



PLATE V. Relief from the tomb of the Emperor T'ang T'ai Tsung, depicting his chestnut bay battle charger. Early Seventh Century. Ht. 5 ft. 8 in.

IN DEFENSE OF THE HORSES OF T'ANG T'AI TSUNG

THERE is, it seems, still some question in the minds of certain students of Chinese art whether the famous stone reliefs of the six battle chargers of T'ang T'ai Tsung are the originals. The object of this paper is to clarify the state of our knowledge of these sculptures and to show that, so far, no conclusive evidence has been brought against their being



PLATE VI. Relief from the tomb of Emperor T'ang T'ai Tsung, depicting his saffron yellow battle charger. Early Seventh Century. Ht. 5 ft. 5½ in.

the originals, and that, indeed, there seems no good reason why their authenticity should ever have been doubted.

In 1931 Dr. John C. Ferguson first challenged the long standing acceptance of these horses as the original sculptures. In *Eastern Art*, Vol. III, he published an article entitled *The Six Horses at the Tomb of the Emperor T'ai Tsung of the T'ang Dynasty*. In this he implied that there was reason to doubt that the series of large stone reliefs, of which two were in the University Museum in Philadelphia and four in the

Provincial Library at Sian Fu, were the ones made for T'ai Tsung in 636 A.D., or shortly after, and put in the cemetery known as the Chao Ling in the mountains north of Li Ch'üan. He intimated that they were copies which one Yu Shih-hsiung (T. Ching-shu), Governor of Li Ch'üan district in the late 11th century, had ordered made for T'ai Tsung's Memorial Temple at the West Gate of the city of Li Ch'üan to save sight-seers a trip up into the mountains. Yu had recorded his action on a stele erected by him in 1089. Dr. Ferguson said he had seen no statement by the Museum as to whether its tablets were regarded as part of the original set or of the Sung dynasty replicas.¹ Dr. Ferguson at the same time claimed that Yu's stele of 1089 mentioned a set of six miniature tablets of the horses also made by Yu for the Memorial Temple.²

In the J.A.O.S. for December 1935 (Vol. 55, No. 4) I published an answer to Dr. Ferguson under title *The Horses of T'ang T'ai Tsung and the Stele of Yu*. There I gave evidence that the six great reliefs, especially the two in the University Museum (where I was Curator of Chinese Art with unlimited opportunity for studying them) could not be the copies Yu says he made, but were the originals from the Chao Ling; that they were the identical sculptures photographed by M. Chavannes in 1909, where the photographs show them *in situ* in the mountains. I explained that the large "rubbings" illustrated by Dr. Ferguson (I have a set also) were not true ink squeezes, but doctored representations, made with stencils and air brush or atomizer, and therefore of no value in proving anything. I showed that there is no evidence that the copies Yu says he had made were in stone, in fact the word he used in the inscription suggested that they were in clay.³ Further, I pointed out that the passage from the inscription on the Yu stele, which Dr. Ferguson had interpreted as referring to a miniature set of tablets, actually referred to the six drawings of the horses incised on the stele itself, directly below the inscription.⁴ Finally, I published rubbings of the typical T'ang design of the flat relief on the end of the tablet of Autumn Dew, and the narrow border design framing the horse, of which traces may still be made out at the lower left corner of the frame. The presence of these intricate patterns of T'ang is generally regarded as lending further weight to the evidence that the reliefs really are of T'ang date.

Thus we were left with the original large stone reliefs of the horses from the Chao Ling in the mountains, the Stele of Yu with its inscrip-

tion and incised pictures of the horses in the Memorial Temple at the gate of Li Ch'üan, and a possible set of life-size copies of the original horses, perhaps in clay, also in the Memorial Temple.

But Dr. Ferguson is still convinced that the large reliefs are copies. He now thinks they are copies made in 973 A.D. In the J.N.C.B.R.A.S., Vol. LXVII (1936), in an article on *The Six Horses of T'ang T'ai Tsung*, he ignores the earlier argument and cites a great many literary references in an effort to prove that the originals were destroyed by a certain Wen T'ao who robbed the tomb of T'ai Tsung sometime between 913 and 923. Between 960 and 973, Dr. Ferguson shows, the *History of Sung* records five or six edicts for the repair and restoration of ancient Imperial tombs, T'ang T'ai Tsung's among them. The repair of T'ai Tsung's Memorial Temple at the West Gate of Li Ch'üan was also undertaken, and commemorated by the erection of a stele dated 973 in the K'ai Pao era, and referred to by Dr. Ferguson as the "K'ai Pao Stele." In 1094, a little more than one hundred years later, the reverse of this K'ai Pao stele was used by Yu Shih-hsiung for the engraving of a map of the Chao Ling and an inscription of much importance to us describing the cemetery.

