

TOMB FIGURES: BACTRIAN CAMEL AND CENTRAL ASIAN GROOM

This text and images are provided courtesy of the Philadelphia Museum of Art.



BACTRIAN CAMEL

618–907 (Tang Dynasty, 618–907)

Earthenware with *sancai* (tricolor) glaze

Height: 32 inches (81.3 cm)



CENTRAL ASIAN GROOM

618–907 (Tang Dynasty, 618–907)

Earthenware with *sancai* (tricolor) glaze and traces of painted decoration on head

Height: 17 inches (43.2 cm)

These ceramic figures of a Bactrian camel and groom were made over one thousand years ago in China for the tombs of wealthy aristocrats or merchants. Objects such as these, along with figures of guardians, soldiers, and entertainers, were placed in tombs so that the spirit of the deceased person might have a rich and full afterlife similar to the life he or she had lived on earth.

China was the eastern end of the Silk Route (also called the Silk Road), some five thousand miles of roads linking Asia, the Middle East, and Europe, along which traders exchanged not only goods and services but also customs and languages. Two-humped Bactrian camels were ideal for carrying the trade goods. Standing seven feet tall at the hump, they can carry great weight, walk on varied terrain with their large feet, and store fat in their humps, converting it to energy or water on long journeys.

The unknown artists who made these sculptures filled them with a lively spirit. The camel twists its neck and opens its mouth to bray loudly. The groom raises his arm as if to control a stubborn camel with invisible reins. Attached to the camel's saddle you can see a water flask, a slab of smoked meat, and a saddlebag with a fanged guardian face.

The figures were coated with cream, amber, and green glazes, which still shine brightly after a thousand years. The groom's face and legs were not glazed, but instead were originally painted with watercolors, which have faded away over time.

Camel: Philadelphia Museum of Art: Gift of Mrs. John Wintersteen, 1964-9-1

Groom: Philadelphia Museum of Art: Gift of Charles H. Ludington from the George Crofts Collection, 1923-21-12

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. Where were these ceramic figures of a Bactrian camel and groom once placed?

- A in the palaces of Chinese emperors
- B in the huts of poor villagers
- C in the tombs of wealthy aristocrats or merchants
- D in the homes of wealthy aristocrats or merchants

2. What does the first paragraph of this text describe?

- A the purpose or use of ceramic figures like the Bactrian camel and groom
- B the importance of Bactrian camels and grooms in trade
- C the method that was used to create the figures of the camel and groom
- D the details that the artists included in the figures of the camel and groom

3. Read this sentence from the text.

“The unknown artists who made these sculptures filled them with a lively spirit.”

What evidence from the sculptures supports this statement from the text?

- A The camel and groom were coated with cream, amber, and green glaze.
- B The camel twists its neck and opens its mouth, as if to bray loudly.
- C The camel is standing on a mostly flat ceramic surface.
- D The watercolors on the groom's face have faded away over time.

4. Read these sentences from the text.

“China was the eastern end of the Silk Route (also called the Silk Road), some five thousand miles of roads linking Asia, the Middle East, and Europe, along which traders exchanged not only goods and services but also customs and languages. Two-humped Bactrian camels were ideal for carrying the trade goods. Standing seven feet tall at the hump, they can carry great weight, walk on varied terrain with their large feet, and store fat in their humps, converting it to energy or water on long journeys.”

Based on this evidence, what can you conclude about what Bactrian camels were used for?

- A Bactrian camels were used to carry aristocrats from place to place.
- B Bactrian camels were used to complete work around the house.
- C Bactrian camels were used to fetch water for their grooms.
- D Bactrian camels were used for carrying trade goods along the Silk Route.

5. What is this text mostly about?

- A the role of grooms in Chinese society a thousand years ago
- B the appearance and purpose of sculptures of a Bactrian camel and groom
- C the importance of Bactrian camels in Chinese society today
- D the methods used by ceramic sculptors in China a thousand years ago

6. Read these sentences from the text.

"The unknown artists who made these sculptures filled them with a lively spirit. The camel twists its neck and opens its mouth to bray loudly. The groom raises his arm as if to control a stubborn camel with invisible reins. Attached to the camel's saddle you can see a water flask, a slab of smoked meat, and a saddlebag with a fanged guardian face."

Why might the author of the text have described the sculptures in addition to providing pictures of them?

- A to indicate that the author is also an experienced artist
- B to point out that all camels are lively and stubborn creatures
- C to provide an interpretation of the sculptures that differs from the unknown artist's interpretation
- D to draw the reader's attention to important details in the sculptures

7. Choose the answer that best completes the sentence.

"Two-humped Bactrian camels can carry great weight, walk on varied terrain with their large feet, and store fat in their humps, converting it to energy or water on long journeys. _____, they were ideal for carrying trade goods."

What noun does the phrase "an Irish-born artist who immigrated to the United States in 1863" describe?

- A Choose the answer that best completes the sentence.
- B Therefore
- C Initially
- D In contrast

8. What were two-humped Bactrian camels used for during the time of the Silk Route?

9. Ceramic figures like the Bactrian camel and groom were placed in the tombs of wealthy aristocrats and merchants in China. What purpose did these figures serve? Support your answer with evidence from the text.

10. The sculptures of the camel and groom reveal that trade was important to the Chinese people over a thousand years ago.

Support this statement using evidence from the text or images.
