

SOME CHINESE GRAVE FIGURES

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I

INTRODUCTION

MENTION was made in a recent article in *THE MUSEUM JOURNAL*¹ of some Chinese grave figurines which have been in the possession of the Museum for several years. Many of them have not hitherto been published and in view of the fact that a number of archaeologists have started investigations in this particular field—that of Chinese tomb figures—and because of the growing interest on the part of the public in these fascinating statuettes it would seem timely to describe them now. These examples are small, some of unusual type, others quite well known. There is a set of nine female figures representing dancers, musicians and attendants, a group of five ladies standing, two ladies sitting, a quartet of men in Tartarish costume and two others in similar dress. They are delightful objects artistically and none could be more stimulating to the curiosity or surpass them in human interest.

The practice of putting clay figures in the graves as substitutes for real things or living persons has been discussed in the article referred to above. In connection with the origin of this custom it may be of interest to include here a poem from the *Shih Ching* (She King), the ancient Chinese Book of Poetry collected by Confucius. It is a lament which was written soon after 620 B. C. It tells of the burial alive of three noble brothers, officials of the duke Mu, who died in 620 B. C. and in whose grave they were entombed in accordance with the ancient custom. Dr. James Legge, whose translation of the poem we give here, says that "in all 170 persons were buried with Mu."

THE HWANG NEAOU

They flit about, the yellow birds,
And rest upon the jujubes find.
Who buried were in duke Muh's grave,
Alive to awful death consigned?

¹ *THE MUSEUM JOURNAL*, September, 1925, Mortuary Figures of the T'ang Dynasty.

THE MUSEUM JOURNAL

'Mong brothers three, who met that fate,
'Twas sad the first, Yen-seih, to see.
He stood alone; a hundred men
Could show no other such as he.
When to the yawning grave he came,
Terror unnerved and shook his frame.

Why thus destroy our noblest men,
To thee we cry, O azure Heaven.
To save Yen-seih from death, we would
A hundred lives have freely given.

They flit about, the yellow birds,
And on the mulberry trees rest find
Who buried were in duke Muh's grave,
Alive to awful death consigned?

'Mong brothers three, who met that fate,
'Twas sad the next, Chung-hang, to see.
When on him pressed a hundred men,
A match for all of them was he.
When to the yawning grave he came,
Terror unnerved and shook his frame.

Why thus destroy our noblest men,
To thee we cry, O azure Heaven.
To save Chung-hang from death, we would
A hundred lives have freely given.

They flit about, the yellow birds,
And rest upon the thorn trees find.
Who buried were in duke Muh's grave
Alive to awful death consigned?

'Mong brothers three who met that fate,
'Twas sad the third, K'een-foo, to see.
A hundred men in desperate fight
Successfully withstand could he.
When the yawning grave he came
Terror unnerved and shook his frame.

