

The Museum and its History

The Musée Cernuschi, the City of Paris museum of Asiatic art, continues the work of the extraordinary figure Henri Cernuschi, forging a link between the capital, China and other Asiatic civilizations. Born in Milan in 1821, Italian patriot, Enrico Cernuschi was forced to take refuge in France in 1850, after the Italian Revolution of 1848. As an economist and then a banker, he made his fortune at the end of the Second Empire (1852-1870). A confirmed Republican, he actively supported the birth of the Third Republic. Deeply disturbed by the tragic events of the Paris Commune, he undertook a trip around the world from September 1871 to January 1873, accompanied by his friend, the art critic Théodore Duret (1828-1927). He purchased almost five thousand works of art in Japan and then in China, including a large number of bronzes. On his return, his collection was exhibited at the *Palais de l'Industrie*, contributing to the emergence of Japonism. At the same time, he commissioned the architect William Bouwens der Boijen (1834-1907) to build him this private mansion, which he donated to the City of Paris, together with his Asian collection. The museum was inaugurated in 1898, two years after his death.

Henri Cernuschi had a smoking room added on the ground floor to the rear of the building. This room is decorated with some of his furniture and works of art brought back from his travels and tries to recreate the atmosphere of the collector's home.

Portrait of Henri Cernuschi, 1890 by Léon Bonnat (1833-1922) donated by Sir and Lady Martin Conway, 1919



© Musée Cernuschi Roger-Viollet

Level 1



Vase
Painted terracotta
Gansu Province
(circa 2800 - 2500 BC)

Disc decorated with a bird
Nephrite,
Shandong,
Longshan culture
(circa 2000 - 1600 BC)

1 The Neolithic Period

The first evidence of settlement by agricultural communities is thought to date back to circa 8000 BC. The Neolithic period is characterized by a surge in artisan activity. Different cultures with their own very distinct features flourished simultaneously in China.

2 The Shang Dynasty (circa 1550 - circa 1050 BC)

From approximately 1700 BC onwards, bronze-working cultures developed in various regions with distinct characteristics, such as the Erlitou culture – circa 1550 BC), based around Henan province. The Shang dynasty, which lasted for approximately 500 years, emerged specifically in Henan Province. The objects of this dynasty are bronzes for ritual use. Bronzes are traditionally divided into



Zun vase
Bronze,
Anyang phase
(circa 1300 -
circa 1050 BC).
Shang Dynasty
(circa 1550 -
circa 1050 BC).
Donated by Total



© E. Emo and Cl.Tachdjian

Vase in the shape of a cat called the Tigress.
Bronze, Hunan Province,
(12th century BC)



© L. Degrâces

3 The Zhou Dynasty (circa 1050 - 256 BC)

The Zhou, who were originally from Shaanxi and were former vassals of the Shang, created their own dynasty and established their capital in the Xi'an region. They developed a political system along feudal lines, with a strict hierarchy of estates and family cult worship, with the royal estate and the worship of Zhou ancestors prevailing. The history of the dynasty is traditionally divided into two periods: the Western Zhou (circa 1050 - 771 BC)

designed to hold stuffs and those reserved for liquids, especially fermented millet-based or sorghum-based hot drinks. These ceremonial wares were used for ritual meals at which descendants of the same aristocratic clan gathered. They are found in abundance in tombs.

Level 1

and the Eastern Zhou (770-256 BC). The latter is subdivided into two periods – Spring and Autumn and the Warring States, during which China was divided into several hostile states which were eventually absorbed by the Qin dynasty in 221. Initially, bronzes became more imposing and majestic, decorated with a limited number of larger patterns.



Drum stand
Wood from the
Chu Kingdom,
Warring States Period
(481-221 BC).
Donated by Mrs A. Deydier
and Mr C. Deydier

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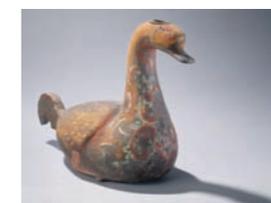
4 The Warring States Period (481-221 BC)

This politically unstable and turbulent period was characterized by the ostentatious luxury displayed by rival courts. The Chu Kingdom in particular displayed a taste for highly-ornate baroque bronze vessels. This culture located in the central southern region of China retained its cultural distinctiveness up until the advent of the Western Han Dynasty (206 BC - 9 AD). This is particularly apparent in its tomb furnishings: tomb guards topped with antlers, sticking out their tongues, or bird-shaped drum stands attest to beliefs which are still not fully understood.

