

THE CHINA GALLERY AT THE PENN MUSEUM

The China Gallery

The Chinese Rotunda provides a majestic setting for an important collection of Chinese art. Based on architectural principles known in antiquity, it is itself an outstanding structural achievement. The dome rests on pilasters set into the wall, creating a large clear space uninterrupted by columns, and the roof is constructed without trusses, using rings of overlapping tiles instead.

The Penn Museum acquired the Chinese collection through gift and purchase, rather than University Museum expeditions. Individual pieces were selected based on artistic merit or historical interest.

Chinese Buddhism is well represented in the China Gallery. In Buddhism, the Buddha, or the enlightened one, can take many forms which symbolize different things. The large stone Maitreya Buddha, dated from 514 CE is the Buddha of the future.



Chinese Rotunda

The large Buddha who forms the center of one of the wall murals from Guangsheng Monastery (Monastery of Vast Triumph) is the Tejaprabha Buddha, who protects against natural calamities. His appearance in this mural is not surprising as it was painted after the earthquake of 1303 CE, which destroyed much of the earlier temple.

Bodhisattvas are beings who are enlightened, but choose to remain on earth in order to help all beings reach spiritual enlightenment and salvation. Unlike the Buddha, who is unadorned, bodhisattvas wear jewelry to indicate their ties to the things of this world.



Maitreya Buddha

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Perhaps the best-known bodhisattva is Guanyin, popularly known as the Bodhisattva of Compassion. Guanyin is unusual among the group of bodhisattvas because during the Ming (1368–1644 CE) and Qing (1644–1911 CE) dynasties, the male deity was frequently depicted as female. The large wooden gilded sculpture of Guanyin (12th–13th century CE) in the rotunda is a male.

Chinese sculptors made some of their best pieces for tombs. The pair of mythical monsters known as Quilins (3rd century CE), located in the center of the rotunda, is typical of the colossal guardian animals that lined the *spirit path* leading to the tombs of Chinese emperors. When complete with tail and legs, each figure would have been approximately nine feet long and seven feet high. The Quilin with horizontal lines across its chest is female; the male has vertical lines.

The two stone bas-reliefs of horses on the wall of the Rotunda were commissioned by Taizong, founder of the Tang Dynasty (618–906 CE), for his tomb.

The relief with a figure and a horse commemorates a battlefield occurrence. Tradition tells that the emperor rode this chestnut charger into battle when he captured Loyang in 621 CE. During the fighting, the horse was pierced in the chest by an arrow. One of the bravest generals dismounted, gave the emperor his own horse, and proceeded to remove the arrow. This pair belongs to a set of six. The other four reliefs are in Shaanxi Provincial Museum in Xi'an, China today.



Female Quilin



Tang Horse

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Camels, Mortuary Figures



Lohan



Cloisonné Lion

During the cosmopolitan Tang Dynasty, the famous Silk Road linked the bustling Tang capital of Chang'an (today's Xi'an) with points as far west as Rome. The resulting exchange of goods and people brought influences from Rome, India, Persia and Central Asia into Chinese art.

In ceramics, many new glazes other than the traditional green, orange-yellow and cream-white were invented, and the technique of making porcelain was perfected. The delicate modeling and fine coloring, which distinguished Tang ceramic work from any other that preceded it, are evident in the glazed pottery tomb figure of horses, Bactrian camels and guardians.