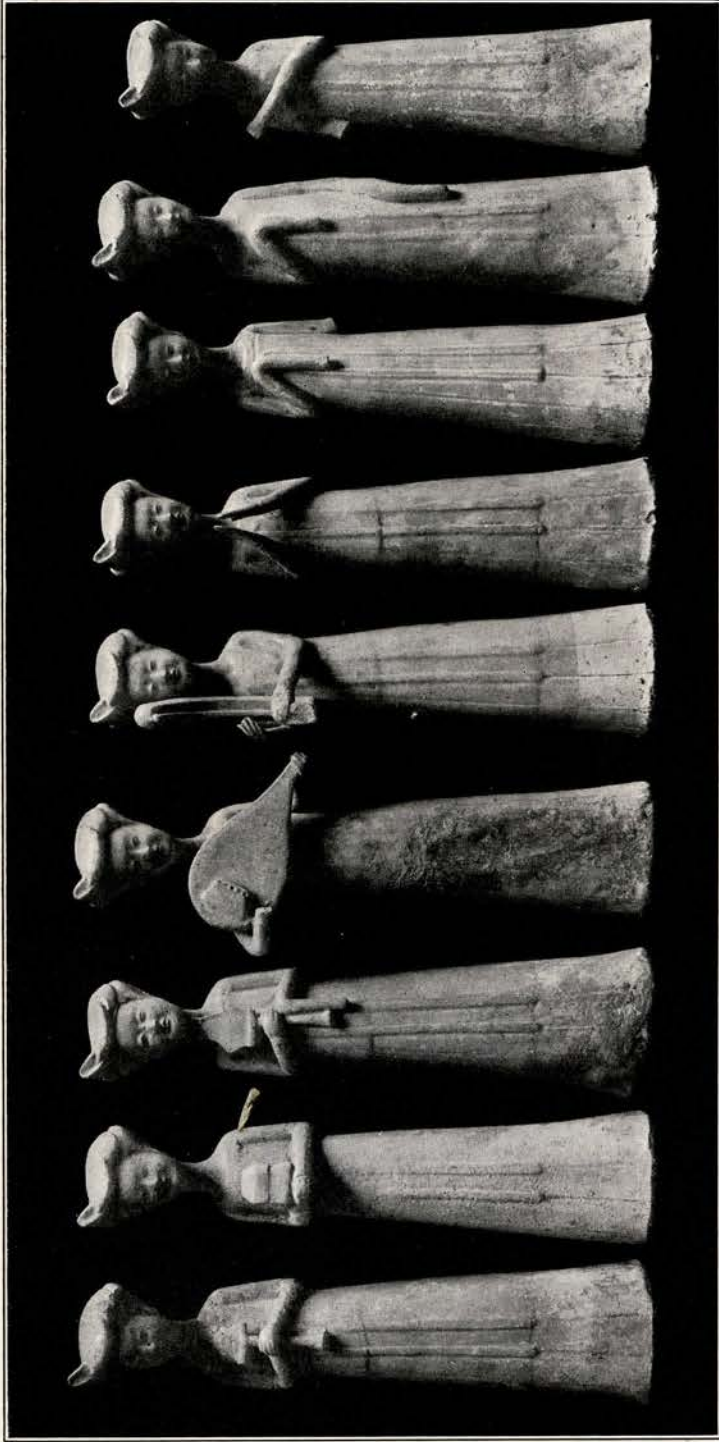
Why thus destroy our noblest men,
To thee we cry, O azure Heaven.
To save K'een-foo from death, we would
A hundred lives have freely given.¹

¹ Dr. Legge's system of spelling is different from that in general use now. According to the great dictionary of Dr. Giles the names in this poem would be spelled Huang Niao, Mu, Yen-hsi, Chung-hsing, and Chên-hu.

That the horror of this custom was keenly felt by the people can readily be surmised from this poem. A hundred years later Confucius had the courage and good sense to condemn the practice and gradually it was abandoned in favor of wooden or clay images which represented the sacrifices and offerings. The Historical Records tell us, however, of a great and spectacular reversion to the custom at the death of Ch'in Shih Huang Ti in 209 B. C. when that tyrant ruler was buried in magnificent state and splendour in Mount Li. All the inmates of his harem and all the workmen on the great mausoleum were entombed with him.

By the third century A. D. the substitution of clay figures was well established. Such large glazed figures as were described in the September number of the JOURNAL were part of the funeral furniture of the wealthy and prominent. But persons of lower station in life had their retinues too, carried out in smaller less pretentious figures but often quite as large numbers of them. Whole processions of these figures may be seen in some Museums. There is an old saying in China to the effect that "The most important thing in life is to be buried well." It would be interesting to know whether the objects in a man's grave always represented the worldly possessions he had actually had or were merely those he had wished for. Did he possess in life the large retinue with which he provided himself for the next world? It is certain that these figures were made by grave potters who turned them out of moulds by the hundred. Some individualism was given each, it is true, by the addition of ornaments and accessories and by the painting or glazing but it is seldom that we see anything approaching portraiture except in the large statuettes of the wealthy. There certain of the ladies and officials bear signs of having been made to represent definite persons, probably of the household or among the friends of the dead. Ordinarily I think we may assume that the man before his death or the family afterwards went into a shop and picked out from the stock figures as many as he could afford.

Many grave figurines dating from the Han and Wei dynasties have been found, but the great majority so far excavated have come from tombs of the T'ang period. Also in some localities the custom survived even into Ming times. But the period during which the use of these figures was most prevalent was, roughly speaking, from the sixth to the eleventh centuries. Five hundred years they cover and more. The smaller figurines are some ten inches high, usually, bearing traces of the paint or glaze with which they were originally



A Set of Nine Pottery Grave Figurines Representing Dancers, Musicians and Attendants.
From a Grave of the Tang Dynasty.

Height: $10\frac{1}{2}$ inches.

covered; the princely figures may be twenty five to fifty inches high. The glazes are amber, cream and green with the occasional use of blue. These statuettes represent men and women mounted on horseback, warriors and tribute bearers, horses, camels, oxen, pigs, dogs, sheep. There are grooms and other servants, armored Guardians of the Four Quarters, t'u kuai or earth spirits, ministers in their official robes, ladies of high rank and of low rank standing or seated, dancers, musicians, actors,—even pedlers. They offer unrivalled material for the study of the daily life of the Chinese people during the period they cover, especially in the matter of costume, of methods of hair dressing, and accessories of all kinds such as utensils, weapons, boxes, stools, dishes, musical instruments, and so on.

