

Dadu: Great Capital of the Yuan Dynasty

Zhixin Jason Sun

In 1264, Khubilai Khan adopted Zhiyuan (Supreme Beginning) as the title of his reign and established his capital in Yanjing, which had been the capital Zhongdu of the previous Jin dynasty. Eight years later he named the new capital, which was on the site of present-day Beijing, Dadu (Great Capital). Khubilai chose the location because it had extraordinary strategic advantage, holding critical access to the vast China Plain to the south, from which he could both launch his attacks to gain control over the country and maintain a strong link to the steppes in the north.

At first Khubilai thought of building his capital over the old Zhongdu of the Jin dynasty. Several years later, in 1267, he abandoned the original site of Zhongdu and decided to build a new city to the northeast. Several factors contributed to this decision. Zhongdu had been brutally damaged during the war that brought the Jin dynasty to its end. A great fire in the third year of the Da'an reign (1209–11), which "lasted for five days . . . burned down more than ten thousand houses." In the following decade, during the Mongol siege, palaces and houses were demolished for firewood. When the Mongols took over, the city was in ruins. By contrast, Daning Hall, the summer residence of the Jin emperor northeast of the city, remained more or less unaffected, its houses and parks mainly intact. When Khubilai arrived, he set up his headquarters at Daning Hall. The most important factor in Khubilai's decision to choose the new site was its proximity to Lake Wengshan, Gaoliang River, and Tonghui River (the last in fact being a canal). An improved canal system linking the three would provide an abundant water supply for the city, as well as an effective and inexpensive route for the shipping of revenue grains, on which the imperial household, the administration, and residents of the city depended.3

For the design of the new capital, Khubilai turned to his most trusted Chinese advisor, Liu Binzhong. The plan of Dadu was from the very beginning Chinese in conception. Liu took into consideration the capital cities of previous dynasties—particularly those of the Song, Liao, and Jin—but he also followed the principles outlined in the *Kaogong ji* (Record of the Investigation of Works) in the *Zhouli* (Rites of Zhou), a classic text of the third century BCE, which specifies that the capital should be "nine li [3.32 kilometers] square, with three gates on [each] side, with nine north-south avenues and nine east-west streets," "the ancestor shrine on the left and altars of soil and grain deities on the right, and the imperial court in the front and markets in the back." ⁴

Except for the summer palace on Qionghua Island, which survived from the Jin dynasty, the city of Dadu was built from the ground up. A large workforce drawn from many ethnic groups, including Chinese, Mongol, Jurchen, Central Asian, and various peoples from the Western Regions, participated in the project. Construction took nearly twenty years, from 1267 to 1285, when Khubilai ordered residents of the old city to move into the new one. Dadu, one of the largest and grandest cities in the world in the thirteenth century, afforded Khubilai many practical advantages. The imperial court and living quarters, surrounded by ring walls, provided privacy and a secure place where he could practice shamanistic rituals or sleep in a tent. His trusted officials would ensure that state rites were performed while he was away at his summer residence.5 More important, the overpowering symbolism of the city attested that Khubilai was a legitimate ruler in the Chinese imperial line and that his state was dedicated to the perpetuation of Chinese institutions and fundamental beliefs.