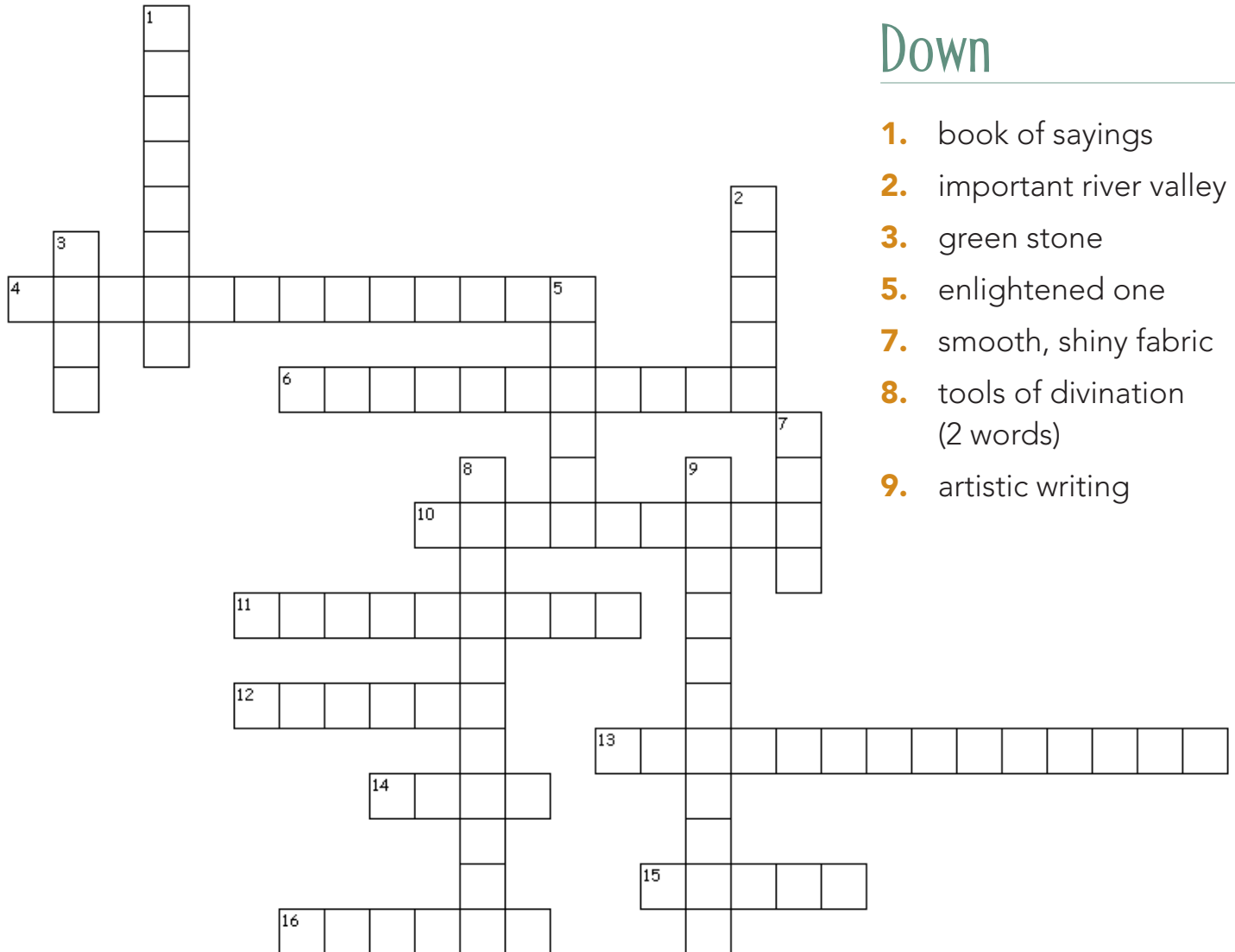
A superb example of this ceramic art is the oversized glazed pottery of Lohan, executed after the fall of the Tang Dynasty, in a part of China where traditions of Tang culture endured.

The pair of cloisonné lions guarding an entrance to the Egyptian gallery is one of the largest examples of this craft in the world. They measure over seven feet in height.

Because lions are not native to China, artists relied on stories from travelers to depict the features of the animal said to protect the Buddha. Travelers' descriptions can be vague. Perhaps that is why the depictions of lions found in China sometimes look more like Pekingese dogs!