Slab decorated with narrative scenes
Embossed
terracotta,
Henan province,
Western Han
period
(206 BC - 9 AD)



© L. Degrâces



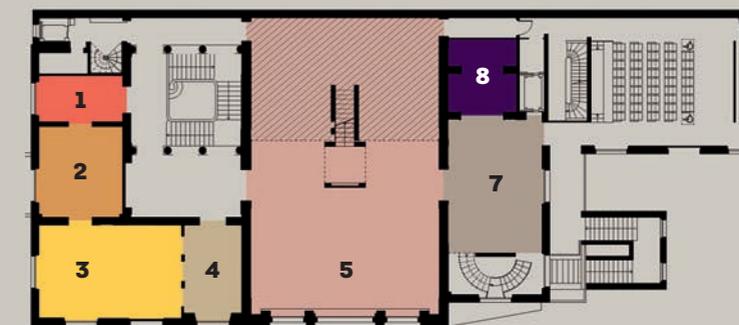
Sitting goose
Terracotta,
Western Han
period
(206 BC - 9 AD).
Donated by
the Elf Foundation

5 The Qin Dynasty (221-206 BC) and the Han Dynasty (206 BC- 220 AD)

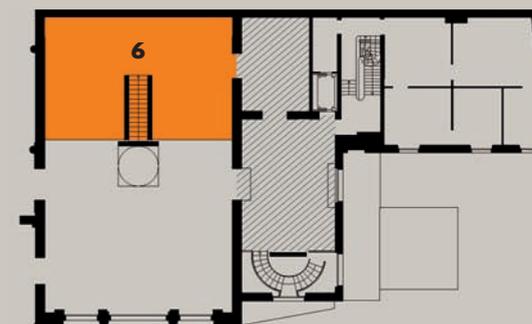
The conquest of China by Qin Shi Huangdi, the first Qin emperor, marks the beginning of the imperial era in 221 BC. The Western Han dynasty (206 BC - 9 AD) based in Chang'an (modern Xi'an) was built on reforms established under the Qin and founded a powerful, centralised empire which extended its boundaries towards central Asia.

Lacquerware objects were already taking a significant place alongside bronzeware. Patterns such as friezes defined by slanting lines with curled ends, and red and black bi-chrome patterns demonstrate the influence of lacquerwork. Peoples inhabiting areas along their borders – nomads to the north and south-western peoples – were developing original bronze art displaying realistically depicted animals.

Level 1



Level 2



- 1 The Neolithic Period
- 2 The Shang Dynasty
- 3 The Zhou Dynasty
- 4 The Warring States Period
- 5 The Qin and Han Dynasties
- 6 Buddha statues
- Mingqi
- 7 The Tang Dynasty
- 8 The Liao and Song Dynasties

Level 1 and 2

Mingqi (Han - Wei - Sui and Tang Galleries)

The Musée Cernuschi houses an outstanding collection of works from the Han period, providing a varied overview of mortuary effigy (*mingqi*) from this period. Most of these are made of terracotta, simply painted with watercolour after firing. They bear witness to the style of clothing and daily life of the Chinese people of this period.

Under the Northern Wei (386-534), subjects which already existed in the Han period evolved further.

In the Sui Dynasty, works subsequently became less detailed, contrasting with bygone bright polychrome colours with numerous decorative details. Mingqi were abundant during the Tang dynasty and their variety attests to the lively and cosmopolitan atmosphere of the Tang court.

Camel driver
Terracotta,
Northern
Wei Dynasty
(386-534)



© Musée Cernuschi / Roger-Viollet

Pipa player
Terracotta,
Sui Dynasty
(581-618)
Donated by
J. Fiersheim-Légueu



© Ladet

Level 2

Bodhisattva

Stoneware, third quarter of the 5th century, Yungang, Shanxi Province, Northern Wei Dynasty (386-534). Donated by Léon Wannieck



© L. Degraës and P. Joffre

Amitābha (Amida)

Marble, in the Northern Qi style (550-577), Liao Dynasty (907-1125). Donated by M.-M Wannieck



© L. Degraës and P. Joffre

Celestial musician

Stoneware, circa 480 Northern Wei Dynasty (386-534). Donated by the *Amis du Musée Cernuschi* association



© P. Joffre

6 Buddha statues

The long period of political division, from the fall of the Han Dynasty in 220 to the reunification of the country in 589, saw the spread of Buddhism as the official religion both in Southern China and in Northern China, which was divided into several barbarian kingdoms whose elites were more or less culturally assimilated to China. The dominant group were the Northern Wei, whose monarchs commissioned ambitious programmes for building cave shrines in their successive capitals, Datong and Luoyang. Initially, many influences from Kuṣāṇa art from Gandhāra (1st-3rd century), in what is now northern Pakistan, and the Mathurā region on the Ganges plain, which came to China as a result of trade throughout Eurasia, had a profound impact on monumental statuary.

In roughly the year 534, new Indian influences appeared, characterized by Gupta art (4th-5th century). After 589,

Level 2

new-found unity enabled Buddhism to flourish once more under the Sui Dynasty (581-618) and most of the Tang Dynasty (618-907). The Liao Dynasty, successors to the Tang Dynasty and great protectors of Buddhism, wanted to assume their place in the illustrious line of preceding “barbarian” dynasties and encouraged a backward-looking aesthetic, reverting to certain features of Northern Qi sculpture (550-577).