The references to the repair of T'ai Tsung's tomb and the Memorial Temple are taken by Dr. Ferguson to prove that the stone horses had been destroyed, and he assumed that therefore copies must have been made at the time of the "restoration," i.e. about 973. He also now insists that the original horses were not in relief but in the round, and offers as proof of this a reference to them in the inscription of the stele of the Map of Chao Ling, where the figures of barbarian chieftains are said to be *hsing* and those of the six horses to be *hsiang*. Dr. Ferguson goes on to say:

"The terms *hsing* and *hsiang* which are used in apposition in this description both signify figures or forms which are images of the shapes of objects. They show clearly that the original carvings of the chieftains as well as of the horses were in *ronde bosse*. These were destroyed by Wen T'ao. In the record of the restoration undertaken during the K'ai Pao period—I have found no reference to these carvings (the horses), but without doubt these tablets were made at this time as part of the restoration. They can therefore now be accurately dated as A.D. 973."

Unfortunately for Dr. Ferguson's thesis there is every reason to doubt all four of his conclusions; namely (1) that the horses were destroyed by Wen T'ao, (2) that the originals were in the round, (3) that these tablets which we have are copies made at the time of the "restoration" of the tomb in 973, (4) that they can now be accurately dated as of A.D. 973. Dr. Ferguson's total amount of "proof" is summed up in his paragraph quoted above, in which, although he admits there is no reference to the sculptures in any of the accounts of destruction or restoration, he asserts confidently that "without doubt" they were destroyed and copies were made in the K'ai Pao period, that therefore these sculptures which we have are copies and can "now be accurately dated as A.D. 973." This is no proof at all, but only wishful thinking. Let us take up the case point by point.

In the J.A.O.S. article I had shown that the huge reliefs of the Provincial Library at Si-an Fu and the two in the University Museum must be the ones photographed by Chavannes in the Chao Ling in 1909 because the breaks were identical. They could hardly, therefore, be the copies made by Yu Shih-hsiung in 1089 for the Memorial Temple at the town of Li Ch'üan, twenty *li* from the Chao Ling—that is, unless the Temple copies were moved up into the mountains sometime before 1909 (*if* they ever were made, and *if* they were in stone, not clay). This proposition is so very unlikely that Dr. Ferguson did not consider it. The only thing for him to do was to try to show that the sculptures up at the Chao Ling were *other* copies. To do this he cites the inscription on the K'ai Pao stele of 973 commemorating the repair of the Temple, and references in various histories to the care of, repair of, and replacement of articles in the Imperial tombs, and the maintaining of sacrifices. There is nowhere a single statement that the stone horses were destroyed. The six edicts quoted from the *Sung History* are concerned with the appointment of families to guard and repair tombs of emperors, etc., to provide victims and vessels for the sacrifices, and to prepare official robes and other garments for tombs that had been robbed, and put them in those tombs. In other words they speak of weeds, sacrifices, and new clothes, there is no intimation of restoration in our modern sense of the word. To an unbiased mind reading these edicts they suggest cutting weeds, setting up fallen stones, preparing and holding sacrifices and replacing official robes that had been stolen; they hardly suggest the carving of meticulously exact copies of grave sculptures that might have been

injured, or the adornment of the grave with new sets of colossal stone reliefs.⁵

Incidentally, what does Dr. Ferguson mean when he says that the original sculptures were "destroyed"? Had they been reduced to powder; had they vanished in thin air? What would robbers do to destroy an avenue of huge stone sculptures (if they bothered to do anything)? Just topple them over and break them. Actually this is just what has happened to these sculptures we possess. They have been "destroyed" at some time or other, by human hand or Nature's upheavals, in the sense that they have been badly broken. The Elgin marbles were "destroyed" likewise, but they still live, and so do these horses. Their condition is a point actually in favor of their being the originals. However, there is nothing in the edicts mentioned by Dr. Ferguson to indicate either destruction of the sculptures or replacement of them by copies.

