



63-22.8] and the battle scene [BTC 212-45.7]. In these examples, the horse is depicted as the vehicle of deities. The Polo Players relief is thus unique in representing both a rare animal and a foreign game.

The horses are excited and chase each other with tails raised high. With the upward swish of the tails, the artist captures the tension of a split-second, yet the whole relief still looks harmonious with the rhythmic legs of the horses and the concentrated poise of the riders constraining their movements within a rectangular frame. The horses are well equipped with harness, bridle, ornamented breast strap,

saddle, saddle cover and stirrups.² The horsemen hold long ladle-shaped sticks in their left hands and harness straps in their right hands while their feet press on the stirrups. Their headdress, though partially eroded, features low diadems with fleurons. At the back of the horsemen's heads are large hair-buns worn slightly to one side, which are also notable of the figures sculpted on the Trà Kiệu pedestal [BTC 95-22.2]. Such stylistic features have prompted art historians to assign a 10th century date to the sculpture.³ However, the historical context of this masterpiece could also suggest the 7th-8th centuries when the Tang dynasty (618-907