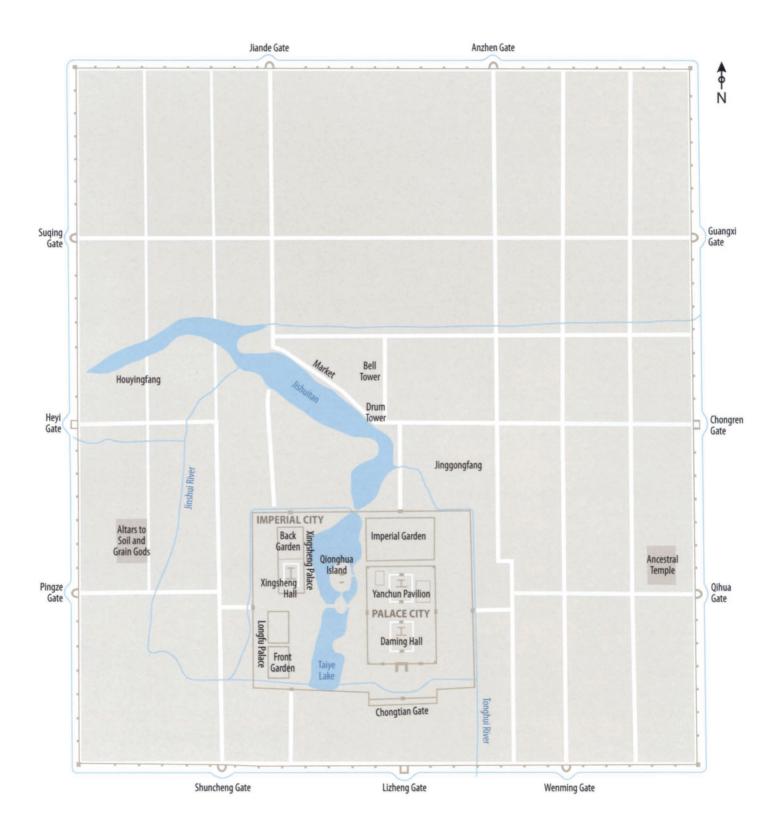


Figure 49. Map of Dadu, 1272-1368

THE CITY OF DADU

Khubilai's capital had three rings of walls. In the words of Nancy Steinhardt, it was "a walled city within a walled city within a walled city" (fig. 49).6 The innermost rampart surrounded the palace city, where the emperor resided, and its subsidiary buildings. Beyond that, encircled by the imperial city wall, were the palaces of the empress dowager and the crown prince, the imperial garden, and various government offices. The outermost wall, which enclosed the entire city, including the shops and houses of the citizens of Dadu outside the imperial city wall, was 28,600 meters long.7 Built of pounded earth reinforced with an inner structure of wooden poles, it was trapezoidal in cross section, measuring 8 meters high, 16 meters thick at the top, and 24 meters thick at the bottom.8 Pottery pipes were installed along the top to draw off the rain. Underneath were large drains, brick-vaulted above and lined along the sides and floor with stone slabs.9 This enormous structure, together with the walls built upon it during the Ming (1368–1644) and Qing (1644–1911) dynasties, was almost completely demolished in the 1960s and 1970s. Only part of the northern section, which was left in place when the Ming moved the northern city boundary farther south, has survived to the present day. There the pounded earth still stands about 8 meters high and is hard as stone, attesting to the formidable task that the Yuan undertook.

The city was rectangular in plan. The southern and northern walls were slightly longer than those at the east and west. There were eleven gates in all—two on the north and three on each of the other sides. Around the city wall was a wide, deep moat, over which a drawbridge extended at each of the gates. The streets were oriented precisely along the north-south and east-west axes. Between each pair of opposing gates was a major thoroughfare about 25 meters wide that allowed nine carriages to ride abreast. These avenues were intersected by subsidiary streets 6 to 7 meters wide that could accommodate two carriages side by side. Marco Polo, who visited Dadu in the late 1280s, described the city as "set out by line; for the main streets from one side to the other of the town are drawn out straight as a thread, and are so straight and so broad that if anyone mount on the wall at one gate and look straight one sees from the one side to the other the gate of the other side, opposite to that, and they are so planned that each gate is seen as the others along the town, by the roads."10

Together, the major and subsidiary streets formed a vast network, dividing the city into fifty-four wards called *fang*, each of which had a gate with its name inscribed on it.

The names and locations of these districts were recorded in the Yuan gazetteers Xijin zhi and Yitong zhi. The fang varied in size; some were twice the size of others. Notably, grand mansions of high officials stood next to modest houses of ordinary residents that were separated only by small alleys or walkways. The fang in the Yuan city were fundamentally different from those in cities of the earlier Tang dynasty. During the Tang, fang were closed structures, with tall walls on all sides, and houses had no direct access to the streets. Fang gates, guarded by officers, were opened and closed according to schedule. At night no one was allowed to enter or exit and the streets were closed to traffic. Radical changes took place during the Song, when a rapid development in commerce brought about the collapse of this closed urban structure." Shops, eateries, teahouses, inns, and entertainment quarters sprang up (fig. 50) and proliferated at an even faster rate during the Yuan. In Dadu, observed Marco Polo, "everywhere along the sides of each main street are stalls and shops of every kind. And there are about the city many palaces beautiful and great, and many beautiful inns."12 More enterprising business owners set up sheds along the streets, selling "seasonal groceries or vegetables" or offering "haircuts, fortune telling, and wheat grinding services." Markets of all sorts flourished across the city. The one on the northern bank of Lake Taiye (an artificial body of water) was the largest. There merchants from all parts of the country bustled about the terminal of the newly expanded Grand Canal, and one could find nearly everything one could possibly need for daily life: food, clothing, medicine, jewelry-even laborers for hire. Larger markets clustered at the intersections of major thoroughfares. The largest market for livestock was located not far from the western gate of the imperial city, and there sheep, cows, pigs, horses, mules, and firewood were sold.14

THE IMPERIAL CITY AND THE PALACE CITY

Located in the southern half of Dadu was the imperial city, encircled by a wall about 3 meters high and 20 li (7,400 meters) in perimeter. Known as the "great interior," it was divided into eastern and western sections by Lake Taiye. To the west of the lake were two compounds, Longfu Palace, residence of the empress dowager, and Xingsheng Palace, residence of the crown prince. To the east was the palace city, the residence of Khubilai himself,



Figure 50. Zhang Zeduan (active early 12th century), The Spring (Qing Ming) Festival along the River (detail). Northern Song dynasty (960–1127). Handscroll, ink and color on silk, $9\frac{3}{4} \times 208\frac{1}{6}$ in. (24.8 × 528.6 cm). The Palace Museum, Beijing

a rectangular enclosure extended about 950 meters from north to south and about 740 meters from east to west. Its walls, more than 16 meters thick, were encased in bricks. It had four corner towers and six gates, three on the south side and one on each of the remaining three sides. Most magnificent of all, in the center of the south wall, was Chongtianmen (Gate of Heavenly Reverence). As is recorded in the *Chuogeng lu* (Notes at Plowing Breaks), by Tao Zongyi, Chongtianmen was 57 meters wide, 16.5 meters deep, and, together with the hall above it, 26 meters high. It had eleven bays and five gates.¹⁵

