols moved away from Chinese custom, in that they actively cultivated relations with foreigners. As pastoral nomads they had relied on trade, and now as rulers of vast civilizations they continued to foster commerce, in particular promoting the development of merchant associations. It was merchants from Iran and West Asia who transported most of the goods, and many remained in China, particularly ports like Quanzhou in South Eastern China, where they formed self governing communities, that built mosques, bazaars and hospitals. The Yuan dynasty's openness towards foreign religions allowed relations between China and Iran to flourish. Khubilai, in particular, recruited Muslims as supervisors of trade, dawghachi (commissioners), censors and tax collectors. He even recruited Persians and central Asians into his military forces.

By the time of the Zhengde reign, many of these families were fourth or fifth generation, well ensconced in Chinese life, but still Muslim. In our first catalogue we touched on the role of the eunuchs at court, but of course, as can be seen by this introduction, the role of Muslims in Chinese society was far wider than court life. The two most interesting pieces from our selection this time are the deep bowl (no.6) and the wide flat dish (no.7). The bowl has an invocation to Ali', the fourth caliph after the prophet Muhammad, and the founder of the Shi'a branch of Islam. The shape of the bowl can be found in the monochromes of the same period, and though no metal forerunner has been uncovered, the steep sides and deep well would suggest a Near Eastern prototype. This could have been made for a bureaucrat or wealthy merchant, but perhaps a more pious recipient like a high-ranking Muslim scholar/official. The second piece is an extraordinary work of art in that it combines Arabic and Persian texts on the same object, a true reflection of Muslim life at the time in China. As was stated in *The Legacy of Genghis Khan, Courtly Art and Culture in Western Asia, 1256-1353*, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2002, the Chinese government opened in 1271 the Institute of Muslim Astronomy, a recognition of the superiority of Persian astronomical instruments. They also imported thirty six volumes on Persian medicine, and at the end of the thirteenth century the Yuan court established the Muslim National College with Erudites for Teaching the Arabic Script, in which officials were trained to translate and interpret Persian. These measures ensured that anywhere in the Mongol domain there were a certain number of bureaucrats who could communicate in Persian and Arabic. Two hundred years later the two languages would appear on a Zhengde period dish.

The well carved eighteenth century cinnabar lacquer vase (No. 20) is a very formal object in many ways and yet its origins may well lie in the Chongzhen period in the seventeenth century. The shape would suggest a Yongzheng / early Qianlong date, coupled with the classic, formal borders, but the decoration of the scenes around the main body hints at one of the innovations of the Chongzhen era, which was the flood of narrative themes on porcelain, based on specific legends, poems, dramas and novels. This resulted from the increased freedom of the ceramic decorators in choosing their subjects and the circulation of woodblock illustrated books in the Wanli, Tianqi and Chongzhen reigns, such as the *Xi Xiang Ji* (The Western Chamber) and the *Shui Hu Zhuan* (Water Margin). It is the latter which may give us the subject matter for our vase, and if we look at *Chinese Ceramics of the Transitional Period: 1620-1683*, China Institute in America, 1983, no.16, p.56, a covered jar, there is a similarity in the scenes, and of course the nature of the composition, with rockwork and trees breaking up the various theatrical vignettes. Equally impressive, but of different construction, is a large, lobed cinnabar lacquer box, (no.21) remarkable both for its condition after two hundred and fifty years, the red lacquer largely untouched by sunlight or wear, and the nature of the subject matter, the 'Hundred Boy' design. Ironically, we have a porcelain stem bowl (no.10) from the late fifteenth century with a similar design, and it is on this material that one would expect to find these scenes. The design works because of the sheer size of the object, allowing the artist to spread the boys around a landscape, as opposed to the more traditional format of a short scroll around a piece of porcelain.

Over the years we have had various sculptural works of art, and they have tended to be in stone, but this year we have a very powerful model of a guardians head in camphor wood (no. 14). The strong scented wood gives an extra dimension to what is already an imposing, life-like sculpture. These figures were part of a large class of lesser deities, or devas. They are the belligerent dvarapalas and Chinese warrior heroes who protected the entrance of a sanctuary. In China they became known as enwang, a pair of guardian deities. Four lokapalas were responsible for protecting the Buddha and his Law, the sanctuary and the congregation from dangers and threats of evil forces. Their images became standard furnishing

on a Buddhist altar platform and at the corners of a stupa or a mandala. The waft of camphor wood will have reminded those devotees of the presence of their protectors.

The porcelain of the Chenghua period (1465-87) is mostly delicate, renowned for its pure glossy glaze and for the clearness of its underglaze blue decoration. This brief description of the ceramics from this period perfectly describes the magnificent stem bowl painted with aquatic plants (no. 11) that is in our exhibition. The wide bank of lotus plants that encompass the main bowl is a perfect example of the abandonment of elaborate border decorations, so as not to detract from the main design. Blue and white wares made in the Xuande era used imported cobalt which fired unevenly from pale blue to black but from the late Chenghua era Leping cobalt, called pingdeng, mined in Jiangxi, was used. This was much paler than imported cobalt, easier to control and gave a more even pigment. Plants were amongst a number of motifs used on Chenghua porcelain, and the use of lotus blowing gently in a breeze is perfectly suited to the shape and contours of the stem bowl, a form originally adapted from Tang metalwork shapes.

