

# A 1300 Year-Old Camel

Chinese, Tang Dynasty | *Braying Camel*



## VISIT THE BMA

and see how the brown glaze was allowed to drip down the camel's body to suggest his thick hide.

Chinese, Tang Dynasty. Detail, *Braying Camel*.  
Early 8th century. The Baltimore Museum of Art:  
Gift of David K. E. Bruce, BMA 1956.148

Many hundred years ago, an artisan in China made this camel out of clay. With great ceremony, it was placed underground in the tomb of a rich and powerful person along with other figurines, dishes, food, and fabrics to provide comfort in the afterlife. Since camels were essential to the wellbeing and prosperity of the Chinese people, the ritual was a fitting tribute.

In the 8th century (a very long time before trucks and trains were invented) Chinese traders depended on camels to transport heavy loads across the arid, rocky deserts of Asia to the Mediterranean Sea. Two-humped Bactrian camels were especially well-suited to survive the journey. They were able to carry 500 pounds on their backs and go 4 to 7 days without food or water, using the fat stored in their humps for sustenance when no food was available. At a refreshing oasis, they could drink 25 gallons of water in 10 minutes to rehydrate their bodies after a long dry spell.

Camels wore brightly-colored blankets to protect their skin from the constant rubbing of saddle bags and bundles piled high on their backs. Stopping at oases along the way, traders bartered their precious silks, ceramics, exotic spices, and Chinese teas for luxuries such as jade from central Asia, peach trees, sweet jasmine, and tapestries from Persia, or glassware and jewelry from Rome. Then they would load up the camels for the long and arduous return home, hoping to escape the deadly sandstorms and attacks by bandits that were a constant threat.

This hollow camel, about as tall as a yardstick, was made in 14 parts, with 8 clay molds required for the legs alone. Brown and green glazes produced the camel's rich brown skin and spotted blanket.

## CHALLENGE FOR STUDENTS

Create a small Bactrian camel with modeling clay and add a cloth blanket. For images of real camels, visit [www.camelphotos.com/camel\\_breeds.html](http://www.camelphotos.com/camel_breeds.html). For historic photographs of caravans of real camels with blankets and saddlebags, visit [www.camelphotos.com/camels\\_china.html](http://www.camelphotos.com/camels_china.html). You can remember that a Bactrian camel has two humps by laying the letter "B" (for Bactrian) on its side and counting the bumps.

**PRINT THE IMAGE ON PAGE 2 FOR YOUR STUDENTS.**

