

FOGG

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Chinese, Shang dynasty, *Ritual Wine Server, Guang type*, 12th century B.C. Bronze, H. 18.3 cm. Arthur M. Sackler Collections, V-37. Photograph courtesy the Arthur M. Sackler Foundation.

Art from Ritual

Ancient Bronzes go on View April 23

Among the most remarkable and enigmatic art forms ever created are the great bronze ritual vessels of ancient China. No single art form in the West held as much significance for its owners as these masterful works had for the rulers of the Shang

and Zhou dynasties for whom they were created. The powerful designs of these vessels, derived originally from cooking pots, wine containers, and the like, have fascinated scholars for centuries, but it is only in our own century — and primarily in the West (not the East) that they have actually been studied as works of art.

Art from Ritual: Chinese Bronzes from the Arthur M. Sackler Collection, a special

exhibition at the Fogg Museum from April 23 through September 6, 1983, is the result of decades of study at the Fogg of the Chinese bronze as an art form. On view will be seventy masterpieces from the Sackler Collection, the most important group of Chinese bronzes in a private collection. Chosen for their artistic quality by the Fogg's scholars of Oriental art, these
(continued on page 2)

BRONZES, *continued*

works will be exhibited to display their monumental presence and individuality. Visitors to the exhibition will be able to see them presented not as curios or artifacts of a long-vanished culture, but as the consummate creation of one of the greatest ancient civilizations in human history.

The ritual bronzes date back to the Shang dynasty founded some 3,500 years ago in central China — predating the Trojan War by several centuries. Ancient craftsmen cast them in intricate clay piece-molds with such skill that their technical mastery has never been surpassed in either the East or the West. Ernest Fenellosa, pioneer of Asiatic art at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, was moved to exclaim: "Not only are the forms among the grandest that human art has left us, but the execution is worthy of the design." After the Shang dynasty fell to invaders around 1030 B.C., the victors, founders of the Zhou dynasty, continued the bronze tradition until they, in turn, fell in the third century B.C.

Of the artifacts of the powerful and magnificent civilization of the Shang, little besides the bronzes now remains. Their chronicles and archives were lost or destroyed, the location of their cities and even the list of their kings remains uncertain. Unlike the great early civilizations of the West, the ancient peoples of China left behind no monumental sculpture and no great stone temples or palaces. No better example of their cultural aspirations have survived than the bronzes themselves.

Around the turn of the century, a new source of information about the Shang was discovered: the so-called oracle bones, animal bones that had been drilled and heated to produce cracks which diviners interpreted as answers to important questions. The bones were traced to an area of Shaansi province which contained many Shang archaeological sites, among them caches of tens of thousands of bones.

Many of the bones bore inscriptions, which were deciphered as notations of the oracular questions and sometimes also included the results of the oracle and the course of subsequent events. The questions concerned sacrifices to the gods and royal ancestors, the propriety of animal sacrifices, the timeliness of hunting and military expeditions, the weather and the success of crops.

The oracle bones and new 20th-century excavations have revealed that the authority of the ruling Shang kings depended largely on their communications with the supernatural world of gods, ancestors, and oracles through rituals and sacrifices. The bronzes played a central role in this culture. Designed to hold sacrificial offerings of food and drink to the ancestors, the bronzes were also potent symbols of temporal power, prestige, and economic and military strength. According to legend, only possession of the nine sacred bronze cauldrons cast by the Emperor Yu of the



Chinese, Shang dynasty, *Ritual Wine Container, You type*, 13th century B.C. Bronze, H. 30.1 cm. Arthur M. Sackler Collections, V-316. Photograph courtesy the Arthur M. Sackler Foundation.

mythic Xia dynasty could certify the power of the ruling house. But the bronzes were also important burial offerings in royal and aristocratic tombs, from which they have been unearthed in large numbers.

After the fall of the Shang, bronzes gradually lost their ritual significance. Although sacrificing none of their technical mastery, the Zhou bronzes became more decorative in nature and seem to have been produced increasingly as luxury goods and status symbols for an emerging gentry class. By the third century B.C., when the Han dynasty came to power, bronze objects had been reduced to a minor "decorative art."

The ritual bronzes fascinated Chinese connoisseurs for centuries; discoveries of ancient bronzes were major events and the earliest known study of their significance is contained in a catalogue of the imperial collections made over a thousand years ago. But they have only recently been appreciated as works of art. The Chinese studied them as historical documents, since the occasional inscriptions they bore were the earliest known examples of Chinese calligraphy and included interesting and important information constituting the few surviving records of China's legendary past. It was not until Western

scholars became aware of them around the turn of this century that they were studied for their aesthetic qualities.

The refined shapes of these vessels and the ingenious and intricate nature of their decoration, which bears sophisticated stylizations of animals and faces, deeply impressed European and American connoisseurs. The careful balance of form, design, and technique of the bronzes, creating an overall impression of great power, is now regarded as one of the chief aesthetic accomplishments in the history of art.

