

TWO CHINESE DOLLS IN A CABINET: ROSENBERG CASTLE, COPENHAGEN

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Abstract:

The Queen Charlotte Amalia Collection at the Rosenborg Castle in Copenhagen, Denmark includes two Chinese dolls. One doll, with a reddish face and wearing a green robe, may be the Chinese god Guandi.

Contents:

Rosenborg Castle, Queen Charlotte Amalia, Chinese Dolls, Guandi, Chinese Deities

Introduction

Rosenborg Castle was built in 1606 by the powerful Danish king Christian IV (1577-1648). The Castle became a public museum in 1838. The Royal Collections include many of the clothes worn by Danish kings and queens, dating from the early 1600s. There are many of the robes worn at coronations, weddings, and other ceremonial and state occasions. The Royal Collections are open to the public but belong to Queen Margrethe II (born 1940). She has reigned since 1972.

Two Chinese Dolls

Queen Charlotte Amalia (1650-1714) married King Christian V in 1667. She had a collection of "rarities" with special and unusual things. They were kept in a Japanese lacquered cabinet which came to the Rosenborg Castle after the Queen died in 1714. It contained over 10 seashells, a dried bird-of-paradise and a little lizard, a carved boxwood comb, and two Chinese dolls of paper and silk. The figures are 16.5 cm tall (6.5 inches) and were presumably used for puppet theater—but we have no further information on how she acquired them. Her collection dates from about 1670-90.

We have been told that these may be figures for classical theater. The angry figure below might be the Chinese god Guandi, the god for war and literature. What are they wearing? Do they always wear the same clothes? Do they have a wardrobe? Could they wear modern clothes?



Figure 1: Front view of first doll, possibly Guandi, a Chinese deity.



Figures 2a and 2b: Front and back views of second Chinese doll.

Conclusion

The figures are only meant to be seen from the front. Small wooden spikes under their feet can make them stand. One figure's back is covered with plain folded paper with lines of Chinese writing on the inside. I have read that Guandi is a giant, with a red face, two foot long beard, eyes of a phoenix, and eyebrows of silkworms. If it is true that he is also the Great Ruler Who Banishes Demons, we are happy to have him in our collection!

Photographs courtesy of Katia Johansen