

The Tibetan Empire

618-842 CE



The Exhibition

From 618 to 842 CE, the Tibetan Empire emerged as a dominant power in Central Asia, known for its military strength and cultural achievements. Under the leadership of emperors like Songtsen Gampo, the empire expanded its borders and influenced the political dynamics of the region through strategic alliances and conflicts with neighboring states, including China and the Arab Caliphate.

This era was marked by the promotion of Tibetan Buddhism, the establishment of monasteries, and the translation of key Buddhist scriptures. The Tibetan Empire's impact on art, religion, and regional politics during this period left a lasting imprint on Central Asian history.

The museum has assembled 30 artefacts, both secular and religious, covering this vibrant era of cross-cultural enrichment. They were selected from 12 temples/museums and collections spread over seven different countries.



SILK ROAD
VIRTUAL MUSEUM

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FEATURED IN THE EXHIBITION



DETAIL FROM A HANDSCROLL: EMPEROR TAIZONG GIVES AN AUDIENCE TO THE AMBASSADOR OF TIBET

Height 38.9cms | Palace Museum,
Beijing, China. 00119106

The handscroll "Emperor Taizong Gives an Audience to the Ambassador of Tibet," housed in the Palace Museum, Beijing, depicts a significant diplomatic event where Emperor Taizong meets with a Tibetan ambassador.

The artwork showcases the grandeur of the Tang court, with detailed depictions of court officials, architectural elements, and ceremonial attire. This meeting led to the marriage of Princess Wencheng to the Tibetan King Songtsen Gampo, forging a crucial alliance between the Tang Empire and Tibet.

Princess Wencheng is credited with introducing Buddhism to Tibet, bringing religious texts, statues, and cultural practices that profoundly influenced Tibetan society.

Celebrated for its exquisite brushwork and historical significance, the scroll provides insight into the sophisticated artistry and international relations of the Tang Dynasty, reflecting the era's emphasis on diplomacy and cultural integration, significantly shaping Sino-Tibetan relations and the spread of Buddhism.



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STEM CUP

Original Height 8.9cms
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York,
USA, 2002.19

A perfect examples of the cultures swirling round the silk road. The twelve zodiac animals on this gold cup indicate the influence of Chinese culture, while the intertwined vines encircling hybrid animals reflect Sogdian and Persian metalwork of ancient Iran.

Symbolises the active role played by the Tiberatn Empire in intercontinental trade and cultural exchange from the seventh to the ninth century.



JOWO SHAKYAMUNI

Original height 150cms
Jokhang temple, Lhasa, Tibet

This statue on Buddha, aged 12, was part of the dowry of Princess Wencheng. The crown is a later addition. The Jokhang temple was built specifically to house it (the temple is facing East, towards China) and the statue remains one of the most venerated statues in Tibetan Buddhism.



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HORSE AND (GOLDEN) TACK

Pritzker Collection, Chicago, USA

Horses held immense symbolic significance in Tibetan culture, representing wealth, power, and prestige. Possession and breeding of horses marked social status and aristocratic privilege, reflecting an individual's influence within the community.

Elaborate decorations, including gold embellishments, were used to signify their importance and the esteemed position of their owners, underscoring both their value and revered status in Tibetan society.

SILVER REPOUSSÉ DRINKING SET

Height Vase 22.9cms.

Cleveland Museum of Art, 1988.67.1-3

The set is ornamented predominantly with Central Asian elements, including grape vines, beaded borders, and heart-shaped motifs. The form of the animal-headed rhyton as a drinking vessel and the use of silver derive from Persian sources, while the lush, luxurious quality of the design and the form of the lions and curling dragon on one side of the vase reveal an awareness of Chinese forms.



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