An imposing city gate seen in a painting dated to the Song dynasty has been identified by Fu Xinian as a Yuan depiction of Chongtianmen (fig. 51). Although not entirely accurate, the representation largely captures the essential features of the gate as described in the *Chuogeng lu*—a high wall and massive portal with five gates, and on either side two large wings with multigabled towers at the ends. The depiction of the five gates matches Khubilai's palace-city gate as described by Marco Polo:

And this wall has five gates on the quarter towards midday, in the middle a great gate much greater than the others which is never opened or shut except only when the great Kaan comes out of it to make war and when he goes in there, and then it is shut, for the entry is open to none but to the king alone. And beside this great gate are two small ones, one on each side, and all the other people who are in company with the great Kaan come in by those. And then there is towards the corner another very large one, and towards the other corner another, by which again the other people enter, so that they are five, and the large one is in the middle, and by those four smaller gates enter all the other people.¹⁷

The base of the palace-city wall was reinforced with large stone blocks, possibly of white marble, that were decorated with elaborate carvings. This carved stone base was likely a feature specific to the Yuan imperial city wall, and is seen in a contemporary painting by Zhu Yu (1293–1365; fig. 52). While the painting purportedly represents the gateway





Figure 51. Episodes from the Career of a Yuan Official (detail), late 13th century. Handscroll, ink and color on silk, $15\frac{1}{2} \times 156$ in. $(39.3 \times 396.2 \text{ cm})$. The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City. Purchase: William Rockhill Nelson Trust 58-10 [Exhib.]



Figure 52. Zhu Yu (1293–1365), Scene at the Dragon King's Palace. Leaf from an album, color on silk, 18×17 in. (45.7 \times 43.2 cm). The Palace Museum, Beijing

beneath the eastern sea leading to the palace of the legendary dragon king, it is in fact a fairly close depiction of the Yuan imperial city gate, whose wall was decorated with large stone blocks carved in relief with a design of curling clouds. Similar carved marble slabs, which were originally used in major Yuan buildings, are in museum collections in Beijing (fig. 53).

The wall of the palace city is of course long gone, and with it the stone bases with elaborate carvings. However, an imperial stone bridge has survived to the present, providing a glimpse of the splendor of the palace city (fig. 54).

Located near the front court of Beijing's Forbidden City, it is believed to have been part of the bridge that once stood near Chongtianmen.¹⁸ Between the balusters are rectangular stone panels, each depicting in relief two spirited dragons on a floral background chasing a flaming pearl. The carved lions on top of the balusters are among the liveliest of Yuan sculptures (fig. 55).

Two large building complexes extended along the central axis of the palace city, on either side of a broad street that ran from the eastern gate to the western gate of the palace city and divided it into two roughly equal parts. On the south side were the front palaces of the "great interior" (danei), grouped around Daming Hall, the main administration building of the Yuan imperial court, where important meetings and ceremonies were held. On the north side were the rear palaces of the "great interior," with Yanchun Pavilion at the center. There audiences were held and the imperial living quarters were housed. To the east of the "front palaces" were the "house of the chefs" and "the warehouse of wines." 19 And to the west were buildings for storage. The "rear palaces" were flanked by rows of halls and houses, some of which served as residences for the imperial guards and attendants.

The Yuan palace city was demolished at the beginning of the fourteenth century, and the site of the Yuan buildings is buried beneath the imperial palaces of the Ming and Qing dynasties. Archaeological excavations, and even test drillings, are thus out of the question. Fortunately, historical texts, in particular the *Chuogeng lu* and the *Xijin zhi*, by Xiong Mengxiang, offer detailed descriptions of the Yuan imperial palaces. In addition, the *Gugong Yilu*, by the early Ming writer Xiao Xun, also



Figure 53. Panel carved with dragon in high relief, from the balustrade of the Rainbow Bridge, Dadu. Stone, height 19¾ in. (50 cm), width 50 in. (127 cm). Bejing Art Museum of Stone Carvings



Figure 54. Rainbow Bridge, Dadu. Marble. On the grounds of The Palace Museum, Beijing



Figure 55. Lion carved on a baluster of the Rainbow Bridge, Dadu. Marble. On the grounds of The Palace Museum, Beijing

records valuable information. Xiao came to the city at the beginning of the Ming dynasty (1368–1644) and was able to see many Yuan palaces before they were torn down. Several significant Yuan buildings, particularly Daoist and Buddhist temples, are still standing in North China. Fu Xinian has made a detailed and convincing analysis of the Yuan imperial palaces. He believes that Daming Hall and Yanchun Pavilion were both constructed on I-shaped platforms and that each building was composed of an office hall in the front and a sleeping chamber in the back, connected by a columned passageway.20 This I-shaped architectural plan was based on Song and Jin palace buildings, evidence of which can be seen in the architecture depicted in a Jin wall painting in Yanshansi, Fanshixian, Shanxi Province (fig. 56). An extant example is the main hall of the Dongyue Temple, in Beijing, originally built in the second year of the Zhizhi reign of the Yuan dynasty (1323). Although the temple has been restored over time, the I-shaped stone foundation still retains its original form.

