

Buddhism



In this stone relief, the Buddha is seen preaching his first sermon in his native country, India. The Gods Brahma and Indra at his sides are inviting him to preach. The Buddha was a religious teacher who lived during the fifth century B.C.E. and founded Buddhism, one of the world's major religions. Buddhism teaches that life is filled with suffering, and that the way to relieve this suffering is through a path of mental and moral cleansing, or *purifying*, that eventually breaks the cycle of death and rebirth.

BUDDHISM

(Statue of Buddha)

This statue, dating to the year 338 C. E., is the earliest known depiction of a Chinese Buddha. Buddhism, which originated in India during the fifth century B.C.E, was gradually introduced into China through Central Asia via the Silk Road. Buddhism, which entered China during the Han dynasty, was influenced by other religions that were present in Central Asia at that time. Once in China, Buddhism was combined, for a time, with another popular Chinese belief system, *Daoism*. In fact, until the end of the Han dynasty, the two belief systems were virtually one and shared many beliefs. The early statues of Chinese Buddhas resembled the statues of Indian Buddhas from the fourth to fifth centuries B.C.E., but have some different features. For example, the Buddha pictured here has a more rounded head than his Indian counterpart; his nose is sculpted as a simple wedge; and his eyes, which are closed, look Chinese.



Bactrian Camel



This two-humped camel comes from the highlands of Bactria (pronounced BOK-tree-ah), a region in southwestern Asia, which is located in modern-day Afghanistan. Bactrian camels, which stand as tall as seven feet high and weigh as much as 1,500 pounds, are used as pack and riding animals. They are also valued for their wool, milk, hides, and meat.

TRANSPORTATION

(Camel Figurine)

This twin-humped camel was introduced into China from Bactria (BOK-tree-ah), in southwestern Asia, sometime around the first century B.C.E. As trade along the Silk Road grew, these pack animals became greatly valued for their ability to travel long distances over mountains and across deserts. Camels were uniquely suited to crossing the roughest terrain in an extremely difficult climate because they could go for days without food or water by living off the fat stored in their humps. Chinese traders used camels to transport such goods as silk, jade, tea, spices, and grain to the West. Chinese craftsmen created camel figurines, such as the one pictured here, to represent the wealth and prosperity that the camel brought into China via the Silk Road.



Gold



Gold coins, such as those shown here, were used by the Romans to pay for trade goods they obtained along the Silk Road. Rome had very few goods to export in exchange for the silk and spices it desired from Asia. Therefore the Romans had to pay for these luxury goods with gold—a precious metal they obtained from the many regions they conquered in Western Europe and the Middle East, which made up the Roman Empire.

GOLD

(Jade and Gold Funeral Suit)

This funeral suit of an ancient Chinese princess is made of 2,156 jade pieces. Jade is a resource found in China and was carried to the rest of the world via the silk road. The material used to sew the suit together, however, cannot be found in China.....GOLD! This suit is sewn together with gold wire. The use of gold became common in China after traders received gold coins from Rome and the rest of the West in payment for silk and spices traded along the Silk Road. Chinese craftsmen began to use gold foil or threads on many bronze objects they created. Later they began to cast objects made of solid gold. During the Han dynasty, the Chinese mastered the technique of changing gold into smaller particles, or granules, a process they learned from Western cultures. This allowed them to create fine gold wire to add to the beauty of other objects. Many Chinese believed that gold possessed the power to defeat death and could lead to immortality. They created liquid potions made from gold and pearls and drank them in an effort to prolong their lives.