Anyone looking at the front cover (no. 22) of this catalogue will have undoubtedly assumed the work of art to have been made of bronze or copper. It is in fact soapstone, of Imperial quality, and as far as we can ascertain unique. The decorative style is closely related to an early example of a parcel-gilt recumbent Buddhist lion inlaid in hardstones, dated to the fifteenth/sixteenth centuries, now in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London. Our censer is almost certainly from one of the Qing palaces, serving an ornamental function rather than a practical one. It reflects the Qianlong taste for archaistic designs, and for ever more unusual styles. Its asymmetry suggests a date in the mid-Qianlong era, when artists dared experiment with mannered forms in creating works for the palace.

Christopher Knapton
Nader Rasti

November 2005

We would like to thank

Design: Landels Associates
Photography: Alan Tabor
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 Anthony Evans (Chinese)
Paintings: Professor Roderick Whitfield
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China: Warring States to Western Han (475BC–8 AD)
Diameter: 5 in (12.7cm)

1

A glass bi disc of plain convex form, the rounded sides narrowing to a thinner edge, raised to the centre, the glass of clear watery texture.



China: Ming Dynasty 16th Century
Height: 2 3/4 in (7 cm)

2

A rare mottled celadon and moss green jade miniature tripod censer of cylindrical form with slightly raised handles and ruyi-head feet, carved with two shaped cartouches containing Arabic inscriptions, the stone well polished.

The Arabic inscription may be read as:
'this world is a field (we) cultivate for the hereafter'



Central Asia: 16th/17th Century
Height: 7 in (17.8cm)

3

A bronze bell, with rounded sides flaring to the foot, the handle with a circular opening, incised with two drop shaped panels with Persian inscriptions among foliage, the sides with interlacing arabesques within double lined borders, the metal of consistent green patination.

The Persian inscription may be read as:
"When the moon-like mistress picked up the ewer
As with Jesus, a hundred hands were washed at Khidr's table,
As I saw her holding the ewer in her hand the cup-holder was both crying and intoxicated".



China: Zhengde (1506-21)
Height: 7 5/8 in (19.3cm)

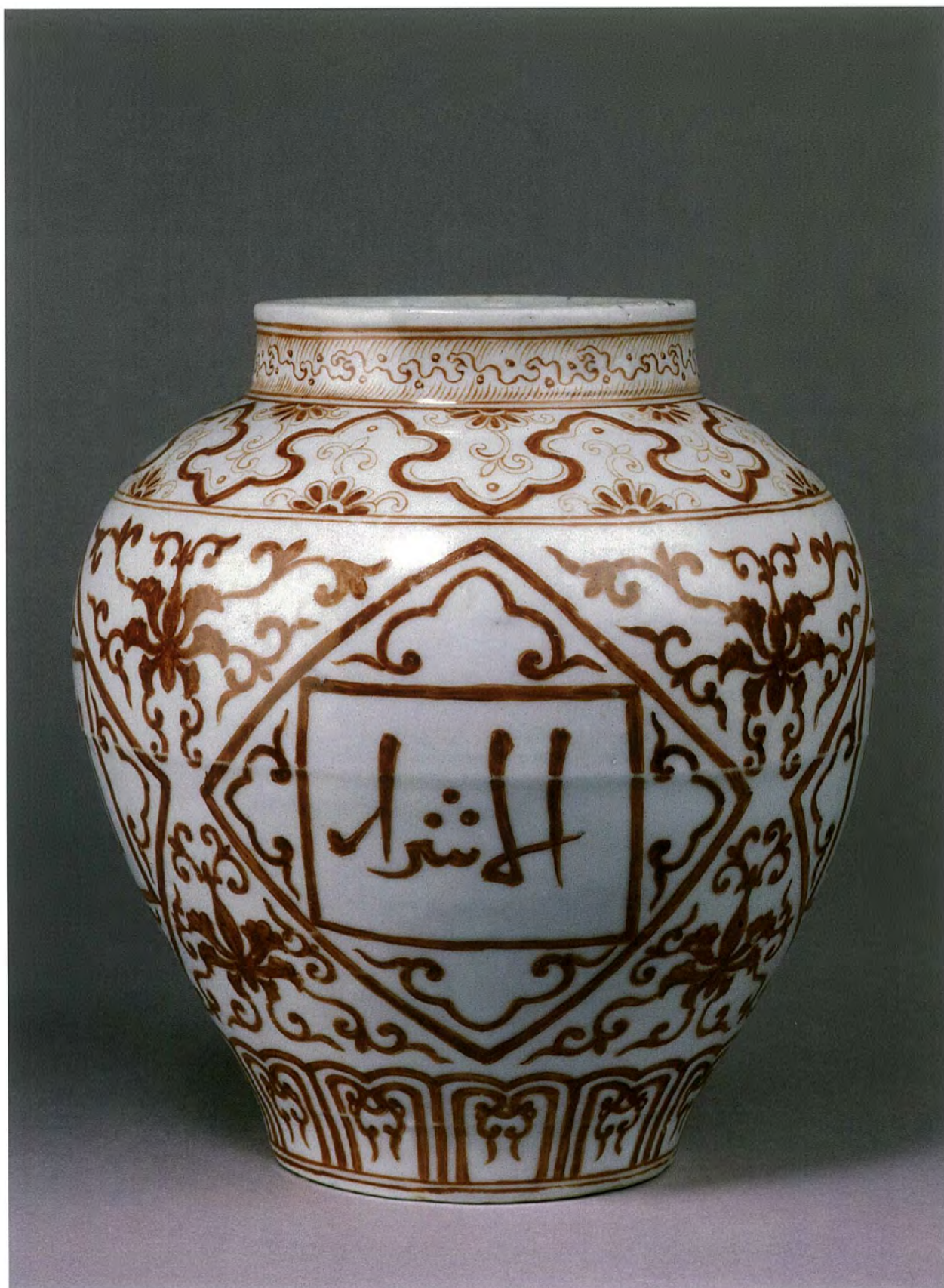
4

A rare iron-red decorated baluster jar with a short cylindrical neck, painted with four diamond-shaped cartouches enclosing Arabic inscriptions within squares, the ground with formal scrolling lotus flowers and foliage between bands of stylised lappets and ruyi head designs, interspersed with demi-florettes, the neck with a further narrow band of foaming waves.