Most magnificent of all the structures in the palace city, Daming Hall—27 meters high, 60 meters wide, and 36 meters deep—had an eleven-bay front. It had two superimposed roofs, which were supported by thirty-two wooden brackets. The *Chuogeng lu* records that the hall stood on a tall base of white marble that had a protruding platform in the front (*yuetai*) and balusters on all four sides.²¹ The rectangular stone panels between the balusters

were carved with dragons and phoenixes in relief. Below the balusters were large drainpipe heads sculpted in fearsome-looking dragon heads. The roofs and roof ridges were covered with glazed tiles, and the wooden structures below, including the brackets, beams, and lintels, were painted in bright colors and highlighted in gold. Square columns under the roof were painted in red and decorated with gold appliqués of dragons cavorting in clouds. The doors, also painted in red, had latticed panels with gold frames on the upper section and gilt-copper fasteners in the corners. The floor was paved with large stone slabs. At the rear of the palace a columned corridor 74 meters long led to the bedchambers. Lavishly decorated, they had floors covered with leather painted in green to simulate grass and walls lined with silk and decorated with landscape paintings highlighted in gold.

Yanchun Pavilion, on the north side of the "great interior," was a two-storied building also on a tall I-shaped stone base and with a similar architectural plan—a front office hall and rear sleeping quarters connected by a long columned corridor. Historical records of Yanchun Pavilion are scant. Fu Xinian has speculated that the decoration and furnishings would have been comparable to those of Daming Hall.

The Yuan architecture and related artifacts that have survived can perhaps help us envision the grandeur of Dadu's architecture. Among the Yuan halls still standing are Deningxian of Beiyuemiao (Beiyue Temple) in



Figure 56. Atelier of Wang Kui (12th century), The Life of Shakyamuni (detail). Jin dynasty, completed by 1167. Mural. West wall, Manjushri Hall, Yanshansi, Fanshixian, Shanxi Province



Figure 57. Sanqingdian. Yonglegong, Shanxi Province

Quyang, Hebei Province (see fig. 94), and Sanqingdian of Yonglegong in Ruicheng, Shanxi Province (fig. 57).²² The former is a seven-bay double-roofed building, and the latter a seven-bay single-roofed structure. Although neither can compare with Daming Hall in scale or in decorative richness, they nevertheless provide important points of comparison. As both were state-sponsored projects, their construction—the shape and arrangement

of the roof brackets, the projection of the roof corners, and the ratio between the height and width of the rooms—met the same official building standards and specifications.

Among extant architectural elements that survive from the Yuan era is a large roof-end ornament in the form of a dragon (*chiwen*), which was removed from the roof of Sanqingdian during restoration (see fig. 93). About five



Figure 58. Architectural element in the shape of a dragon head. Marble, length 32½ in. (82.6 cm). Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region Museum [Exhib.]



Figure 59. Wine bowl. Jade (nephrite), height 27½ in. (70 cm), diameter 53½ in. (135 cm). Beihai Park, Beijing

feet high, the glaring dragon has a wide-open mouth with sharp fangs, pointed horns, and a curving upturned tail. Equally striking in scale is a six-foot-high stone post unearthed at the site of Shangdu, the former northern capital of the Mongol Empire, in Zhenglanqi, Inner Mongolia (see fig. 101). Like the pillars of Daming Hall, it is square in section. Originally at the corner of the front platform of the imperial audience hall, it is carved in high relief with dragons on a floral background.²³ Stone dragon heads found at the site of Yuan Shangdu (fig. 58), originally on the marble platform of the main palace hall, are slightly smaller in scale, although their fearsome faces with sharp fangs continue to arouse a sense of awe.

West of the palace city was Lake Taiye, in which were two islands. The larger of the two, Qionghua Island (renamed Wansuishan in 1271), an artificial mound constructed in the Jin dynasty, was Khubilai's pleasure garden. There flourished rare trees and plants from foreign lands,

and clusters of exotic rocks embellished the slopes. Marco Polo described the mound as the "green hill" because the trees were verdant all year round.24 On top of the mound was Guanghan Hall, with twelve pillars carved with dragons and interior walls lined with cloud-patterned sandalwood panels painted in gold. Described by many writers, including the fourteenth-century friar Odoric of Pordenone, was the black jade wine bowl (fig. 59).25 Nearly five meters around, this gigantic bowl was carved from a single block of dark streaked jade. Its surface is densely covered with dragons and fantastic sea creatures writhing amid racing clouds and rough waves. It was likely made by local craftsmen, as a contemporary source records a jade works in the southern suburb of Dadu, where there was a community of more than a hundred families of jade carvers.²⁶ The execution of the bowl must have been regarded as an extraordinary feat, for its placement in the hall in 1265 was by imperial order and is recorded in the official history of the Yuan.27



