



350. Striding Horse

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China, Early Tang Dynasty (618 - 907 AD)

H: 78 cm L: 85 cm

TL tested by Oxford, UK

This large unglazed pottery horse, which stands on a rectangular base, is very naturalistically modelled. Its long striding legs, pricked ears, wavy forelock and flowing saddle cloth, all suggest a horse in motion. The mouth is open and the short tail is bound and dressed. Modelled from greyish pottery, it was then covered in a white slip; the ears, nostrils, mouth and saddlecloth cold painted in orange-red pigments. The back of the neck, has a channel for the insertion of a mane of real hair. Each part of the horse would have been individually moulded, then assembled with slip before being fired. The facial features were often individually modelled, giving each piece a unique character. In the Tang period, pottery models of horses were produced in substantial quantities; but the size and amount allowed in burials were regulated by strict sumptuary laws. The unusually large size of this horse indicates it would have been made for an important nobleman or princeling.

The volume of pottery horses found in tombs, testifies to the importance attributed to this animal by Tang society.

Horses were considered the reward for military invasions, as well as the foundation of imperial solidity.

Thoroughbred horses were traded with neighbouring Arab nations for silk, from as early as the Han dynasty, gradually replacing the more sturdy indigenous steppe ponies. Besides military use, horses were also employed in recreational activities involving dancing, polo and hunting - themes also seen in contemporary wall frescoes and paintings. Even the women of the Tang court were known to hunt and play polo on horseback. Galloping horses involved in the game of polo graced the tomb walls of Prince Zhanghuai (654-684) and military parades including horses were depicted on the tomb walls of Princess Yongtai (684 –701) and Yide (682–701) in Xian (Shaanxi Province).

Provenance:

Private Collection, The Netherlands (2005)