Little progress has been made in the dating of these figurines inside of the general period to which they belong. There is without doubt a gradual development of which we can even now see the outline. We can usually distinguish the earlier Han and Wei examples and the decadent types that came after T'ang. But within the T'ang dynasty itself, although it is a period of 228 years (618–906 A. D.), not much differentiation can yet be made. It is interesting to note that among the figures described at this time there are several which very probably belong to the years when the custom had become only a lingering survival in certain localities.

II

SET OF LADY MUSICIANS, DANCERS, AND ATTENDANTS

Among the figures in the University Museum is a set of nine little ladies bearing musical instruments and other objects, or wearing the long sleeves characteristic of the dancer's costume. They are standing dressed in long tube like gowns of "Empire Style" with straps over the shoulders, which are worn over close fitting jackets with round necks and long tight sleeves. Their necks are slender, heads small, and the features rather pinched with eyes half closed and lips pursed. It is evident that the same mould was used for them all as they are exactly alike except for the arms and the accessories. Variations in height or inclination of the head are due to the vicissitudes of mending in each case. The figure carrying the coffer and the one clapping her hands are the only ones that

have not suffered decapitation at some time in their careers. A puzzling feature in most of these grave statuettes is the headdress. Just how much is hair and how much hat—or rat? The members of this group seem to have their hair combed straight up behind and puffed out high up over the ears, while on top, well toward the front, rests a peculiar little flat cap made apparently of folded cloth with the loop of a bow on the right side rising like a short horn and a flat pad of the cloth directly above the forehead. The arms, which were attached to the model after it had come out of the mould, are merely long thin rolled pieces of clay bent to represent elbow and wrist, the hands roughly indicated in the attitude required in each case. All of these figures are of the white pipe clay so commonly used for the purpose. The bodies are hollow and made in two sections joined half way up. One is reminded of a piece of pipe closed at one end and ornamented with a head. These little white clay figures were all dipped in a colourless glaze which has, nevertheless, a decided celadon green tinge where it is thickest, as in the grooves and hollows of face and hair. This glaze ends in an even line about an inch and a quarter from the bottom of the skirt. From this fact, together with the observation that the glaze is thickest on the head, we would conclude that the figures were dipped in the glaze upside down and fired in that position. The glaze is finely crazed all over and the innumerable brownish lines running over the otherwise white figures give them a warm creamy tone. It is a most attractive set. No. 2 is probably a bearer of some offering. One of the figures in the avenue before the tomb of Emperor Jên Tsung, who died in 1063 A. D., carries a casket almost identical with the one here represented.¹ Chavannes calls him a “bearer of tribute.” In a private collection in New York a small horseman, a tomb figurine, may be seen with a casket somewhat similar in his hands. It has a rounded cover, however, instead of the bevelled edge. No. 4 plays a five stringed lute, No. 5 a harp, No. 6 is clapping her hands, and Nos. 7, 8 and 9 are dancers wearing the long narrow sleeves which were waved about like scarfs in graceful movements during the performance. No. 1 carries some object which is badly broken and hardly recognizable but which suggests a fan. We know that attendants of princes did carry fans and fly whisks. In a relief of Pin-yang Grotto at Lung-men we see Prince Vicvantara and his wife represented as bidding farewell to the king and his prime

¹ Chavannes, *Mission Archæologique*, Plate CCCXI, No. 498.

minister and both the former carry what appear to be oval fans.¹ Some of the wall paintings at Tun-huang show Bodhisattvas carrying fans with straight bases and curved tops,² and in a relief at the top of the Wei stele of 551 A. D. in this Museum the seated figure on the right holds in his hand a fan or whisk which shows a strong similarity to what is left of the object carried by No. 1.³ In the scroll painting attributed to Ku K'ai-chih called "Illustration of the Poem of Lo shên," a goddess holds a fan from the top of which wave two plumes.⁴ Perhaps figurine No. 1 was holding a fan with just such feathers and it was one of these feathers which was touching her cheek, for a broken piece of the object she is carrying may be seen along the left side of her face. The object carried by No. 3 appears to be the same thing although this figure evidently represents a dancer as may be inferred from the long left sleeve. The fan may have been used in the dance, although I have found no evidence in support of this. Again these objects may be rattles of which the Chinese had many kinds.