Sikhara Tower

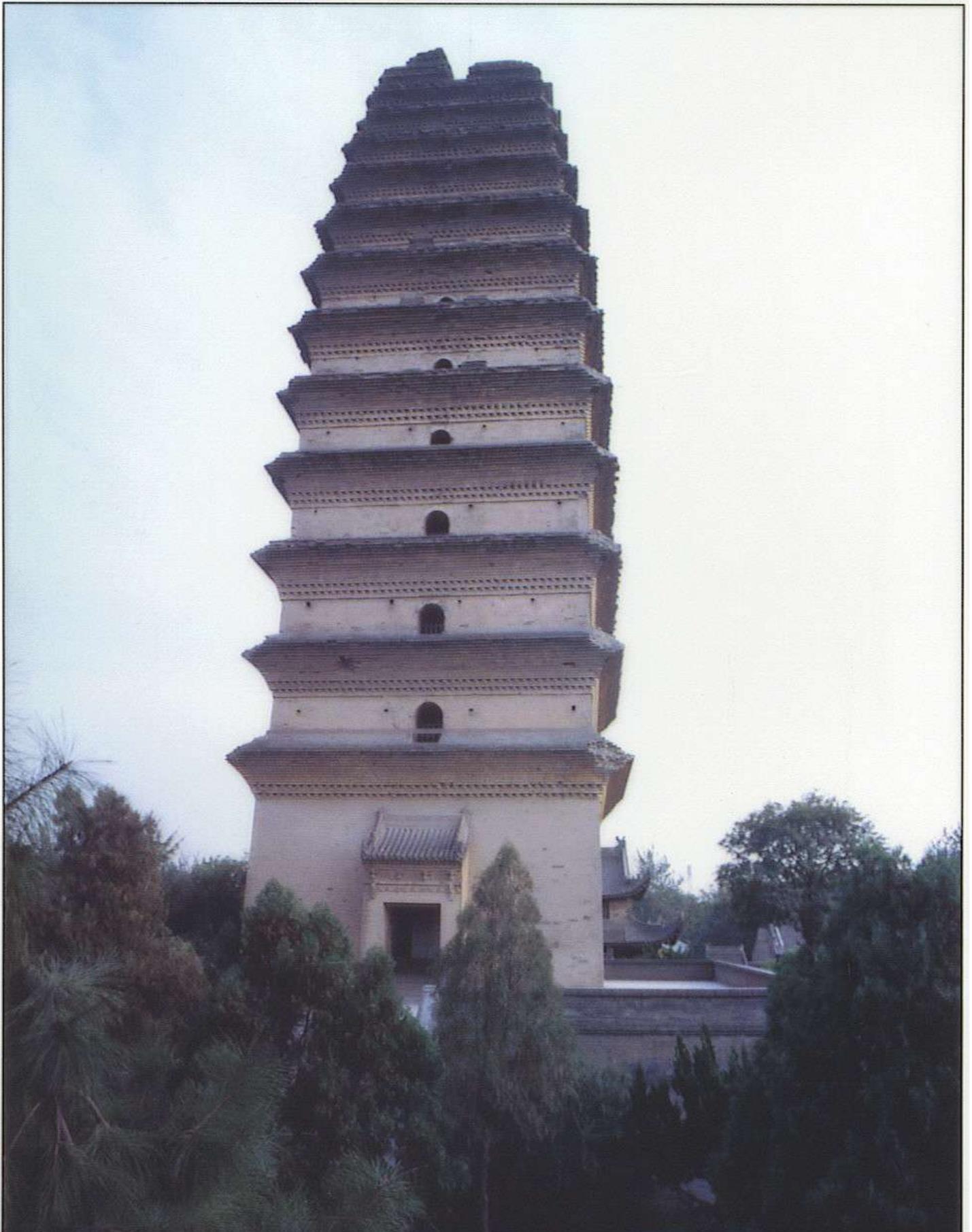


These are examples of *sikhara* (pronounced shi-KAR-ah) architecture, a style in which Buddhist temples of northern India were constructed more than a thousand years ago. *Sikhara* means "mountain peak" in the ancient Indian language, Sanskrit. Like mountains, these structures are larger at the bottom than at the top. They were built of stone and brick and were capped with a bulb-shaped top called an *amalaka*.

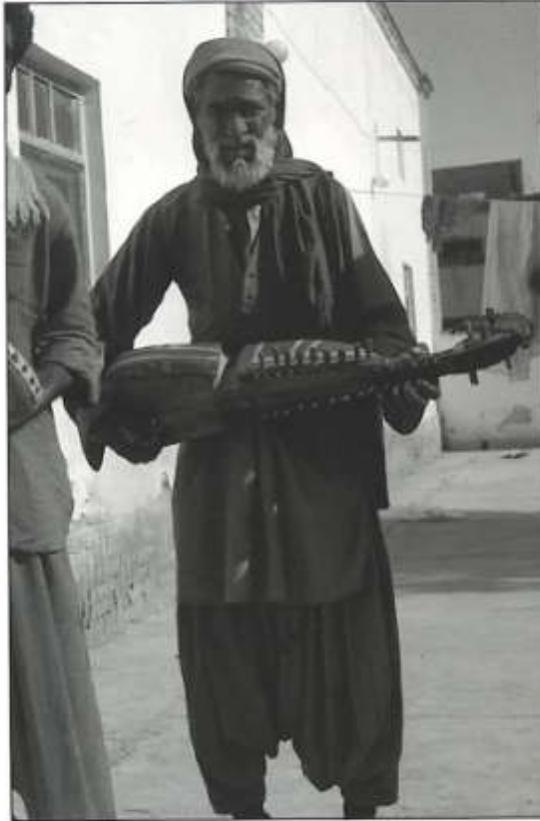
ARCHITECTURE

(Pagoda)

When the Buddhist religion was introduced to China through the Silk Road from India around the first or second century C.E., Buddhist architecture accompanied it. Chinese monks, who traveled to distant lands where Buddhism was practiced, returned home to describe the wonders of giant Buddhist temples that spiraled toward the sky. In earlier times, the Chinese people had built their own style of temple – called a *pagoda* (pah-GO-dah) – which had several stories and were made of wood. After Buddhism reached China, the Chinese adapted the Indian architectural style, and built pagodas such as the one shown here. Its design copies the curve of the Indian *sikhara* (shi-KAR-ah) temples. Over time, the Chinese constructed stone and brick pagodas that combined many Indian elements with the style of earlier Chinese structures.