The Arabic inscription may be read as:
'O God ! Protect Hui Ma Yun (from) the anger of the wicked.'

Reference: for a very similar iron red decorated jar of the same period see Christie's New York, Fine Chinese Ceramics and Works of Art, 18 September 2003, lot 290.





China: Zhengde four character mark and of the period [1506-21]
Diameter: 8 1/2 in (21.6cm)

5

An underglaze blue and white deep bowl, the gently flaring sides rising from a short foot to an everted rim, painted to the exterior with four lotus flower medallions, the central head surrounded by three smaller sprays, below a narrow band of swastika lozenges and above a double line, the interior with a further lotus flower circular medallion.

Reference: for an identical example see plate.76, p.82, Vol.35, The Complete Collection of Treasures of The Palace Museum, Beijing.





China: Zhengde six character mark and of the period (1506-21)

Height: 3 3/4 in (9.5cm)

Diameter: 5 3/8 in (13.7cm)

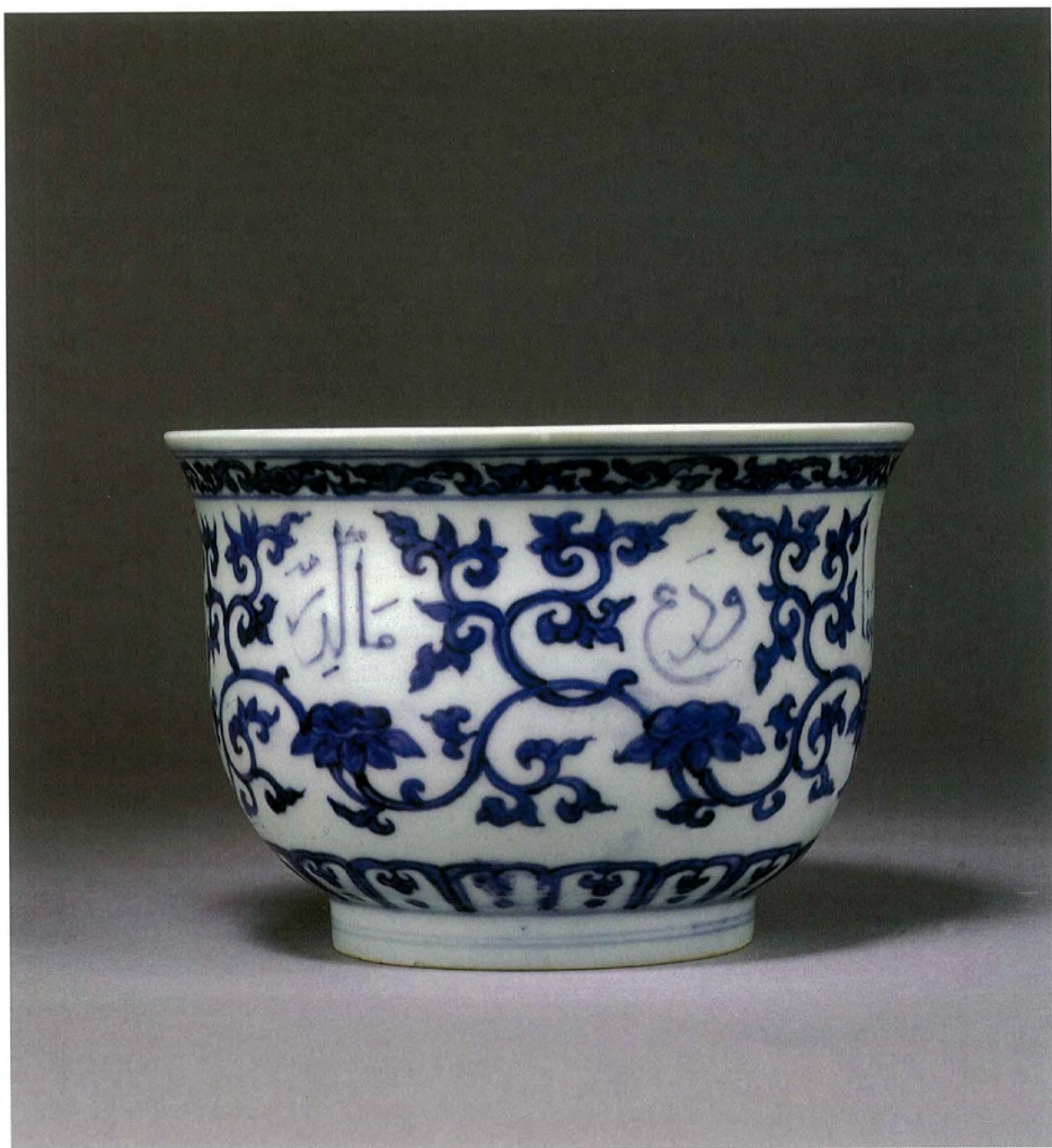
6

A very rare deep bell-shaped underglaze blue and white bowl, the flaring everted rim rising from a short foot, painted with six cartouches of Arabic inscriptions, on a ground of scrolling lotus and leafy foliage, between borders of scrolling vines and floral lappets, the interior plain.

