



**348. Terracotta Bactrian Camel**

Height: 97 cm

China, Tang Dynasty (618-907)

TL-tested by Oxford Authentication Ltd.

Price on request

With the neck turned and the head rearing back with mouth open in a bray, the animals appear to be walking; carrying their riders between the humps, they are covered with orange and red pigments and are rendered with extraordinary realism. Bactrian Camels were not indigenous to China, but imported from Turkestan and Mongolia. They were the essential means of transportation for merchants wishing to transact affairs between China and the oasis cities of Central Asia, Samarkand, Syria and Persia. Enduring hot and cold temperatures, camels could travel across the forbidding deserts and the high mountain ranges that extend west from China into Central Asia over the Silk Road trading routes. They could carry 160-450 kg of load and could travel up to 50 km in a day. Depending on how hard they worked they could go for 4-9 days without water and slightly longer without food. Camels were therefore considered a very important and valuable asset, and were a sign of great wealth.

The camels, known as the ships of the desert, often had foreign grooms to accompany them on their journey and are frequently depicted with them. Here the grooms are wearing long-sleeved tunics (hufu), a typical form of dress of the nomads to the north west of China and sturdy black boots. Their fists are clenched in the act of controlling the reins. The frequent occurrence of non-Chinese elements in the Tang burials, reflected the great emphasis attributed to foreign cultures as important components of the life of contemporary society.

The trade in China during the Tang Dynasty was truly phenomenal. They exported silks, bamboo and lacquer ware and imported perfumes, horses and jewels. Chang'an was the capital of this thriving Empire. There were two great markets in the city—the Eastern Market and the Western Market—filled with shops and places to eat and drink tea, a favoured activity by the Tang court. The recent excavation of thirty-seven separate tax receipts, recording around 600 payments made in a year, at a tax office outside Turfan (Xinjiang) testifies to the fast moving pace of trading activities along the Silk Road.

Through most of the Tang dynasty, the capital cities of Chang'an and Luoyang were cosmopolitan centres where men and women of different races and religions coexisted in relative freedom. The all embracing attitude, adopted

by Tang Dynasty Emperor, Taizong, facilitated the cultural exchanges between the Han Chinese and the foreigners. Travellers included Songdians, Turks, Uighurs, Arabs, Mongols, Persians and Indians. Not only were goods exchanged between East and West, but also was religious tolerance towards the professed religions of the Muslims, Nestorians, Christians, Zoroastrians and Buddhists.