Down

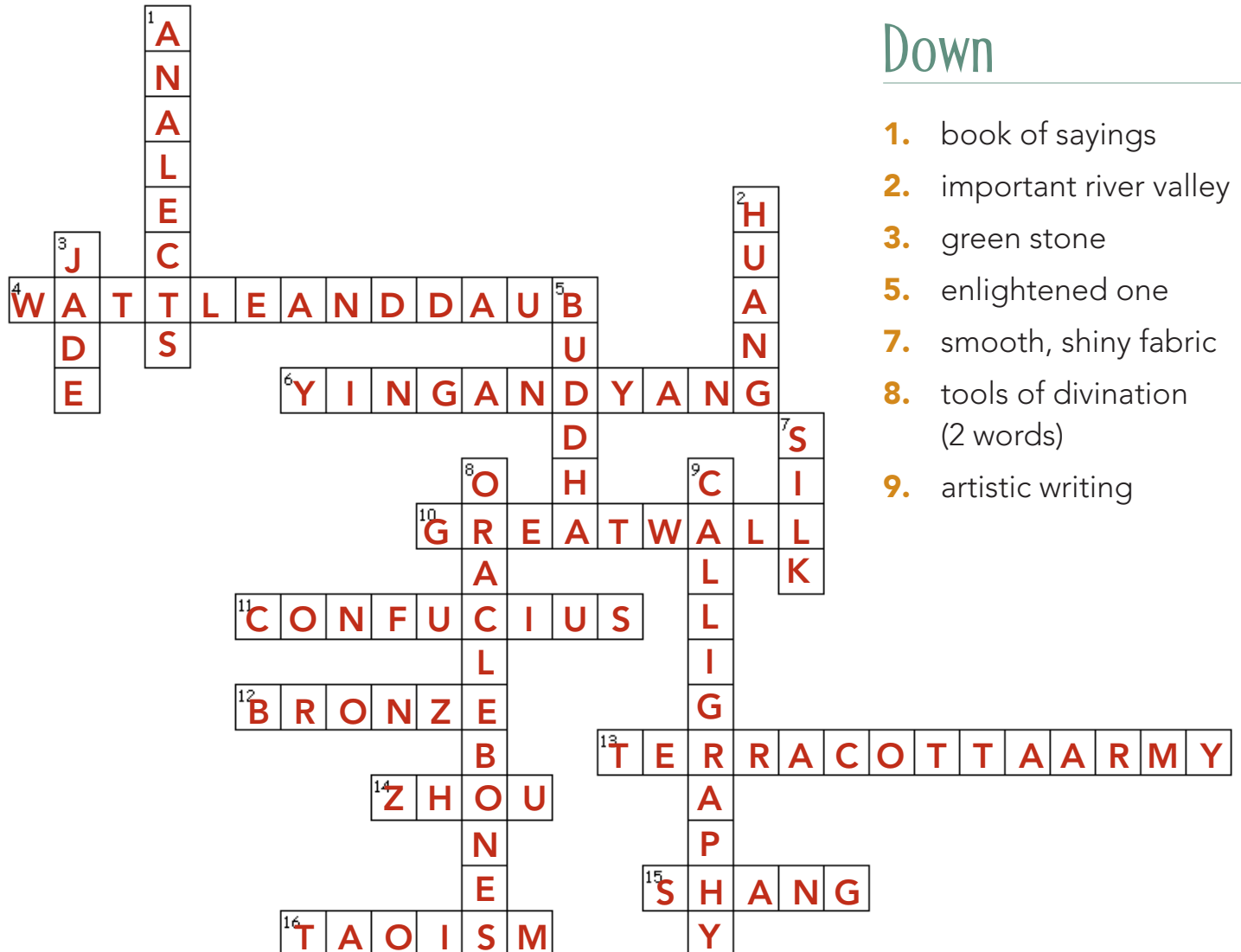
1. book of sayings
2. important river valley
3. green stone
5. enlightened one
7. smooth, shiny fabric
8. tools of divination (2 words)
9. artistic writing



Across

4. ancient building technique (3 words)
6. good and evil (3 words)
10. invader stopper (2 words)
11. philosopher
12. age of metal making
13. stone warriors (2 words)
14. China's longest dynasty
15. China's first dynasty
16. Chinese philosophy





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