The Arabic inscription may be read as:
"Ali – may God have mercy on him – said:
Acquire what is pure and abstain from what
is tainted".

Reference: for an identical example see
plate.77, p.83, vol.35, The Complete Collection
of Treasures of The Palace Museum, Beijing.
This bowl appears to be the only other
comparable example.





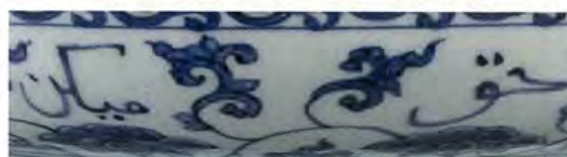
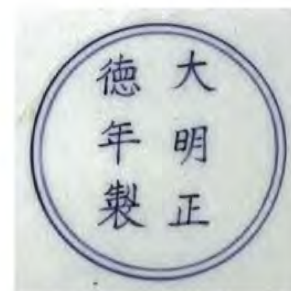
China: Zhengde six character mark and of the period (1506-21)
Diameter: 9 in (23cm)

7

A rare underglaze blue and white circular dish, the gently curving sides rising from a short foot, the exterior painted with a Persian inscription comprising ten words, interspersed with scrolling lotus flower tendrils below a narrow band of classical scrolls, the interior with a large single Arabic inscription within a quatrefoil scroll cartouche, the rim with a further band of classical scrolls.

The Arabic inscription to the interior may be read as: 'Happiness'. The Persian inscription to the exterior may be read as: 'Express your gratitude to God continually for his favours, so that God may give all his favours to you'.

Reference: for a nearly identical example see plate. 66, p.71, Vol.35, The Complete Collection of Treasures of The Palace Museum, Beijing; another larger example at Christies King Street, Chinese Ceramics and Works of Art, 18 June 2002, lot 18, which was illustrated in J. Carswell, Blue and White, Chinese Porcelain around the World, p.138, no's 160a, 160b, and Pereira de Castro, a Ceramica e a Porcelana, Chinesas, vol.2, p.58, fig.43; another example is illustrated in Masterpieces from the Ataka Collection, Tokyo, 1975, fig.92 and in Sekai Toji Zenshu, Shokakugan Series, vol.14; another in the Percival David Foundation is illustrated in the Catalogue, section 3, no.B686; and a large dish, no.29.313, plate 75 & 76, Chinese Porcelain from the Ardebil Shrine, John Alexander Pope, Smithsonian Institution, Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, 1956.





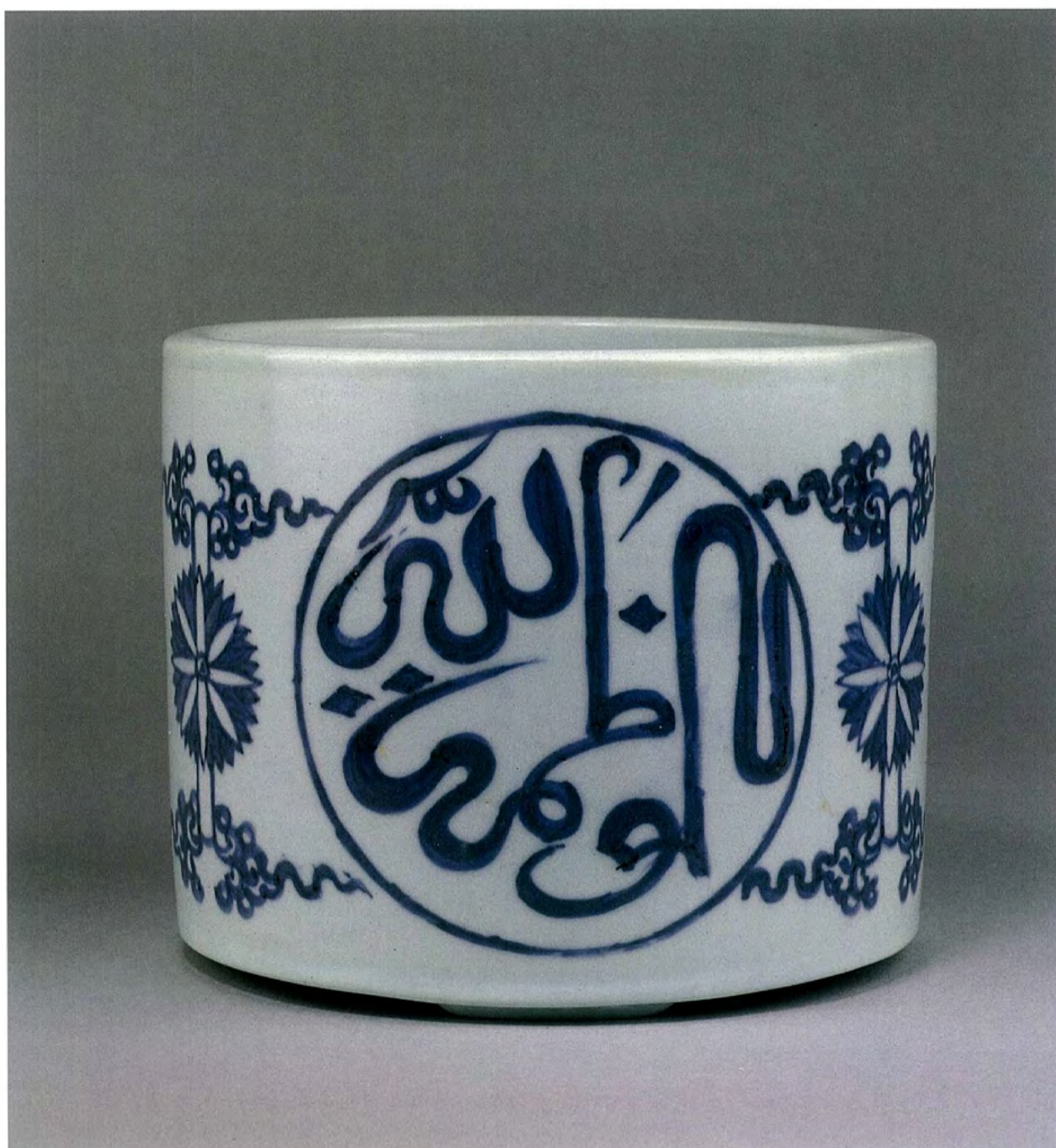
China: Zhengde four character mark 17th Century
Height: 5 1/2 in (14cm)
Diameter: 6 3/4 in (17.2cm)