The Fogg has been a major center for bronze studies for more than a generation. Max Loehr, celebrated authority on Chinese art and former curator at the Fogg, developed a significant classification and dating system for Shang dynasty bronzes. The Grenville L. Winthrop bequest of 1943 brought a number of important works, particularly Zhou dynasty bronzes, into the Fogg collections. In recent years, study has centered on the Sackler collection, culminating in the scheduled publication of a three-volume catalogue of the collection, to be distributed by Harvard University Press, and this, the first public exhibition of highlights of this exceptional group of objects. A catalogue of the exhibition objects, prepared by Dawn Ho Delbanco, will accompany the show.

News of the Fine Arts Library

A Guide to the Fine Arts Library, an illustrated, 32-page booklet describing the Library's facilities, services, collections, and policies is now available at the circulation desk. The publication describes circulation policies, how to find books and periodicals, the resources of the visual collections, and the special collections of the Library.

Wolfgang M. Freitag, librarian of the Fine Arts Library and senior lecturer on the fine arts, is on leave for one year, beginning this past November, in order to serve as a special consultant to the J. Paul Getty Trust of Los Angeles. He will help the Trust plan a major art history research center in Southern California, which will include a 500,000-volume library collection reflecting the center's broad, humanistic concept of art history. He also expects to participate in many other phases of planning for the library, information, and documentation services of the projected complex, which will consist of a Center for Advanced Study, the Getty Museum, and a Conservation Institute. Freitag has previously been a consultant to a number of academic institutions and museums, among them the Yale Center for British Art, and The National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. He is a member of the Trustees' Visiting Committee for the Thomas J. Watson Library of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. James Hodgson, acquisitions librarian, will be acting librarian in Freitag's absence.

Three Kings of France: A Lecture Series

By the end of the 17th century, Louis XIV, the "Sun King," had succeeded in making his glittering court at Versailles the cultural center of the West. For the next two centuries, the taste, mores, styles, and fashions of the French king's court set the standard for all of Europe. A new Friends of the Fogg lecture series, *The Arts of France during the Reigns of Louis XIV, Louis XV, and Louis XVI*, taught by former Fogg director Agnes Mongan, and Eleanor P. DeLorme, research fellow at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, will explore the superb architectural settings of châteaux and palaces, with their gardens, furnishings, paintings, and sculpture, as French taste moved from the grand Baroque Classicism of Louis XIV, through the exuberant Rococo of Louis XV, to the spare Neo-Classicism that prevailed on the eve of the Revolution. The lectures, which will be held on Thursdays from 4:00 to 5:00 p.m., will include "Louis XIV and Baroque Classicism" (March 3); "17th-Century Palaces and Châteaux" (March 10); "Louis XV, Madame Pompadour, and the Rococo" (March 17); "The Rococo, Inside and Out" (March 24); "Louis XVI, Marie Antoinette, and Neo-Classicism" (March 31); and "Changing Tastes Foretelling a New Accent on Simplicity" (April 7). Subscriptions to the series are \$35 for Friends of the Fogg, \$50 for others.



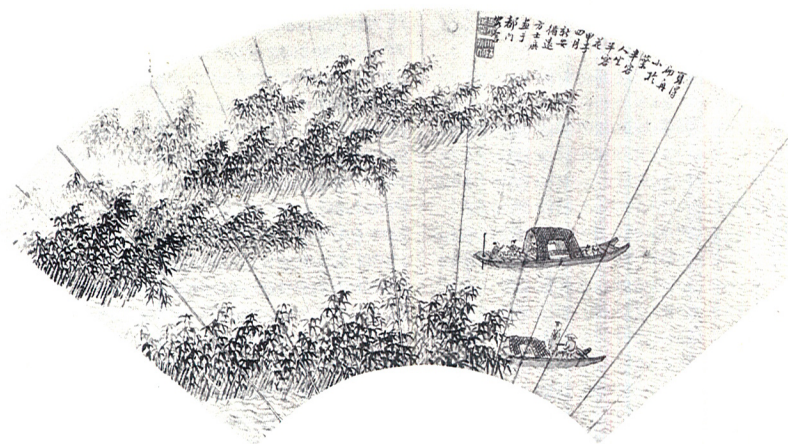
Le Château de Courances, South of Paris, near Milly la Forêt. Photograph by A.C. England, Jr.

Thirty-five Centuries of Chinese Culture: A Seminar and a Lecture Series

The rich and ever-changing story of Chinese culture began centuries before the fall of Troy and continues to this day. This spring the Friends of the Fogg will offer a special seminar and a lecture series exploring some of the most fascinating artistic episodes of this 3,500-year epic.

