

ACM WONDERS

Suitable for ages 13 and up

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GOLD OCTAGONAL CUP

Made of solid gold in China, around the 830s

Background Information

Several exquisite gold and silver wares were found in the Tang shipwreck cargo, including this gold cup. Each side of the cup is decorated with a figure playing an instrument or dancing. The long curly hair and billowing clothing do not correspond to the typical Chinese hairstyles and clothing of the period. They resemble people from Central Asia more. The faces on the top of the handle also look foreign, with their side profiles and curled beards. As the theme of its design seems to be entertainment and celebration, what do you think this cup might have been used for?

Gold and silver objects found in the Tang shipwreck were most likely made in Yangzhou, in southern China. Some designs look similar to foreign metal wares made in Sasanian-ruled Iran and Sogdiana (in present day Uzbekistan and Tajikistan). These wares were brought to China by merchants along the Silk Road.



Octagonal cup with musicians and a dancer
China, probably Yangzhou, around 830s
Gold, height 9 cm
Asian Civilisations Museum
2005.1.00918

The Tang Shipwreck was acquired through the generous donation of the Estate of Khoo Teck Puat.

LET'S DISCOVER

Learn about this unusual gold cup from the Tang Shipwreck, and how it reveals trade links between China and the Middle East.

FUN FACT

This gold cup is the largest and heaviest Chinese example we know of made during the Tang dynasty. The rare and precious nature of it raises many intriguing questions about why it was onboard the ship and who might have owned it.

GLOSSARY

An **octagonal** object has eight sides and eight angles. The octagon is a shape often found in Middle Eastern and Islamic designs and patterns. The number eight (八) is also an auspicious number in Chinese culture as it sounds like prosper (发).

The Silk Road was not a single, long road, but rather a series of many linked trading routes. These routes connected China with the Middle East and Europe, by both land and sea.

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LET'S LOOK CLOSELY

Use these guidelines to discover details about this object.

1. **LOOK** closely at the object. Do you recognise any of the instruments the musicians are using? What kind of music might they be playing? Would it be loud or soft, fast or slow?
2. **EXAMINE** the material of the cup. Do you think its texture is smooth or rough? How long do you think it took to create this cup, and how much do you think the cup weighs?
3. **THINK** about the nature of this cup. It was made in China, but with Central Asian designs. It was on board a ship bound for the Middle East. Who do you think this cup was made for? Was it meant as a gift for a foreign king? Or smuggled aboard ship to be sold to foreign merchants who desired precious Chinese objects?

CREATE AT HOME

Continue the experience at home by doing this activity. Mention us @ACM_SG with a photo of your completed design for a chance to get featured.

4. **DESIGN** a cup to be used for a special occasion. **FIND** a piece of aluminium foil and use a pencil to gently press pictures and designs onto the foil. Then turn the foil over to see the raised designs engraved onto it. Shape the foil into a cup. Alternatively, try designing a cup using other materials that you can easily find around your home.