As with the edicts, Dr. Ferguson quotes the inscription of the K'ai Pao stele as though it proved such destruction, but, according to his own translation, it only lauds T'ai Tsung, speaks of weeds and millet covering the graves of former sovereigns and records the fact that "money was appropriated and skilled workmen were employed. The old tomb was opened so that robes and caps could be replaced, and a new temple was built for the offering of sacrifices at regular intervals." Not a word about restoring the great avenue of sculptures which extended north from the tomb to the Yuan Wu Men, not a word about any carving of six great stone tablets, portraits of the famous horses, to replace the originals in the stone house at the north gate of Chao Ling.

Dr. Ferguson leans most heavily, however, upon an account of the robbing of T'ai Tsung's tomb which he found in the *Biography of Wen T'ao*, an official of the Five Dynasties, given in the *Wu Tai Shih* (chuan 40). I have translated the whole of this account and cannot find in it anywhere the proof which Dr. Ferguson claims is there. Wen T'ao, a former bandit, while a magistrate for seven years in the Li Ch'üan district, in the period between 913 and 923, opened all the T'ang tombs in that region and took all the valuables (chin pao). The biography states that he found

"the Chao Ling most firmly constructed. He followed the spirit way down (into the tomb) and saw a vast and elegant hall like that of a palace . . . The central room was the mortuary chamber, while to east and west of it were side rooms with stone

couches, above which were stone book cases. Inside, in an iron chest, were stored away famous treasures of former generations. The manuscripts (writings and drawings) of Chung (Yu) and Wang (Hsichih) in respect of brush strokes, paper and ink were like new. Wen T'ao took them all and later they became known to people."

This is all that is said about T'ang T'ai Tsung's tomb. Dr. Ferguson's translation is substantially the same, yet he adds, "There is no reference—in this biography—to the stone figures of the six horses, but it can be taken for granted that they suffered the same fate as the tomb of T'ai Tsung." Now things cannot be "taken for granted" in submitting proof of anything. Moreover, this is a strange statement to make if he wants to show the destruction of the horses, for it would seem from the text itself that Wen T'ao had not "destroyed" anything, he had *taken out* of the tomb those articles of value which he wanted, apparently small things, easily carried off—in other words he *robbed* the tomb, but did not necessarily smash up everything around it. He would hardly have cared to call attention so to his robbery, or rouse resentment by such desecration. How *can* it be "taken for granted" that he went out of his way to break sculptures two miles from T'ai Tsung's tomb, and that so badly that nothing would be left. In those days the sculptures at a grave were not considered of any intrinsic or art value. At any rate, there is not the slightest evidence here that Wen T'ao did anything to the six horses.

Dr. Ferguson, furthermore, says that the inscription on the stele of the Map of Chao Ling, made by Yu Shih-hsiung in 1094, confirms the inference as to the destruction of the original six horses because it speaks of them as carved in the round, when what we have are in relief. But *does* it say they were in the round? The passage he quotes is, "The figures (*hsing*) of barbarian chieftains were carved—and the shapes (*hsiang*) of the six horses were cut and polished . . ." He declares that *hsing* and *hsiang* both signify figures in *ronde bosse*. This is surprising, for, although *hsing* means form, *hsiang* is the term commonly employed in the title of a painted portrait. Dr. Ferguson says himself that it is used here in apposition to *hsing*. That would imply a difference, not an identity of technique. Dr. Ferguson should have remembered, also, that Yu wrote this inscription and made this map in 1094, when, if Dr. Ferguson's thesis were correct, the originals which Dr. Ferguson claims were

in the round would no longer have been up at the Chao Ling, but the reliefs would have taken their place there since 973! Dr. Ferguson states (p. 5 of his paper), "It is certain that the first set of horses which are represented in the Map of Chao Ling as standing in two rows of three on the sides of the road leading in from the north gate were carved in *ronde bosse*." But the horses themselves are *not* represented on the Map of Chao Ling; only their names, engraved in cartouches, appear on the stele.⁶ Yu Shih-hsiung shows not the least sign, either on the Map Stele or on the Stele of the Picture of the Six Horses, that he thought the stones up at the Chao Ling in his time were not the originals. It would have been strange if this had been the case and it were not generally known, since thousands of workmen had been clearing up the tombs. In the inscription of the Stele of the Picture of the Six Horses Yu certainly makes it clear that he believes that the horses at the Chao Ling in his day were the ones made for T'ang T'ai Tsung.⁷

