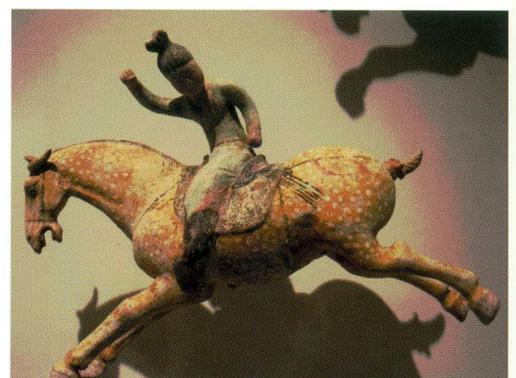
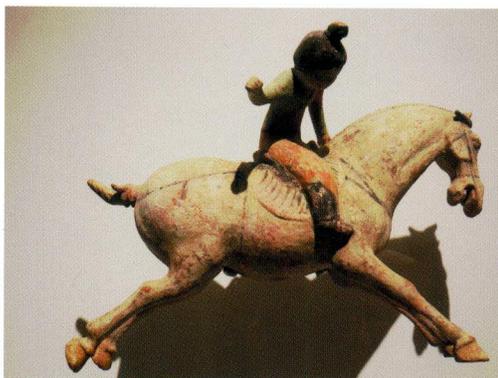


Fig. 1: Tang polo players. Guimet Museum of Asian Art. (Photo NHHD).



Fig. 2,3 Closeups of Tang polo players (Photo NHHD).



- 4 Berthold Laufer, *The early history of polo: a study of the origins of the great game, made from ancient documents* (United States: 1932), 13-14, 44; *Imperial China: The Art of the Horse in Chinese History* (Lexington: Kentucky Horse Park, 2000), 48-49.
- 5 Robert E. Harrist, Jr., *Power and Virtue: The Horse in Chinese Art* (New York: China Institute Gallery, 1997), 18-19, 7-77.
- 6 William Southworth, 'The Origins of Campa in Central Vietnam - a Preliminary Review', (Unpublished PhD thesis, SOAS, University of London, 2001), 31-318. Kenneth R. Hall, *Maritime Trade and State Development in Early Southeast Asia* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1985), 178-181; Geoff Wade, 'Beyond the Southern Borders: Southeast Asia in Chinese Texts to the 9th centuries', in *Lost Kingdoms: Hindu-Buddhist Sculptures of Early Southeast Asia*, ed. John Guy (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2014), 26.

CE) became fascinated by polo. The sport is said to have originated with Iranian peoples in Central Asia, who had a strong tradition of horsemanship since the early first millennium. Later it was transmitted to China and East Asia following the development of the Silk Road. Literary evidence recorded a polo match in 709 between Chinese and Tibetan teams at the Tang court and the sport was also depicted in Tang mural paintings, bronze mirrors and poems.⁴ A large number of polo playing tomb figures, mostly earthenware, have been excavated from Tang tombs in Shaanxi and Xinjiang.⁵

The Champa polo sculpture was discovered in the province of Quảng Trị in modern north central Vietnam. Formally this area was part of Linyi, the first polity of Champa that is mentioned repeatedly in Chinese chronicles until the 8th century. They record the Tang court receiving Linyi embassies continuously from 623 to 749 CE, with tributes including trained elephants, rhinoceros horns, precious stones, silk fabrics and so on. This diplomatic and commercial relationship was interrupted from 755 to 758 CE due to the rebellion of An Lushan

and the sack of Guangzhou by Arab and Persian traders. After this political turmoil, the South China Sea trade was restored but trading hubs shifted north to the ports of the Red River Delta. Linyi no longer appeared in Chinese annals and gave its place to a southern polity of Champa, known as Huanwang.⁶

Given the trading and diplomatic contacts between China and Linyi and the popularity of polo playing under the Tang dynasty as seen from archaeological and literary evidence, it is likely that polo was introduced to Linyi from China around the 7th and 8th centuries CE and it was only played by members of the royalty. The fully developed harnessing system as depicted on the two horses also speaks to this possibility as it reflects high equestrian skills that is claimed to have been perfected under the Tang court. Horse imagery was popular in Indian art; however, it was not until the 15th century that polo became a fashionable game of the Mughal Emperors in India. Hence it is possible to attribute an early dating and Sinitic influence to this sculpture of polo in Cham art.