Figure 60. Bowl and plate with dragon in repoussé. Silver, height of cup 7 in. (17.8 cm); diameter of plate 6% in. (16.8 cm). Hunan Provincial Museum

After the fall of the dynasties, the bowl was taken to a Daoist temple and used to store pickles before it was rediscovered and moved back to the imperial garden by the Qianlong emperor, more or less on the spot where it originally stood. Though recarved in the Qing dynasty, its overall shape and design nevertheless retain the character of Yuan jades. The dragon and sea creatures, the protruding rocks, and deeply engraved waves compare closely to the scene of dragons and sea waves on a Yuan silver bowl and plate recently unearthed in Hunan Province (fig. 60).²⁸ It is also an exemplary demonstration of the Yuan jade workers' ability to quarry large jade rocks and to carve them into monumental sculptures. This tradition ceased in the Ming dynasty and did not resume until the eighteenth century.

INSIDE THE CITY WALL

Urban Residences

Many officials and members of the ruling class lived in Dadu, both in and outside the city. Marco Polo was particularly impressed by their grand houses, which he described as "beautiful" and "spacious," many of which, he added, also have "corresponding courts and gardens." A site with remains discovered in the 1970s at Houyingfang, north of Beijing, gives evidence of having been a large Yuan residence. Judging from the remaining foundation and walls, the house stood on approximately eight mu (Chinese acres), a standard lot for an official residence.

The architectural remains included the foundations and walls of part of the central, eastern, and western court-yards. Relatively intact was a raised I-shaped foundation in

the eastern courtyard. Remaining traces of the building indicate that a front hall consisting of three rooms and a back hall of comparable size once stood on the foundation, each measuring 11.16 meters wide and 4.75 meters deep. Connecting the two halls was a columned passage 6.32 meters long and 3.72 meters wide. Two brick staircases (tadao) at the southeast and southwest corners of the foundation ended in brick-paved pathways leading to the southeast and southwest side doors. The findings at Houyingfang demonstrate that the I-shaped plan was widely used for both official and residential buildings.

The main residence, in the central courtyard, was similar in design but larger in scale. It also stood on a raised I-shaped foundation, of which only the front section, in the shape of a squat T, and two brick-built staircases survive. A three-room hall 11.83 meters wide and 6.5 meters deep flanked by two 4.9 meter-wide side rooms once stood on the foundation. Pillar bases next to the hall suggest that the building had a front porch about 4.5 meters deep. Behind the hall was a narrow columned passageway that would have led to the bedchambers.

Judging from the ruins, the house in the eastern courtyard had wooden panels on the front and back sides and partition walls and a columned hallway within. The panels measured 2.37 meters high by 0.7 meters wide, and each had a lattice on top with square or hexagonal openings and was pasted with paper. Some of them have on the corners brass fasteners engraved with floral motifs. The roofs of the building were covered with gray baked-clay tiles, their ridges decorated with small pottery animal figures. Fragments of plaster found on the floor indicate that the walls were embellished with murals.

Among the architectural remains discovered in the western courtyard were a small section of a raised foundation and a staircase on the front, left, and right sides. Two small stone sculptures of lions stood on the foundation, signifying the privileged status of the owner. As is described in the *Xijin zhi*, sculptures of lions, made of cast iron or carved out of white stone, were placed at the two south corners of the platform of government office buildings. They also commonly flanked the gates of "prestigious officials and wealthy families in the capital, as well as those of pawnshops."³¹

Lions are not native to China. They were first brought from West Asia in the late Han dynasty as gifts to the imperial court. The earliest extant representation of lions is a pair of stone sculptures, depicted with realistic details, found at the site of an Eastern Han tomb dating to the second century. As Buddhism took root in China during the following centuries, lions, as Buddhist guardians, became



Figure 61. Lion. Stone, height 10% in. (27 cm). Capital Museum, Beijing [Exhib.]

Figure 62. *Lion*. Stone, height 11% in. (30.2 cm). Excavated at Houyingfang, Beijing. Beijing Art Museum of Stone Carvings [Exhib.]

Figure 63. *Lion*. Stone, height 12 in. (30.5 cm). Found in Beijing. Collection unknown





increasingly popular. From the Tang dynasty onward, stylized images of the great beasts, characterized by bulging eyes, broad muzzles, and curly manes, became a standard motif in the Chinese decorative vocabulary, both religious and secular. Nearly all lions in Yuan art are stylized (fig. 61). A small stone figure excavated from Houyingfang (fig. 62) is rendered in a realistic manner, with a muscular body, pointed muzzle, staring eyes, and straight mane. Another lion, also found at a Yuan site in Beijing (fig. 63), bears an even closer resemblance to lions in Western art. Together they point to the new wave of influence that came to China during the Yuan period with trade and other types of contact. Real lions were kept in the imperial park, where artists working for the court may have gone to observe them.

Most commoners lived outside the city wall, but a fair number resided within. Remains found in the western section of Beijing suggest that their houses were small and low, the walls built of brick fragments and earth. The furnishings perhaps consisted of a stove, a bed made of mud bricks, and a stone mortar for shelling grains.