Central Asian Lute

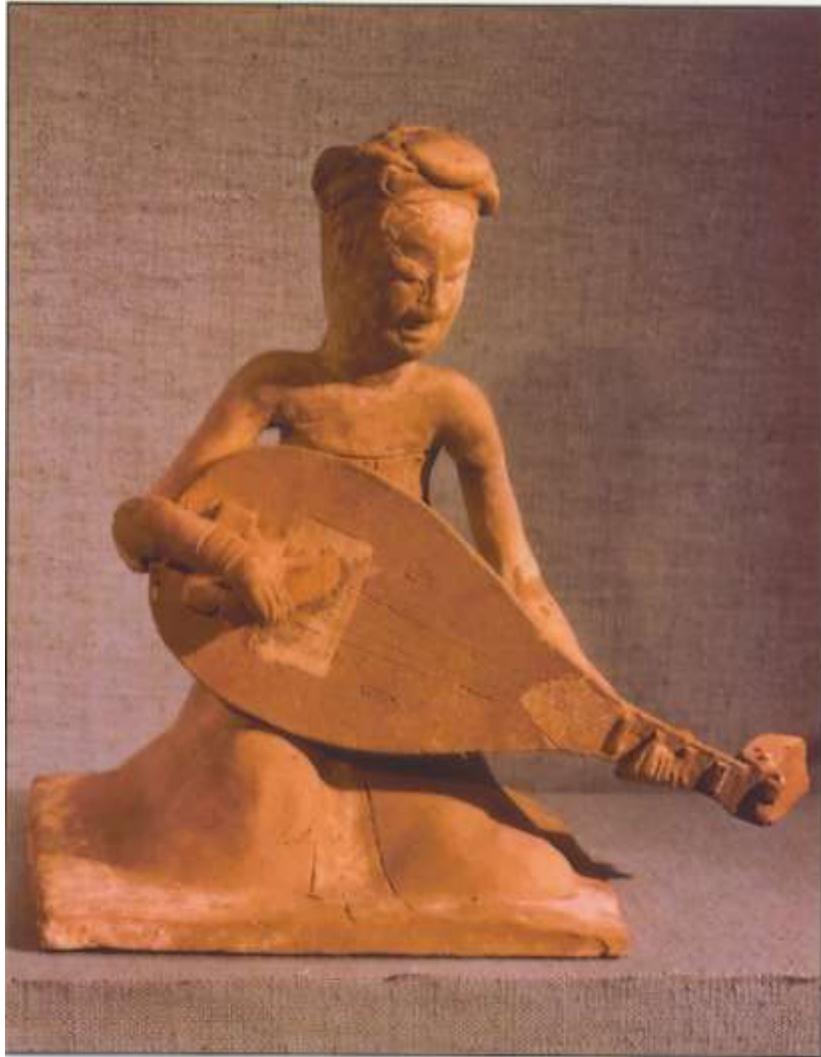


This man is holding a lute in Afghanistan. The lute is perhaps the most widely played stringed instrument in the world. While no single type of lute is played everywhere, one early version, pictured here, originated hundreds of years ago in Central Asia. It has a deep, pear-shaped body and a short neck; usually contains four or five strings; and is plucked with the fingers and a small wooden or metal object called a *plectrum*.

MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS

(Pipa)

The *pipa* (PEA-PAH), the short-necked lute instrument pictured here, first became known in China around the second or third century C.E. This stringed instrument reached China from Central Asia through the Silk Road. The pipa, like other versions of the lute, has a pear-shaped body with a wooden belly. A musician hold the instrument on his knee and plucks its four silk strings with a wooden or metal object called a *plectrum*. The pipa has been used for hundreds of years as a solo instrument, and much later it became an important instrument in Chinese opera orchestras. The pipa's wide musical range makes it suitable for playing sad songs, as well as, for expressing the terrible violence of a battle. The influence of the pipa spread from China. Variations of the pipa can be found in Japan, Korea, and Vietnam.



Grapevines



Grapes have been used for thousands of years to make wine. The grapevines shown here are from Central and Western Asia. These areas have some of the world's oldest vineyards for the cultivation of grapes.

GRAPES (WINE)

(WINE CUP)

This wine cup shows an image of Zhang Qian, a famous Chinese military officer and explorer from the Han dynasty. Around 139 B.C.E., the Han emperor sent Zhang on a journey outside of China to learn about foreign lands. Zhang returned 10 years later, with tales of fabulous riches and wonders in the lands west of China. One legend says that he brought back grape wine from Central Asia, as well as the method to make it. Traditionally, the Chinese had made wine from rice, grain, wild berries, and fruits such as plums and peaches. When grapes were first introduced in China, the Han emperors kept the vineyards for the use of the imperial palace only. Special wine cups like this one were made for the imperial family. Because the emperors kept the vineyards for themselves only, it took several hundred years for ordinary Chinese people to know about grape wine. Eventually, the Chinese began to grow grapes in parts of the country where the climate and soil were suitable, and grape wine became popular among the general population.