8

An underglaze blue and white tripod censer of cylindrical form, painted to the exterior with three circular roundels of Arabic inscriptions interspersed with stylised chrysanthemum sprays, each surrounded by four ribbons.

The Arabic inscription may be translated as:
'Magnificence is God's. Power is God's. Mercy is God's'.





China: 18th Century
Height: 6 1/2 in (16.5cm)

9

An underglaze blue and white tray stand, painted with pseudo-Arabic inscriptions in rectangular floral cartouches interspersed with Mamluk-style blazons either side of a double chain band, the rims with petal and chevron design, the underside of the flattened top rim with scattered flowerheads and leaf patterns.

Note: This eighteenth century stand is a revival of Yongle prototypes, which were inspired by Mamluk period metalwork stands, c.1300-1350. They were used as supports for circular metal trays for a convenient height to eat while seated on the ground. By comparison, the eighteenth century examples appear to be even rarer. The inscriptions on all known examples, including the present example, are indecipherable.

Reference: for a similar tray stand see no.33, Knapton Rasti Asian Art, November 2001; another p.67, *Guci bianshang*, Beijing, 1995; and for Yongle period examples see p.176-182, *An Early Ming Porcelain Stand from Damascus*, *Oriental Art*, New Series XII, John Carswell, Autumn 1966; another in the Tianjin Municipal Museum Collection, *Tianjin Municipal Museum*, plate 79; and another in the British Museum, *Oriental Ceramics, The World's Great Collections*, vol.5, no.181; again illustrated no.3:22, p.110-11, *Ming Ceramics in the British Museum*, Jessica Harrison-Hall, London 2001; and plate 46, p.48, vol.34, *The Complete Collection of Treasures of the Palace Museum*, Beijing, where the example has been called a zun.



China: late 15th / early 16th Century

Height: 4 1/8 in (10.5cm)

Diameter: 6 3/8 in (16.2cm)

10

An underglaze blue and white stem bowl, the cylindrical foot rising to deep rounded sides flaring at the rim, painted to the exterior with a continuous scene of boys playing in a procession within a fenced garden, holding banners, flying a kite, riding a hobby horse and playing blind man's buff, all above a band of lappets, the foot with galloping horses above breaking waves, the interior with a central roundel depicting a jagged rock with issuing shrubs above further breaking waves and below the rising moon among clouds, the rim encircled with a band of floral diaper pattern. Gold lacquer repair to the rim.

Provenance: Japanese Collection

Note: it is unusual to have porcelain from this period painted with scenes of children playing in landscapes, recording the traditional theme of 'One Hundred Children' representing fertility, wealth and happiness.

Reference: for a similar 16th Century stem bowl see Christie's Hong Kong, 3 November 1996, lot 715 from the A.D. Brankston and Eugene O. Perkins collections; *The Emperor's Broken China, Reconstructing Chenghua Porcelain*, London, 1995, cat. no. 54; p.163, pl.6:2, *Ming Ceramics*, British Museum, London, 2001.



see introduction



China: Chenghua [1465-87]
Height: 4 1/4 in (10.8cm)
Diameter: 6 in (15.2cm)

11

A very rare underglaze blue and white stembowl, finely potted with deep rounded sides flaring at the rim and supported on a slightly splayed hollow foot, painted to the exterior with a continuous scene of flowering lotus alternating with curling leaves and sprays of millet supported on feathery stalks interspersed with wavy fronds to simulate blowing in the breeze above foaming waves, the foot painted with four tied flowersprays, all separated by three double circle bands, the interior with a central circular medallion depicting a lotus spray tied with a bow, within two double circles, the glaze with a soft blue tinge.

the inside of the foot with collection number 7516 painted in red, with original leather and basket weave carrying case.

Provenance: Private English Collection

Reference: for a blue and white stembowl decorated with lotus scrolls see no.13, p.42, An Exhibition of Important Chinese Ceramics from the Robert Chang Collection, Christies London, 1993, sold Christies London 15 July 1981, lot 89, and then again Christies Hong Kong, Dragon & Phoenix – 800 Years of Patronage, 1 November 2004, lot 829; for a Chenghua marked jar of similar design see Sothebys London 15th July 1980, lot 109; another in One Hundred Selected Masterpieces from Collections in Japan, England, France and America, plate 90, and again in Sekai Toji Zenshu, vol. 14, fig. 112, and another jar plate 165; for a cup with similar design see plate 39, p.42, vol.35, The Complete Collection of Treasures of the Palace Museum, Beijing; a more upright Chenghua marked jar in the Illustrated Catalogue of Ming Dynasty Porcelain in the National Palace Museum, Taiwan, plate 2; a small bowl with similar design, no.C56, p.200-201, A Legacy of Chenghua, Imperial Porcelain of the Chenghua Reign Excavated from Zhushan, Jingdezhen, The Tsui Museum of Art, Hong Kong 1993; for an example of a fifteenth century blue and white stembowl with original leather and basket weave carrying case see no.41, p.36 & 37, Knaptown Rasti Asian Art, November 2004.

see introduction





China: Qianlong [1736-95]
Length: 2 1/2 in (6.4cm)

12

An underglaze blue and white rectangular pendant inscribed zhajie (fasting and purification) to one side, the reverse in Manchu, the corners canted, the central characters surrounded by continuous bands of interlocking angular scrolls, the rims with a band of key-frets.

