

Media Release

For immediate release



A RARE GLIMPSE OF THE LONG-FORGOTTEN IMPERIAL TREASURES FROM THE REVERED FAMEN TEMPLE IN CHINA REVEALS MORE ABOUT THE TANG DYNASTY – A GOLDEN AGE

Singapore, 16 January 2014 – A heavy thunderstorm in 1981 led to the dramatic collapse of the Famen Temple pagoda in Shaanxi province, China, resulting in the discovery of forgotten treasures from the Tang dynasty. Hidden away underground for over 1,000 years, some of these marvelous objects from the underground crypt will be shown for the first time in Southeast Asia at Singapore’s Asian Civilisations Museum. They attest to an era of great economic prosperity, international trade, and exchanges between the cultures of East and West.

Secrets of the Fallen Pagoda: Treasures from Famen Temple and the Tang Court is an exhibition made possible by the collaboration between the Asian Civilisations Museum, Shaanxi Provincial Cultural Relics Bureau, and Shaanxi Cultural Heritage Promotion Centre, People’s Republic of China.

Dr Alan Chong, Director of the Asian Civilisations Museum explains: “The Tang dynasty was a period when China was actively engaged with the wider world. Trade along the Silk Route and maritime shipping with Southeast Asia and the Indian Ocean not only brought exotic new goods, but also people and ideas to China. The treasures from Shaanxi province on display in this exhibition show the creativity in China, and also its responses to other cultures – from rare ceramics and finely crafted gold and silver, to impressive glass vessels.”

The 120 exquisite objects on display provide insights into Tang society. They include treasures uncovered in the hidden crypt below the fallen pagoda of the Famen Temple as well as objects excavated from temples, palaces, and tombs.

Kan Shuyi, Curator (East Asia) at the Asian Civilisations Museum, shared more on her thoughts while curating the show: “We want to create an exhibition that is visually stunning that will present a novel experience for visitors. Many people who visit Xi’an will likely make a trip to see the terracotta warriors. They are, however, less familiar with other existing treasures such as those from the Famen Temple crypt, which was a major archaeological discovery in the same province. Most objects from the Famen Temple were made later in the Tang dynasty (9th century), so we have also selected objects dating to the earlier period (7th and 8th century) from other Shaanxi institutions to complement the display. We hope this exhibition is able to reflect a golden age in Chinese imperial history and the high levels of artistry that was achieved in the art of that era.”

The exhibition is divided into five sections: Tang Tombs and the Afterlife, Buddhism, The Famen Temple and Crypt, Foreigners in China, and Women in Tang China. The Buddhist sculptures and ceremonial wares, gold and silver courtly vessels of exquisite craftsmanship, glassware from Central Asia, and ceramic tomb figures reveal the artistry of Chinese culture. These objects provide a glimpse into the social, political, and spiritual life of the Tang dynasty.

Previously, the Asian Civilisations Museum collaborated with the Shaanxi Provincial Cultural Relics Bureau and Shaanxi Cultural Heritage Promotion Centre to present *Terracotta Warriors: The First Emperor and His Legacy*, an exhibition held in 2011.

Secrets of the Fallen Pagoda: Treasures from Famen Temple and the Tang Court will be open to the public from 17 January to 4 May 2014.

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About the Asian Civilisations Museum

The Asian Civilisations Museum is dedicated to exploring the rich artistic heritage of Asia, especially Singapore’s ancestral cultures. Through a collection of works of art and a varied exhibition programme, we hope to deepen understanding of Southeast Asia, China, South Asia, West Asia, and the Peranakan world. Rare among museums in Asia, the ACM connects audiences with many cultures.