There is another good reason why the original horses were made as reliefs and not in the round. Sculptures in stone of horses in the flying gallop would be almost impossible, they would break in the middle. Technically it could not be done without leaving stone posts beneath the bellies, perhaps leaving the whole space under the horse in the stone. The horses were, for this reason if no other, done in relief for T'ai Tsung, and not in the round. The designs as we know them are pictorial rather than sculpturesque, and that they are the original designs we have no occasion to doubt, especially since Yu Shih-hsiung begins his inscription on the Stele of the Picture of the Six Horses by saying, "I once saw the Painting of T'ang T'ai Tsung's six horses, for generations handed down as by the brush of Yen Li-pen." Below the inscription he draws the horses in the arrangement of a hanging picture. If the attitudes of the stone horses on the reliefs had been different from those he had seen in the painting he would surely have noted that fact. The designs are the same as those of the great reliefs which have come down to us. There is no reason to believe that they have ever been changed.

There certainly were statues of horses along the "spirit way" approaching the tomb of T'ai Tsung. All graves of important persons had such. They appear prominently on the maps of the Chao Ling in the Gazetteers. But they are not the famous portraits of the Emperor's battle chargers. Those were set up behind the tomb near the north gate. The

great reliefs which have come down to us are those portraits, superb works of art of typical T'ang design, after the drawings of Yen Li-pen. T'ang sculptures in high relief are not rare, they can be found all over the walls at Lung Men and other sites. There is no reason for thinking that there was ever an earlier set of T'ai Tsung's horses in the round, although Dr. Ferguson is right in not taking it for granted that there could not have been. It is simply that the evidence is overwhelmingly for the reliefs.

I cannot see why Dr. Ferguson thinks that the existence of the square spaces in the upper corners of the reliefs "makes it certain that the destruction of Wen T'ao included the original stone figures," or how he knows that "the verses were never engraved and the spaces remained vacant." In my paper in the J.A.O.S. I showed the remains of a narrow border design in flat relief which surrounded the tablet on the frame and was on the same level with and ran into this upper square space. I suggested the probability that the verses written by T'ai Tsung were indeed carved, in this same flat relief, on that space; in fact, I am not the only one to believe this, for Chang Ch'ao, in the account of his visit to the Chao Ling in 1611,⁸ mentions seeing traces of inscriptions in the upper corner spaces. Dr. Ferguson stated in his first paper that he was "not inclined to give too much credence to the accuracy of this record of the visit of Chang Ch'ao." Dr. Ferguson doubted Chang because he mentioned the Map of Chao Ling, which was the only mention that Dr. Ferguson had found, he said, of that stele. Since then, of course, the existence of the Map Stele (reverse of the K'ai Pao Stele) has been verified, and even located, and that by Dr. Ferguson's own research. Chang Ch'ao's record, far from being inaccurate, is one of the best sources we have. Chang says that the scholars of olden times "discussed whether the *painted characters* (of the eulogies) had been washed off so as to obliterate all traces." He goes on to figure out the measurements; the space is one foot square⁹ and there are four lines of four characters each in the eulogies. If these verses, only, went on the squares, then, he concludes, each character would be allowed about two inches square. This, he thinks, would be suitable for *Ch'iu Ch'eng Kung* (Imperial Palace) script if the characters were not placed far apart. The following is Chang's account of what he found out about these spaces when he examined the stones:

"Above each horse's head is a corner angle a foot (square) retained in the stone which is level with the boundary border.

Scarcely visible are the traces of characters. This is the place where the eulogies were once cut. . . . There was no place containing writing on the stone pedestals . . . According to Chao (?) Tzu-han there was writing on the horses and not on the pedestals. Verily this is so. Now, the severe frosts have turned two of them over on their sides. I felt and rubbed and pushed and estimated and rejoiced in getting the upper corner where the eulogy was written. Plainly, indeed yes, it can be seen. I think that the reason this space is so very narrow is that the style of writing was finely delicate and thin, and it was not cut with large deep writing. A great many changes have left their record (mark). The wind and rain have peeled off and eaten away (the surface) until they must have diffused and destroyed (the writing)."¹⁰

It is not unreasonable to conclude from this that the verses, eulogies, composed by T'ang T'ai Tsung, *were* carved on the square spaces intended for them. We have no proof. But the evidence for it is at least as strong as for Dr. Ferguson's theory that they never were put on. And the probabilities are great for the sculptures having been completely finished, verses and all, for T'ai Tsung when he had them put at his Empress' tomb. Yu says in his inscription on the Stele of the Picture of the Six Horses that Yin Chung-jung in 670 was ordered to write another theme in praise of the horses for the stone pedestals. Dr. Ferguson says this theme was actually engraved on the pedestals. But he offers no proof of this beyond his statement, and merely adds that when the substitute tablets were made in 973 the square spaces were substituted for pedestals. How then does it happen that Chang Ch'ao in 1611 saw pedestals as well as square spaces? It would seem either that Dr. Ferguson did not read all of Chang Ch'ao's narrative, or that he still puts no credence in it.