Note: these pendants were worn over clothes during Buddhist rituals as a reminder to the owner to fast.

Reference: for a related sandalwood example see no.219, p.239, Qing Dynasty Costume Accessories, National Palace Museum, Taipei.





China: late 16th/early 17th Century
Height: 22¾ in (57.4cm)

13

A large pair of gilt bronze Buddhist figures modelled as Shariputra and Maudgalyayana, each wearing long sleeved robes tied at the left shoulder with a silk cord and attached with a circular clasp to the chest, the hems of the clothing intricately chased with floral designs including lotus, peony and chrysanthemums, one with his hands in namaskara mudra, the other in anjalimudra, each disciple standing on a double-lotus petal base, traces of red pigment to the lips and the hems of the robes.

Provenance: Property of a Belgian Collector
Spink & Son Ltd.

Note: Shariputra and his lifelong friend Maudgalyayana were born to brahmin families in neighbouring villages near Rajagriha, the capital of the kingdom of Magadha. As young men they were both disillusioned with worldly life. Together they left home to find enlightenment and eventually became the leading disciples of the sceptical philosopher Sanjaya. This teaching did not satisfy them for long however, and so they both set out again to find the truth and eventually found Buddha Shakyamuni.

Shariputra and Maudgalyayana were not interested in mere leadership, they were determined to attain liberation under a true teacher, so they both left and took half of Sanjaya's 500 disciples with them. When Shakyamuni Buddha saw the two friends coming to meet him, he announced to the assembly that these two would become his chief disciples.



China: Ming Dynasty 14th/15th Century
Height: 15³/₄ in (40cm)

14

A large lacquered and gessoed camphor wood head of a guardian, the powerfully modelled face with grimacing expression, protruding forehead and thick frowning eyebrows, the eyes opened wide and the nose broad and prominent, the cheekbones deeply defined, wearing his hair in a topknot, the band tying the hair lacquered and gilt, with black glass inset eyes, the overall features intensely rendered.

Note: the guardian figures are found at temple entrances as protectors. We are grateful to Dr Peter Gasson at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew who matched a sample from the head with their reference material of *Cinnamomum* sp in the family Lauraceae which is a type of camphor wood found in China, Taiwan and Japan, hence the strong scent of the sculpture.



China: early 19th Century
Height: 15³/₄ in (40cm)
Length: 32¹/₂ in (82.5cm)
Width: 12³/₄ in (32.3cm)

15

A pair of zitan wood low tables, of rectangular form, each fitted with four small sliding drawers and stretchers, carved intricately in low relief with interspersed stylised angular scroll motifs, the ends with pierced friezes of similar designs.



China: Qianlong (1736-95)
Height: 9³/₄ in (24.8cm)
Width: 19¹/₈ in (49cm)

16

A rectangular zitan wood box and hinged cover with gilt bronze mounts, a lock plate to the front, handles to the sides, carved in deep relief to the top with a coiled five clawed dragon amongst cloud scrolls, within a raised border, the front and back with confronting phoenix birds, their tail feathers spreading and interlocking over the ground to form a roccoco style pattern, the sides with a single phoenix decorated in a similar manner, the metal incised with formal lotus and other flowers and foliage. With original lock and key.

Note: In one of its earliest manifestations, two thousand years ago, the symbol of the dragon and phoenix represented the Emperor and Emperess. This motif continued into the eighteenth century, but by the end of the Qing had become merely another decorative motif. The technical quality of the carving, the type of wood and its subject matter would suggest an Imperial connection, allied to the fact the carver has been heavily influenced by the French roccoco style.

Only two other zitan boxes of this pattern and size appear to be published. One was no.197 in the exhibition *Splendour of the Qing Dynasty*, Hong Kong Museum of Art, Hong Kong, 1992, with a detail on the dust jacket.

It is extremely rare to find an original lock and key on a piece of furniture such as this example.



China: Ming Dynasty 16th/17th Century
Diameter: 3 1/4 in [8.3cm]

17

A small cinnabar lacquer circular box and cover, carved in relief to each side with fruiting lychee branches issuing from leafy branches on a cell pattern ground with florettes, the details with similar geometric design including swastikas, the interior in black lacquer.

Reference: for an almost identical box see no.40, p.105, *East Asian Lacquer* The Florence and Herbert Irving Collection, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, James C.Y. Watt and Barbara Brennan Ford 1991; another similar, plate 19, *Masterpieces of Chinese Carved Lacquer Ware* in the National Palace Museum, Taipei 1971; another in the Collection of H.M. the King of Sweden, plate 61, no.248, vol.30, *Transactions of the Oriental Ceramic Society* 1955-57, and again in plate 125, p.107, *Chinese Art from the Collection of H.M. King Gustaf VI Adolf of Sweden*, Bo Gyllensvard & John Alexander Pope, The Asia Society 1966.