About the exhibition

Secrets of the Fallen Pagoda: Treasures from Famen Temple and the Tang Court

盛世遗珍：陕西省法门寺与大唐文化瑰宝

Exhibition Dates : 17 January 2014 – 4 May 2014
Venue : Asian Civilisations Museum
1 Empress Place, Singapore 179555
Website : www.acm.org.sg
Enquiries : 6332 7798 / nhb_acm_vs@nhb.gov.sg
Admission charges : \$12 (adults) / \$8 (Singapore Citizens and Permanent Residents)
Opening hours : Monday to Sunday: 10am to 7pm (to 9pm on Friday)
Getting There : By MRT – Raffles Place
By Bus – 75, 100, 107, 130, 131, 167
By Car – Parking is available at Parliament House, Connaught Drive, The Fullerton Hotel, One Fullerton, and Six Battery Road

Programme Highlights

Whose and what body? Or, what do the Famen Temple reliquaries tell us?

18 January 2014, Saturday | 10.30am – 12pm | Asian Civilisations Museum | Free admission

A lecture by Eugene Wang, Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Professor of Asian Art, Harvard University

Something portentous was afoot in Tang China in the early 870s. A fanatic cult developed around the Buddha's finger bone, known as the "True Body" relic. Upon the death of the emperor, the hysteria faded. Was it a coincidence that these body-inspired events followed one after another?

Magnificent reliquaries donated by the emperor, and uncovered from the Famen Temple crypt in 1987, provide tantalising clues. Like Russian dolls, they are packed boxes within boxes, and they diagrammed the graduated dissolution of an individual body into a transcendent state. From this scheme we can read undertones largely absent in historical texts. Esoteric Buddhist visual idioms provide the clues. Professor Wang will unpack the reliquary boxes to reveal the intricate design of this artistic and bio-political engineering.

The Famen Temple reliquaries also relate to the mandala, a diagram of the mind and cosmos and a chart of the progress toward enlightenment. The mandala designs embedded in the Famen Temple reliquaries tells us how the mandala worked in Tang China, and how it could serve specific circumstances and agendas. Exposition on mandala tends to be long on generalities and doctrinal principles and short on worldly contexts. But now, as Professor Wang will relate, we have a real story.

In Conversation with Tim Yip: Costume and Set Design, and the New Orientalism

7 February 2014, Friday | 7.30pm – 8.30pm | Asian Civilisations Museum | In English

8 February 2014, Friday | 2pm – 3pm | Asian Civilisations Museum | In Mandarin

Friday, join Alan Chong, director of ACM, in conversation with artist Tim Yip, Oscar winner for best art direction on Ang Lee's *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*. Saturday's talk is moderated by Ng Kee Haur, former newscaster, and Lim Chye Hong of ACM. This program is a collaboration between ACM and the Esplanade's Huayi – Chinese Festival of Arts.

Chinese New Year Celebration

8 February 2014, Saturday | 1pm – 5pm | Asian Civilisations Museum | Free admission

Join us for an afternoon of Chinese New Year celebrations with activities for the whole family. Prepare for prosperity with performances, ang bao (red packets) crafts, and Chinese art and crafts, inspired by the exhibition.

Secrets of the Fallen Pagoda Weekend Festival

8 & 9 March 2014, Saturday & Sunday | 1pm – 5pm | Asian Civilisations Museum | Free admission

Experience the glamour of the Tang dynasty with beautiful displays of spring festival flowers, fun-filled performances from the golden age of Chinese art, and crafts inspired by the special exhibition, *Secrets of the Fallen Pagoda: Treasures from Famen Temple and the Tang Court*.

Ladies' Night @ ACM

8 March 2014, Saturday | 5pm – 10pm | Asian Civilisations Museum | Free admission

Celebrate International Women's Day with a delectable selection of pampering pursuits. Indulge yourself at our Beauty Quarters, enjoy classical performances and spend a relaxing evening exploring Tang art and culture.

The Famen Temple and the World of Tang Buddhism

18 April 2014, Friday | 7pm – 8pm | Asian Civilisations Museum

A lecture by Tansen Sen, Associate Professor of Asian History, Baruch College, The City University of New York.

Visit www.acm.org.sg for more exciting talks and programmes.