

15 'THE HORSE THAT SWEATS BLOOD'

*Tang Dynasty, China, AD 618–907*

*Size: 22 × 22 cm*

*Bronze*



In 139 bc the Han Emperor of China Wudi (r. 141–87 bc) sent Zhang Qian, a palace attendant, as his envoy to the Yuezhi confederation in the Ili Valley, to seek an alliance against the Xiongnu nomads who so troubled his western borders. The account of his travels that still survives describes a most extraordinary odyssey. He was intercepted by the Xiongnu, whose leader Junchen Chanyu treated him with courtesy, providing him with a wife but not letting him go. Ten years passed before he could make his escape and continue on his quest, arriving back at the Chinese court in 126 bc. On his way he went through the Ferghana Valley, and there saw the 'Horses that Sweat Blood'. When the Emperor heard about them he realized that military superiority depended on such horses. It took more than a decade of military campaigns, and construction of a line of fortresses throughout Xinjiang, to assure a supply. The Emperor Wudi commissioned the building of a mausoleum for his most illustrious general Huo Qubing, in front of which stands a life-size horse like this in stone.

*The report of the scientific examination by Striptwist Laboratory is available.*