China: Qianlong (1736-95)
Height: 5³/₈ in (13.7cm)

18

A cinnabar lacquer fang ding and cover with knob finial, on a fitted stand, the rectangular vessel with upright handles and side flanges, carved in relief with taotie masks to the sides and cover, all on a leiwen ground, the cylindrical legs with mythical beast masks, the stand carved with a ground of swastikas, the interior and underside black.

Reference: for a similar cinnabar lacquer ding, cover and stand see plate 77, p.95, *The Treasures of the Nanjing Museum*, Xu Huping 2001.



China: Qianlong (1736-95)
Height: 24½ in (61.6cm)

19

A pair of cinnabar lacquer two-part table screens, the plaques of circular form, one carved in relief with a scene of a horse and rider accompanied by two soldiers holding spears, turning to acknowledge two figures on top of a castellated wall, in a landscape of maple, pine and rockwork, on a ground of alternating hexagonal cell-pattern and swastikas, within a border of interlocking stylised scrolls, the rims with florette diaper pattern, the other panel depicting a magistrate seated at a table, a figure before him being held by two soldiers while four further officials and soldiers look on, the scene on a fenced terrace behind a large screen decorated with waves and T-pattern, the landscape of pine trees, plantain, various flowers and rockwork, on a cell and diaper pattern ground, with similar borders and rim, the stands with long-tailed birds perched on pierced rockwork among flowers, the gently curving stands with bats in shaped cartouches, on grounds of scrolling lotus flowers and foliage, the reverses painted in colours with ladies in flowing robes in gardens beside pierced rockwork and flowers, one above a Buddhist lion, the other above two deer.

Provenance: European Private Collection





China: 18th Century
Height: 14¹/₂ in (36.8cm)

20

A large cinnabar lacquer bottle vase with tall flaring neck, deeply carved to the bulbous body with three continuous scenes, the first depicting two equestrian warriors in combat with halberds, another with a further equestrian bearded warrior approaching a soldier drawing a bow and arrow beside six banners behind rockwork, the last with a soldier beside his horse, a weapon on the ground next to him, kneeling before an official and two attendants carrying a halberd and banner, all set within a landscape of pine trees, maple and other foliage issuing from deeply carved rockwork on grounds of floral cell pattern and geometric motifs, above a band of key frets to the foot and lappets containing flower sprays, and below ruyi head panels of flowers interspersed with similar hanging pendants, the neck carved with interlacing lotus flowers within borders of shou characters, confronting stylized birds and floral motifs, the interior and underside in black lacquer.

the underside bearing a label inscribed 5834/C,
No. 1400

Provenance: English Private Collection

Reference: For a similar shaped bottle vase see
vol.6, Anthology of Chinese Lacquer, Tianjin
Museum, Zhu Jiajin & Xia Gengqi.



China: Qianlong (1736-95)
Width: 19 in (48.3cm)

21

A very large cinnabar lacquer box and domed cover with 'Boys' design, of lobed octagonal form, deeply carved with numerous boys in the foreground in a pavilion, playing around a table, some carrying boxes and flowers, and others fishing over the terrace, in the background further boys playing on a swing and flying a kite in a landscape of weeping willow, pine and maple issuing from pierced rockwork, two pagodas in a rocky landscape in the distance below clouds, all on a ground of swastikas, key-frets and other geometric designs, bordered by further key-frets and lappets, each lobe with rectangular panels depicting vases of flowers, bowls of fruit and various vessels and scholarly items, on a ground of scrolling lotus, the base with similar rectangular panels and further implements including brushpots, ruyi sceptres, and brush rests, the interior and underside in black lacquer.

Provenance: The Estate of the Benson Family, Asscot Hall, Craven Arms, Shropshire. This family originally earned its fortune in copper mines in South America in the early 1800's.

Note: The subject of children at play has enjoyed long standing popularity in Chinese decorative art. It may be seen in stone and brick carvings of the Han Dynasty (220BC-AD220), and in paintings of the Jin (265-420AD), and Tang (618-906) Dynasties. But it was during the Song Dynasty that it was popularised by painters such as Su Hanchen (1127-89), and Li Chong (1166-1243). In carved lacquer, children at play may be seen on a polychrome dish with a Jiajing (1522-66) mark, a red hanging screen dated to the sixteenth century and boxes and trays of the Qianlong period (1736-95).

see introduction





China: Qianlong (1736-95)
Height: 7 3/8 in (18.7cm)
Length: 7 1/8 in (18.1cm)

22

A very rare Imperial lacquered and gilt embellished soapstone incense burner and pierced domed cover in the form of a snarling qilin, facing forward and standing four-square on sharp-clawed feet, with bifurcated tail, the animal carrying a tall shaped vessel on its back, pierced at the top and carved with cloud scrolls and ruyi heads, the details of the body powerfully rendered and inlaid in white jade, carnelian, dark-brown and black soapstone, malachite and turquoise, the details inset with further white jade and the eyes in malachite, the underside well defined.

bearing a label to the underside with the inscription "March 1922, No. 39"

Provenance: French Private Collection

Note: no other example of an embellished soapstone incense burner of this type appears to have been published, although there are a number of gilt-bronze examples held privately or in museums. It is possible that this piece was a special order for the emperor to simulate bronze examples.