Religious Buildings

Of all the Chinese dynasties, the Yuan was the most tolerant of religions. Although the Mongol imperial clan and aristocrats were followers of Buddhism, especially Tibetan Buddhism, they were open-minded in their acceptance of Daoism, Islam, Christianity, and other beliefs, and there were many temples and places of worship in the capital

to accommodate the congregations of various religions. About one hundred Buddhist and Daoist temples in Dadu are recorded in the Xijin zhi,32 including the stillstanding Buddhist temple Dashengshou wan'an si, built by the imperial family, and the Baiyun Guan, where the renowned Daoist priest Qiu Chuji was abbot. Both temples enjoyed great renown and were always packed during religious festivals. Among Christian churches, the most frequented were the two Franciscan "temples of the cross." John of Montecorvino, an Italian missionary, mentioned them in letters to the pope, respectively dated 1305 and 1306.33 One of them could seat more than two hundred people and had a tower with three bells. The church was on the north bank of the Tonghui River, the east side of what is today Di'anmen Street, where the shrine of Khubilai's mother, a pious Christian, was located.³⁴ Neither of the two churches has survived to the present day. However, archaeologists have identified the site of a Christian church in the hills south of Dadu, where two steles stand among other stone carvings. One of them records that the temple was restored in the late Yuan, when the Nestorians resumed their worship practice. Two large stone pillar bases were found at the site in the 1930s, one of them engraved with a cross, floral motifs, and an inscription in Syrian that reads "look up to Him and hold hope in Him," evidence that Nestorians lived in the Dadu area.35

Residents of the capital included immigrants from the Western Regions, most of whom were Muslim. A large mosque on Niujie Street in modern Beijing built in the Liao dynasty continued in the Yuan to be a major center for Muslim worship. Two stone steles in the mosque record its long history. While this mosque was not in the city proper but in the southern suburb, frequent mention of Muslim practice in contemporary records suggests that there were mosques within the city walls. The Xijin zhi notes that a "Uighur Buddha temple" stood southeast of the Yanhua Pavilion in Xingsheng Palace.³⁶ While this temple may have been a Buddhist shrine, it was more likely a place of worship for Muslims from the Western Regions. It was not unusual in Yuan literature for Buddhist deities to be confused or conflated with those of other faiths; a Christian mass, for example, is referred to in the Yuanshi (History of the Yuan Dynasty) as a "Buddhist event." 37 Hence the description "Uighur Buddha temple" could easily have been a misinterpretation.

Entertainment and the Performing Arts in Dadu

As the capital of the empire, Dadu was also the center of Yuan art and culture, and the residents enjoyed a wide variety of entertainment and cultural activities during seasonal holidays and festivals. In and outside the city, official and popular celebrations took place throughout the year. A parade in February for the Buddhist festival, sponsored by the imperial court, was among the most spectacular of those events. It involved thousands of participants and extended for miles. The throng included "120 drummers from the eight garrisons, 500 mounted imperial guards, 500 soldiers and service members carrying the sacred seat of Guandi, members of 360 officially sponsored temples [who] carried Buddhist icons, altars, banners, umbrellas, and drums on wheels." There were also "150 women performers under the Xinghe office, 150 acrobatic and various [other] performers under the Xianghe office, and musical bands of Chinese, Uighur and [people of the Western Regions, each consisting of three groups, totaling 324 members."38

Hardly any visual records of such grand celebrations have survived; however, numerous representations of festival activities have been recovered at archaeological sites in northwest Henan and southwest Shanxi provinces, and they give a sense of what those events in Dadu would have been like, though on a smaller scale. For example, a group of molded pottery tiles decorated with the figures of folk dancers was found in a Jin-dynasty chamber tomb in Xinjiangxian, Shanxi Province (figs. 64–67).39 Although the tomb dates from the first half of the thirteenth century, the performance represented on the pottery tiles is known to have taken place from the Northern Song through the Yuan dynasty. Each tile shows one or two dancers in a parade, including a large-gong player, a smallgong player, a man carrying a large melon, and a man holding an umbrella in the shape of a lotus leaf and dancing with a woman. The last two dancers are perhaps performing a popular comic dance known as "Playing the Newlyweds" or "Playing Man and Wife," which was frequently mentioned in contemporary literature.40

Small pottery sculptures of musicians and dancers have also been found in Jiaozuo, Henan Province.⁴¹ Molded in high relief on tiles that lined the interior wall of a tomb chamber, they are nearly three-dimensional sculptures. The distinctive hairstyles and costumes of these performers are characteristic of northern ethnic groups. One of the dancers wears a pointed hat with a broad rim and a fitted knee-length coat with several ribbons knotted on the chest, closely resembling the customary outfit of the Mongols



Figure 64. *Musician Playing a Large Gong.* Jin dynasty, first half of 13th century. Molded brick, pottery with pigments, height 9¾ in. (24.8 cm). Excavated from a tomb in Nanfangzhuang, Xinjiangxian, Shanxi Province, 1981. Shanxi Museum [Exhib.]



