Chinese Tang tomb figures
Northern China, about AD 728

About one metre high, these are among the tallest known burial figures from the Tang dynasty (AD 618-906). They come from the tomb of Liu Tingxun, an important official.

The group comprises two fabulous beasts (one with a human face), two fierce lokaṇa, guardian figures usually seen at the entrance to temples, and in the centre, two officials, one military, one civil. The military official has armour over his green robe and a bird of prey on his hat. Figures of horses, camels and grooms from the same tomb group are also on display in the British Museum. They are reputed to be from the tomb of Liu Tingxun, an important military commander who died in AD 728.

The memorial tablet found with these figures records his skill in military matters and the arts of statesmanship, and that he died at the age of 72.

It is interesting that all the human heads are unglazed, including that of the fabulous beast, as are the flaming manes of both animals. Otherwise, the figures are completely covered with lead sancai (three-colour) glaze.