Other figures from this same mould are well known. The same type of face and headdress appear in two figures in the Metropolitan Museum and one in the British Museum,⁵ but they wear heavy cloaks with the fulness gathered over the left arm giving an effect of drapery not seen in these figures which we have been considering. Mr. Hobson places the British Museum example in the 10th century and I have no doubt that it is to that same period, the end of T'ang or just after, that the figures in the University Museum belong.

III

FIVE PAINTED POTTERY FIGURINES OF LADIES STANDING

Five little standing figures of ladies with hands folded under their scarfs or holding up the drapery of their long skirts are also among the objects not before published by the Museum. The material of the first and fourth is a buff clay which has been fired into a heavy stoneware and shows reddish near the base. The other three are of the white pipe clay turned buff near the surface and are

¹ Chavannes, *Mission Archæologique*, Plate CLXXIII, No. 294. Clearer photo in Kokka, No. 253, June, 1911.

² Pelliot, *Touen-huang*, Vol. III, Plates 172, 175.

³ THE MUSEUM JOURNAL, March, 1923.

⁴ Kokka, No. 253.

⁵ Hobson, *Guide to the Pottery and Porcelain of the Far East*, British Museum, Fig. 21.



Unglazed Pottery Grave Figurines of Ladies Standing.

From Tombs of the T'ang Dynasty.

Height: 1, 10 inches; 2, 10 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches; 3, 12 inches; 4, 11 $\frac{7}{8}$ inches; 5, 9 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches.

light in weight. All are unglazed but show traces of vermilion, emerald green and black unfired pigments.

The first is the short figure of a lady with double peaked head-dress, the two knobbed style so familiar in these grave figurines. She wears a long robe cut with round neck and over her shoulders is thrown a scarf whose ends fall down in front over her clasped hands. There are traces of vermilion paint on the scarf, of black on the hair, and the skirt shows maroon stripes. In the Eumorfopoulos Collection there is a figure exactly like this and doubtless it comes from the same mould.¹ A third was shown in the Metropolitan Museum in the Exhibition of 1916.² No. 3 and No. 4 are almost alike except for material and weight. The headdress is of the high rolled type which seems to be the distinctive mark of a woman of high rank and mature years. Indeed one Chinese student has stated that these ladies with the high roll were court "chaperones" and that only the young "flappers" of the time wore their hair in the two knobs. Whether that is true or not the high roll certainly had the effect of heightening the dignity of the wearer. No. 4 wore an elaborate costume. The remains of colour show that her high girdle was painted to resemble gorgeous brocade. The skirt was vermilion, the scarf emerald green, the hair black. Eyebrows are delicately penciled in black and lids and pupils of the eyes are indicated in the same way.

The second figure is interesting for the costume which shows a style quite different from that worn by the musicians and dancers. There is a close fitting but not tight bodice with high waist line, short sleeves covering the upper arm half way to the elbow and a neck cut round and rather low. An under waist which is perfectly plain comes up to the base of the neck and has long tight fitting sleeves to the wrist. The skirt seems, like the bodice, to be of heavy material and is full and long, falling in heavy folds from the right hand which lifts it so that the hem will not catch in the rosettes on the slippers. A scarf over the right shoulder is knotted on the left hip and held up gracefully in front. There are traces of vermilion paint on sleeves, scarf and lips, and black of course on the hair. It is a matronly figure full of dignity and poise. The little lady at the end, No. 5, seems by way of contrast all the younger and more coquet-tish. Her dainty head is turned toward the left but her eyes glance back at you sideways in a flirtatious manner. The face is delicate

¹ Hobson, Catalogue of the Eumorfopoulos Collection, Vol. I, No. 183.

² Exhibition of Early Chinese Pottery and Sculpture, Metro. Mus. 1916, No. 316.



Unglazed Pottery Figurine of a Woman Mourning.
From a Tomb of the T'ang Dynasty.
Height: $6\frac{3}{4}$ inches.

and pretty and the two elegant knobs of the headdress rise up in royal fashion above the soft parted hair. Her costume is the same as that of the older woman just described but the figure is slight and girlish, in fact this young lady has affected a most astonishingly modern "debutante slouch" which is further accentuated by the scarf which she has knotted jauntily around her hips. On her left arm she carries what appears to be a large knitting bag. Probably it was for some kind of embroidery. Skill with the needle has always been one of the accomplishments of the Chinese woman and that beautiful embroideries were made in the T'ang period we know from the fragments that were discovered by Sir Aurel Stein at Tun-huang and from references in Chinese literature. The remains of pigments on this charming figure show that the skirt was a yellow ochre with dark red stripes, the scarf was an intense green, the hair black and the bodice probably maroon (now disintegrated into a faded lavender). On the face and neck are traces of a grayish pink pigment.