Figure 65. Musician Playing a Small Gong. Jin dynasty, first half of 13th century. Molded brick, pottery with pigments, height 97% in. (25.1 cm). Excavated from a tomb in Nanfangzhuang, Xinjiangxian, Shanxi Province, 1981. Shanxi Museum [Exhib.]



Figure 66. Man Carrying a Melon. Jin dynasty, first half of 13th century. Molded brick, pottery with pigments, height 10 in. (25.4 cm). Excavated from a tomb at Nanfangzhuang, Xinjiangxian, Shanxi Province, 1981. Shanxi Museum [Exhib.]



Figure 67. Couple Performing a Comic Dance. Jin dynasty, first half of 13th century. Molded brick, pottery with pigments, height 97s in. (25.1 cm). Excavated from a tomb in Nanfangzhuang, Xinjiangxian, Shanxi Province, 1981. Shanxi Museum [Exhib.]



Figure 68. Mongol Dancer. Jin or Yuan dynasty, 13th century. Pottery, height 15¾ in. (40 cm). Excavated from a tomb in Xifeng, Jiaozuo, Henan Province, 1973. Henan Museum [Exhib.]

(fig. 68). He dances vigorously, waving his arms and flexing his knees. Two of the musicians have a shaved forehead and wear braided pigtails, as was the custom among the Jurchens (fig. 69). There are also dancers dressed like boys, with shaved head and pigtails tied up in a knot (fig. 70). They, too, are shown in animated poses, and each holds either a musical instrument, a banner, or an umbrella in the shape of a lotus leaf. The age of the tomb is still under debate: some scholars date it to the Jin dynasty, others to the Yuan period.⁴² Whatever the case, these figures give a rare glimpse of the northern ethnic people who made up a sizable portion of the population of Shanxi and Henan and were represented among the townspeople of Dadu.

A group of carved stone panels found in Shexian, Anhui Province, offer a rare scene of festivities on a smaller scale, the celebration by a family whose members have just been awarded official academic degrees.⁴³ Such degrees were not merely scholarly honors; they would

ensure decent positions in the government. Two of the stones show the recipients riding on horses amid a parading crowd. On one (fig. 71), enthusiastic young men march in front of the procession holding ceremonial weapons, a large umbrella, and a banner on which is written "happy homecoming in the second year of the Yuantong reign [1334]." On the other (fig. 74), attendants carry portable furniture and boxes for clothing. The parade is held in residential streets, where proud family members, mostly women dressed in formal attire, watch from the windows of storied houses. The other two stones portray the scholars as they travel to the city—one scholar stops by a restaurant (fig. 72)—or visit a country house on their way home (fig. 73). Especially noteworthy is the wine jar in the restaurant, which has exactly the same shape as a celadon wine jar in this exhibition (see fig. 295), indicating that it was a favored shape in the Yuan period. Also of interest are the Tang poems inscribed on two of the stones, demonstrating

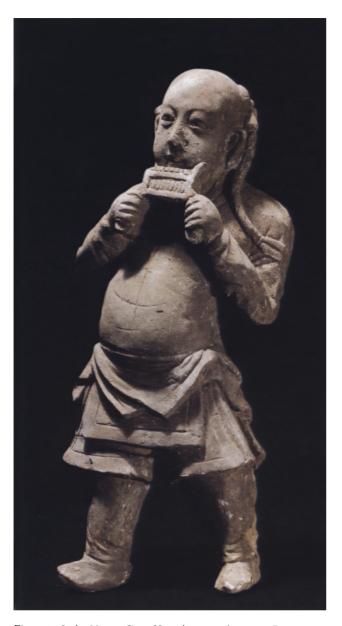


Figure 69. *Jurchen Musician*. Jin or Yuan dynasty, 13th century. Pottery, height 14% in. (37 cm). Excavated from a tomb in Xifeng, Jiaozuo, Henan Province, 1973. Henan Museum



Figure 70. Boy Playing a Flute. Jin or Yuan dynasty, 13th century. Pottery, height 15¼ in. (40 cm). Excavated from a tomb in Xifeng, Jiaozuo, Henan Province, 1973. Henan Museum [Exhib.]

that poems from the Tang must have been widely known among the common people.

Of all forms of entertainment, the Yuan drama, known as zaju, held perhaps the greatest appeal for Dadu residents, from the social elite to the ordinary marketplace crowd. The capital city naturally attracted many renowned playwrights and performing artists. Three of the four great masters of Yuan drama—Guan Hanqing, Ma Zhiyuan, and Wang Shifu—lived and worked in Dadu, and celebrated actors and actresses gathered there as well. As Xia Tingzhi (ca. 1300–1375) noted in his Qinglou ji (Record of Entertainment Quarters), about forty of the one hundred or so most popular actresses of the Yuan lived and performed in Dadu.⁴⁴ Many of them associated with prominent state officials, such as Lian Xixian, and with famed artists, such

as Zhao Mengfu and Xianyu Shu.⁴⁵ There were numerous playhouses and entertainment districts where city residents would watch and cheer their favorite actors. Xia noted wryly that at the theaters "called *goulan*..., either in the capital or out in local towns... the audience would spend their money generously on the actors."