In conjunction with the exhibition *Art from Ritual: Chinese Bronze Vessels from the Arthur M. Sackler Collection* (April 23 through September 6), Dawn Ho Delbanco, associate in research at the John King Fairbank Center for East Asian Research and author of the exhibition catalogue, will offer a seminar on *Ritual Bronze Vessels of Ancient China*. The four sessions will meet on Tuesdays from 10:00 to 11:00 a.m., beginning April 5 and will explore the history and significance of the most monumental art form of ancient China, the ritual bronzes of the Shang (ca. 1500-ca. 1030 B.C.) and the Zhou (ca. 1030-221 B.C.) dynasties. Participants will be able to examine in detail the unique stylistic and technical features of bronze ornaments in the outstanding Sackler collection examples and from the remarkable bronzes bequeathed to the Fogg by Grenville L. Winthrop. Subscriptions to the series are \$35 for Friends of the Fogg, \$50 for others.

A five-part lecture series titled *The Arts of China*, meeting on Wednesdays, 8:00 to 9:00 p.m., starting March 2, will investigate five other topics from the extraordinary range of Chinese artistic accomplishments. The lectures include "Ancient Chinese Jades" with Robert Bagley, assistant



Fang Shih-shu, *Boating on a Moonlit Night*, 1744. Fan-shaped painting mounted as an album leaf, 19.7 x 49.3 cm. Purchase — Oriental Objects Fund, 1978.91.

Aspects of Indian Art: Two Exhibitions

Painting in India is as old and as highly-developed an art form as it is in Europe, but its traditions are considerably less familiar to Westerners. This spring the Fogg's Islamic department will present two exhibitions presenting two very different aspects of Indian painting. *Indian Painting from the Colonial Period*, on view from January 19 through March 6, will explore the fascinating, hybrid mode that developed when Indian painters came under the influence of Western artists and were patronized by British colonials. Organized by Stuart Cary Welch, curator of Islamic Art, and Michael Brand, acting assistant curator, the show will include over 30 paintings and drawings, from the Fogg and from private collections, among them natural history studies, portraits, furniture designs, and religious works, some made for British patrons, some for Indians who admired English taste, and showing some of the most delightful effects of the

meeting of two very disparate cultures.

From March 9 through May 1, the Islamic Department will present *The Arts of Krishna Bhakti*, an exhibition exploring the art of the *bhakti*, or devotional, branch of the Hindu religion, which rose to pre-eminence in the middle ages, partly as a reaction against earlier, more abstract and theoretical Hindu traditions. Organized by Michael Brand, the exhibition will include textiles, ivories, and small bronzes as well as miniature paintings, most of them concentrating on the story of the love of the milkmaid Radha for the Hindu god Krishna, a favorite metaphor symbolizing the human soul's desire for mystical reunion with God. Of particular interest will be a series of pages from a famous manuscript of the *Bhagavata Purana* made around 1540, and material relating to the important *Vallabhacarya* sect now centered in Nathadvara, Rajasthan. The exhibits will be drawn both from the Fogg's own collections and from private collections, including that of Mrs. Cynthia Hazen Polsky of New York.



Indian, Gujarat (?), *Krishna Receives the Homage of a Prince as the Gopas with their Cows Stand By* (from a *Bhagavata Purana* Series, detail), ca. 1650. Gift — Mr. John Goelet, 1960.53.

professor of fine arts, Harvard University (March 2); "The Living Work: A Lecture on Chinese Painting" by John Hay, associate professor of fine arts, Harvard University (March 9); "Portrait of a Chinese Gentleman: Commemorative Painting in the Ming Dynasty" by Anne Clapp, associate professor of art history and chairman of the art department, Wellesley College (March 16); "The Art of Chinese Ceramics" with Robert Mowry, curator of the Mr.

and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller III Collection of Asian Art, The Asia Society, New York (March 23); and "Folk Traditions of Long Bow Village" a lecture and film about the revival of folk dance-performance in contemporary China, both by Carmelita Hinton, graduate student in fine arts, Harvard University. Subscriptions to all five lectures are \$25 for Friends of the Fogg, \$35 for others.

More "Hidden Treasures" Revealed

A series of exhibitions of the Winter/Spring season will reveal a number of the Fogg's masterpieces that are rarely seen by the public. *The Western Tradition: Paintings from Europe and North America* (on view through February 13) includes 50 major paintings from the Fogg's collections and on long-term loan to the Fogg, many of which have not been displayed for many years.

Aspects of the Fogg's extensive collection of Japanese woodblock prints will be featured in four exhibitions: *Humor in Japanese Prints* (through March 9), *Lady Murasaki and the Tale of Genji* (March 12 through April 20), *The Making of a Japanese Print* (April 23 through June 1), and *The Ichikawa Family of Kabuki Actors* (June 4 through July 13).

Friends of the Fogg Spring 1983 Programs

To reserve places in lectures or seminars, please complete this form and mail it with your check payable to the Friends of the Fogg to:

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Fogg Art Museum
32 Quincy Street
Cambridge, MA 02138

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