IV

POTTERY FIGURINE OF A WOMAN MOURNING

In the Eumorfopoulos Collection is a duplicate of this from the same mould.¹ This is of white pipe clay, hollow, light in weight and bears traces of black and vermilion pigments. The figure sits in an attitude of grief, with left knee up and left hand resting on the heart while the head is bent in sorrow. The headdress is elaborate, a variation of the high roll, but otherwise the costume is indefinite.

V

GLAZED POTTERY FIGURINE OF A WOMAN PLAYING CYMBALS

The details of costume in this figure are clear. The lady is seated on a low square platform a cymbal in each hand. Her hair is in the high roll and was evidently painted black originally. The short jacket with its sleeves less than elbow length is glazed cream colour and so are the hands. The platform, scarf, and long sleeves of the under waist are in amber, while the skirt is green glazed. The material is the white pipe clay. The glaze shows a faint crackle, or rather crazing, and the surface is in most places dull, due to the beginning of decomposition.

¹ Hobson, Catalogue of the Eumorfopoulos Collection, Vol. I, No. 187.



Glazed Pottery Figurine of a Woman Playing Cymbals.
From a Tomb of the T'ang Dynasty.
Height: 7½ inches.

VI

SET OF FOUR PAINTED POTTERY FIGURINES OF MEN IN TARTARISH COSTUME CARRYING MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS

Six figurines of men clad in Tartar costume may be found among the grave statuettes that the Museum has possessed for some years. Four of them constitute a set and belong together. They stand on square tiered pedestals and have moveable heads. Each holds a musical instrument in his hands and except for this and the variety in heads the figures are exactly alike. All are of yellow clay and are hollow from base to neck. The head, like a pointed peg, fits down into the opening of the neck. The finger prints of the potter show plainly inside the bases. The figures were covered with a white slip and then painted with black, maroon and vermilion pigments. All wear heavy coats falling from a thick roll collar to below the knees, the folds represented by grooves and a panel down the front painted more heavily than the rest. Thick trousers come well down over the ankles and the feet are clad in heavy boots. The first figure carries a drum, the second a clarinet, the third a banjo like instrument, and the fourth a Chinese mouth organ. The heads are highly amusing for the chubby round faces and perky little hats with upturned brims and round or pointed crowns remind one strangely of acorns. The cap of the clarinet player is more elaborate than the others and has traces of yellow green paint on the band in front.

We cannot assign these figures to the T'ang period. Rather do they mark the decadence of the grave potters' art and a lingering survival of the use of clay for grave paraphernalia. They were probably made in the Ming period.

VII

TWO GLAZED FIGURINES OF MEN IN TARTARISH COSTUME

None of the members of the orchestra just described show any signs of glaze but these other two Tartarish figures do. The one, A, wears a heavy coat which displays a rich leaf green glaze on the upper part and sleeves, and on a wide panel down the front and back of the skirt. The side panels of the coat from the belt down are unglazed and appear to have been painted maroon. The material of which this figure is made is a coarse reddish clay and very heavy,



Set of Four Painted Pottery Figurines of Men with Musical Instruments.
Probably of the Early Ming Period.

Height: Three of them, $9\frac{1}{2}$ inches; fourth, 10 inches.

A



B



A. Glazed Pottery Figurine in Tartarish Costume.
Probably of the Early Ming Period.
Height, $11\frac{1}{2}$ inches.

B. Glazed Figurine in Tartarish Costume.
Probably of the Early Ming Period.
Height: $9\frac{1}{2}$ inches.

only the base is hollow. Originally there was a white slip. The pedestal is square and in two tiers as with the musicians but it is nearly twice as high as theirs. The head is of the same jolly round type, in this case not removable, and the hat is very high and cone like. What the figure held is a question but one could guess a drum, for there is a hole just below the belt for the support of some such instrument and the hands are pierced and held in an attitude as if grasping drum sticks. It is a crude little figure but immensely amusing.

The other, B, is of reddish buff pottery with traces of a white slip, and also stands on a tiered platform, in this case a low one. The heavy belted cloak with its wide sleeves is covered with a green glaze running to a very dark colour, almost black, in drops near the bottom, and shows a minute crackle. The tall hat of sausage shape was originally painted black or possibly had a black glaze which has disintegrated. Boots are large and clumsy. The hand at the belt is pierced with a round hole. Again the figure is crude but interesting. These also were made in the Ming period probably.