Reference: for a very similar gilt-bronze incense burner see plate 119, p.265, *A Special Exhibition of Incense Burners and Perfumers Throughout the Dynasties*, National Palace Museum, Taipei, 1994; also plate 21, *A Special Exhibition of Buddhist Gilt Votive Objects*, National Palace Museum, Taipei, 1995; another illustrated on the cover of the *Collection of Oriental Antiquities*, British Museum, London 1989; and a pair of gilt bronze censers with turquoise inlay from Shenyang Palace Museum are illustrated by Robert L. Thorp, plate 33, p.40, *Son of Heaven, Imperial Arts of China*, Seattle, 1988.

see introduction



China: Ming Dynasty 16th/17th Century
Length: 56 ³/₄ in (144.2cm)
Width: 30 in (76.2cm)

23

A set of three Buddhist paintings in colour on silk, depicting a central figure of the Sakyamuni Buddha seated on a lotus throne, set on a stepped hexagonal base, the deity wearing flowing robes decorated with floral roundels, a double halo behind the head, the ground with shaped clouds; the two further paintings with four standing figures, including Manjusri holding a set of sutras, and Avalokitesvara, each with their feet on lotus pads, clothed in flowing, diaphanous robes and celestial scarves, the haloes of green and blue.

mounted later on a cream silk brocade





China: Ming Dynasty 16th/17th Century
Length: 70 in (177.8cm)
Width: 34 1/2 in (87.7cm)

24

A Buddhist painting in colours on silk depicting a figure of Guanyin holding a bamboo spray, the moustachioed figure standing on two lotus pads, the goddess wearing a long diaphanous cowl over maroon robes, the clothing decorated with florettes in a hexagonal cell pattern interspersed with lotus leaves, the hems with further scrolling lotus and foliage, the body adorned with a necklace, arm and wrist bracelets and a long silk tassel inset with precious gems, the hair pulled up into a high chignon mounted with a jewel encrusted diadem inset with a seated figure of Amitabha Buddha, all before a single green halo.

mounted later on a cream silk brocade



China: Ming Dynasty 16th/17th Century
Length: 91 in (231cm)
Width: 52 1/2 in (133.3cm)

25

A large Buddhist painting in colour on silk, depicting a central figure of the Buddha (perhaps teaching the first sermon), surrounded by four monks, one holding a fan decorated with the sun and moon; the four guardian kings (or Devarajas), protectors of the Buddhist Law; Weituo (holding a sword) the keeper of the North Gate of a Buddhist Temple, and his counterpart Avalokitesvara holding a white lotus spray, the hands in anjalimudra. The remaining adherents are yakshas (or guardians) and devotees.

mounted later on a yellow silk brocade

The short Inscription, (on the painting) Zhen xiang fo kong zhang feng juan, may be read as: 'Presented by Zhang Feng (also known as) Zheng Xiang Fo Kong'.

Note: The name Zhen Xiang Fo Kong is a recorded alias of the Seventeenth Century Nanjing painter Zhang Feng. The long inscription (on the mount) may be read as: Ming (Dynasty); Painting presented by Zhang Feng to a Buddhist temple. [This] painting of the Supremely Dreadful One (was) bought in mid-Autumn 1993 in Pingyao, having benefited from meticulous remounting after damage. Treasure from the Collection of Wang Yongning.

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China: 16th Century
 Length: 74 in (188cm)
 Width: 42 1/2 in (108cm)

26

A large Buddhist painting in colours on silk depicting a seated figure of Avalokitesvara, the Water Moon Guanyin seated in rajalilasana on a rockwork base, one foot resting on a lotus pad, the other raised, resting on a grass mat placed on the rock, wearing flowing robes and celestial scarves detailed with flowerheads and foliage, the hair pulled up into an elaborate high chignon mounted with a jewel encrusted diadem inset with a seated figure of Amitabha Buddha, further long stands of hair falling over the shoulders, the body adorned with intricate necklaces and pendants, arm and wrist bracelets, all before a single halo.

mounted later on a cream silk brocade

Note: The name Zhen Xiang Fo Kong, is a recorded alias of the Seventeenth Century Nanjing painter Zhang Feng. The long inscription (on the mount) may be read as: Ming (Dynasty); Painting presented by Zhang Feng to a Buddhist temple. An extremely fine painting of the water moon Guanyin, being one of a number of Buddhist paintings bought in poor condition in the old market at the city wall in the old city of Pingyao in Shanxi province, while passing through in mid-Autumn 1993.





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Chronology

Xia dynasty	B.C. 2100-1600
Shang dynasty	1600 - 1100
Western Zhou	1100 - 771
Eastern Zhou	770 - 256
Warring States	475 - 221
Qin dynasty	221 - 206
Han dynasty	206 - A.D. 220
Six dynasties	A.D. 220 - 581
Sui dynasty	581 - 618
Tang dynasty	618 - 906
Five dynasties	907 - 960
Liao dynasty	907 - 1125
Northern Song	960 - 1127
Southern Song	1128 - 1279
Jin dynasty	1115 - 1234
Yuan dynasty	1279 - 1368
Ming dynasty	1368 - 1644
Hongwu	1368 - 1398
Jianwen	1399 - 1402
Yongle	1403 - 1424
Hongxi	1425
Xuande	1426 - 1435
Zhengtong	1436 - 1449
Jingtai	1450 - 1456
Tianshun	1457 - 1464
Chenghua	1465 - 1487
Hongzhi	1488 - 1505
Zhengde	1506 - 1521
Jiajing	1522 - 1566
Longqing	1567 - 1572
Wanli	1573 - 1619
Taichang	1620 - 1620
Tianqi	1621 - 1627
Chongzhen	1628 - 1643
Qing dynasty	1644 - 1912
Shunzhi	1644 - 1662
Kangxi	1662 - 1722
Yongzheng	1723 - 1735
Qianlong	1736 - 1795
Jiaqing	1796 - 1820
Daoguang	1821 - 1850
Xianfeng	1851 - 1861
Tongzhi	1862 - 1874
Guangxu	1875 - 1908
Xuantong	1909 - 1911