7 The Tang Dynasty (618-907)

The early and most outstanding part of this dynasty (618-755) continued the policy of administrative centralisation, major works and conquests initiated by the Sui Dynasty. The capital, Chang’an (Xi’an) in the Shaanxi region, was one of the two major urban hubs in Eurasia alongside Byzantium. Large numbers of *mingqi* from this period have survived and bear witness to its rich social life and to trade with central Asia.

Camel

Terracotta, three-colour Sancai glaze, southern China, first half of the 8th century, Tang Dynasty (618-907)



© P. Pierrain



© L. Degraës and P. Joffre

Barbarian with a horn

Terracotta, Shaanxi Province (?) second half of the 7th century, Tang Dynasty (618-907). Purchased with a substantial financial contribution from the *Amis du Musée Cernuschi* association.

Level 1

Funeral headdress

Gilt bronze and silver, southern China, Liao Dynasty (907-1125)



© P. Ladet



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Meiping vase

Stoneware with raised relief decoration, Northern Song era (960-1126). Bequest, Cesar Mange

8 The Liao and Song Dynasties

With the collapse of the Tang Dynasty, China entered a new era of division (the era of the Five Dynasties, 907-960). The Song Dynasty can be divided into two phases: the Northern Song (960-1126), which was replaced by the Southern Song (1127-1279). Barbarian empires, which were culturally assimilated to China, flourished in the North (Xixia, Liao and Jin).

This period saw the unprecedented development of techniques and of both internal and international trade. A taste for antiquities and history, the rise of landscape painting and the variety and accomplishment of ceramics produced in most of the provinces are the main distinctive features of intellectual and artistic life promoted in literate circles. During the era of the Five Dynasties and the Song Dynasty ceramic techniques reached their peak, achieved in kilns spread out across most of the country. The Mongols became permanent rulers of Northern China in 1234, bringing the Song Dynasty to an end in 1279.

Musée Cernuschi

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Public Transport

Metro: Lines 2 or 3,
Villiers or Monceau stations
Bus routes 30 or 94
Vélib cycle hire:
75 rue de Monceau

Opening Hours

Daily, 10 am – 6 pm, except
Mondays and public holidays.

Admission

Free admission to permanent
collections. Entrance charge for
special exhibitions.

Disabled access

Lifts are available between the
different levels of the museum.
There is a disabled parking space
in front of the museum.
Wheelchairs are available on
request at the information desk or
can be reserved in advance by
calling 0033 (0)1 53 96 21 50.
Toilet facilities are located at
basement level and are accessible

for disabled or elderly visitors.
Lecture tours in sign language
or for lip readers can be booked
on 0033 (0)1 53 96 21 72.

Filming and photography

Non-flash photography and hand-
held video are permitted in the
permanent collection for private
use only. For exhibitions, television
footage, films or documentaries,
please contact the Visitors and
Communications Department on:
0033 (0)1 53 96 21 73.

Bags and luggage

Standard handbags may be
carried in the museum.
Large bags, rucksacks and cases
must be left in the free cloakroom.

Lecture tours of the collections and exhibitions, workshops and story-telling sessions

- Individual visitors, please enquire at the information desk
- Group and school parties, information and bookings: 0033 (0)1 53 96 21 72, or by email: camille.bailly@paris.fr.



MAIRIE DE PARIS



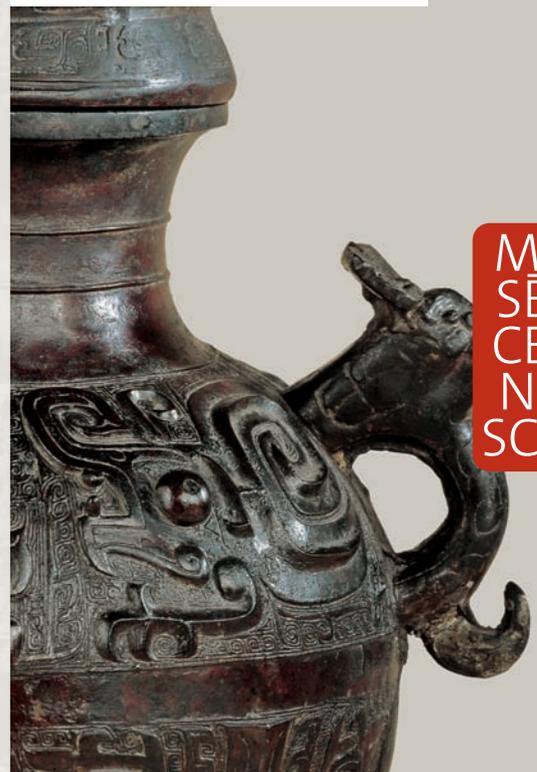
City of Paris Museum
of Asian Art

MUSÉE
CERNUSCHI

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Cover Photo: Le vase, bronze, second half of the 11th century. BC. © Paris-Musées - Karim Maucoteli, Christophe Walker. Plans © Franck Hridiky