It will thus be seen that none of the data presented by Dr. Ferguson, tremendously interesting and important as it is, can be considered "proof" that the reliefs of the horses of T'ang T'ai Tsung are anything but the originals. His search of the literary records reveals no mention of any destruction of the originals, or of their having been replaced by others. I have shown (1) that the Biography of Wen T'ao, cited by Dr. Ferguson as proof that the horses were destroyed about 920, contains no allusion to such destruction, (2) that Dr. Ferguson has no basis for his conclusion that the original horses were in the round, (3) that the edicts do not in any way imply that new stone sculptures were made in 973 as part of the "restoration" of ancient tombs, and (4) that the reliefs

certainly can *not* therefore be accurately dated as of 973. It is doubtless always wise to question monuments which have been too much taken for granted, but it does not invariably follow that such monuments are other than what they have been thought to be. In the case of the Horses of T'ang T'ai Tsung all questionings have served only to establish more firmly their claim to being the originals, and that is what we must still consider them. The ultimate evidence against their being either copies or replacements lies in the sculptures themselves, for they are vital, powerful works of art, in the style and spirit of early T'ang, and carved to a scale befitting an Emperor's resources.

There is no reason to believe that the Horses of T'ang T'ai Tsung are anything but the originals, and therefore date from 636 or 637 A.D.

HELEN E. FERNALD.

- ¹ Mr. Bishop had published them as the originals, in *THE MUSEUM JOURNAL* in 1918.
- ² Dr. Ferguson seems not then to have known the Stele of the Picture of the Six Horses except by the text of its inscription as published in the *Li Ch'üan Gazetteer*. He apparently did not connect it with a rubbing published by Bushell in *CHINESE ART*, Vol. I, Fig. 18, which showed pictures of the six horses engraved—in miniature—on a stone in the manner of a kakemono. Bushell's rubbing did not show Yu's inscription and Bushell himself had supposed it was from a stele of the 7th century set up by T'ai Tsung.
- ³ Mr. S. K. Chang, Dr. Ferguson's fellow worker, who went to Li Ch'üan later to investigate, reported seeing some clay figures against a wall in the ruined temple where the Stele of the Picture of the Six Horses was still standing, but unfortunately he says nothing further about them. See *J.N.C.B.R.A.S.* 1936, p. 2.
- ⁴ I had guessed that the inscription translated by Dr. Ferguson must be from the same stone as the picture of the horses in Bushell and I finally located a rubbing (thanks to Mr. C. T. Loo) which proved it, showing the inscription above the drawings of the horses, and thus identifying the figure in Bushell. I presented this rubbing and evidence in my lecture on the Horses of T'ang T'ai Tsung for the Royal Academy, at Burlington House, in London, Dec. 13, 1935.
- ⁵ No family would have spent its fortune doing either of these things. If the stone horses were broken they would simply have set them up again as we would an old grave stone that has fallen down, perhaps clamping the breaks together. If the pieces had been carried off they could not be copied. The execution of newly designed colossal stones would have been commemorated on many stele and recorded in the historical works of the time, the local gazetteers, etc. Such a deed would have been widely publicized.
- ⁶ Dr. Ferguson must have had in mind not the map as drawn on the stele, but that published in the *Li Ch'üan Gazetteer*, showing six standing horses, all alike, lined up three on each side of the hill. They are accompanied by the usual two military and two civil officials and the group had nothing to do with the sculptures under discussion.
- ⁷ I am deeply indebted to Dr. Ferguson for rubbings of all these stele and their inscriptions, and I regret that our interpretation of the data is so at variance. I cannot ignore his challenge, however, nor allow the authenticity of the horses to go undefended.
- ⁸ See *Chao Tai Ts'ung Shu*, Vol. 12, No. 37. Dr. Ferguson first located this account and gave a resumé in his article in *EASTERN ART*, Vol. III, p. 69.
- ⁹ Chang's measure would be in Chinese feet of the Ming Dynasty. Measurement of the squares on the sculptures in the University Museum show $14\frac{1}{2}$ English inches. A Chinese foot has 10 inches.
- ¹⁰ I have purposely translated this as literally as possible.