Chinese theater reached its full maturity during the Yuan dynasty, when *zaju* developed into a full-fledged multimedia entertainment that offered plot, acting, dialogue, music, and dance. *Zaju* had its roots in the short plays, skits, and monologues of the variety shows popular in the Song, also called *zaju*, and in the plays, known as *yuanben*, of the Jin. Not only *zaju*'s dramatic structure and music but also its classification of actors by type were a legacy of Jin theater. More than nine hundred plays are known to



Figure 71. Stone carved with scene of a family watching a parade, dated 1334. $16\frac{1}{8} \times 20\frac{7}{8}$ in. $(41 \times 53 \text{ cm})$. Shexian Museum [Exhib.]

Figure 72. Stone carved with scene of a restaurant, dated 1334. $21\frac{1}{4} \times 61$ in. (54 \times 155 cm). Shexian Museum [Exhib.]

Figure 73. Stone carved with rural scene, dated 1334. $21\frac{1}{4} \times 61$ in. (54 \times 155 cm). Shexian Museum [Exhib.]

have been produced during the Yuan period, of which one hundred or so have survived to the present day.⁴⁷ The texts vividly illustrate the sophistication of Yuan drama, and archaeological finds over the last few decades provide valuable visual evidence of its long and sustained development.

Among those archaeological finds are pottery tiles with figures in high relief recovered from the interior walls of a late twelfth-century chamber tomb in southwest Shanxi Province (figs. 75–78).⁴⁸ The tiles were made in sets of







Figure 74. Stone carved with scene of a family watching a parade, dated 1334. $20\% \times 27\%$ in. $(53 \times 69.5 \text{ cm})$. Shexian Museum [Exhib.]





Figure 75 (left). Actor in the Leading Male Role (mo ni). Jin dynasty, late 12th century. Pottery, height 28¾ in. (73 cm). Excavated from a tomb in Miaopu, Jishan, Shanxi Province, 1978. Shanxi Museum [Exhib.]

Figure 76. Actor in the Secondary Male Role (fu mo). Jin dynasty, late 12th century.
Pottery, height 28% in. (72.1 cm). Excavated from a tomb in Miaopu, Jishan, Shanxi Province, 1978. Shanxi Museum [Exhib.]





Figure 77 (left). Actor in the Comic Role (fu jing). Jin dynasty, late 12th century. Pottery, height 26 in. (66 cm). Excavated from a tomb in Miaopu, Jishan, Shanxi Province, 1978. Shanxi Museum [Exhib.]

Figure 78. Actor in the Role of an Official (zhuang gu). Jin dynasty, late 12th century. Pottery, height 28¾ in. (73 cm). Excavated from a tomb in Miaopu, Jishan, Shanxi Province, 1978. Shanxi Museum [Exhib.]



Figure 79. Model of a stage with five actors. Jin dynasty, dated 1210. Left to right: Actor in the Role of an Official (fig. 80), Actor in the Secondary Role (fig. 81), Actor in the Leading Role (fig. 82), Actor Who Introduces the Play (fig. 83), Actor in the Comic Role (fig. 84). Pottery, height of stage 55½ in. (140 cm). Found in a tomb in Niucun, Houma, Shanxi Province, 1959. Shanxi Museum [Exhib.]

four or five, and each tile depicts an actor in performance. By analyzing their costume and posture, scholars have been able to identify each figure as a representation of one of the major types of actors in plays of the Jin and, by extension, of the Yuan dynasty. The actor in the lead role (mo ni) wears a long, broad-sleeved robe and the hat worn by officials that was made of gauze and stiffened with lacquer, and he holds a tablet in both his hands (fig. 75). The actor in the secondary male role (fu mo) wears a tall hat and long robe with narrow sleeves (fig. 76). The comic actor or clown (fu jing) is dressed in a soft headcloth with two projecting flaps, or "wings," and a loose robe falling above the knee (fig. 77). And the actor who takes the part of an official (zhuang gu) has a hard gauze hat (fig. 78). The comic actor is particularly interesting; with an animated face, he bares his protruding belly and raises his left hand in front of his chest, apparently making a humorous remark.

Figure 80. Actor in the Role of an Official (zhuang gu). Jin dynasty, 1210. Pottery, height 8¼ in. (21 cm). Found in a tomb in Niucun, Houma, Shanxi Province, 1959. Shanxi Museum [Exhib.]

Figure 81. Actor in the Secondary Role (fu mo). Jin dynasty, 1210. Pottery, height 8½ in. (21.6 cm). Found in a tomb in Niucun, Houma, Shanxi Province, 1959. Shanxi Museum [Exhib.]

Figure 82. Actor in the Leading Role (mo ni). Jin dynasty, 1210. Pottery, height 8½ in. (21.6 cm). Found in a tomb in Niucun, Houma, Shanxi Province, 1959. Shanxi Museum [Exhib.]

Figure 83. Actor Who Introduces the Play (yin xi). Jin dynasty, 1210. Pottery, height 7¾ in. (19.7 cm). Found in a tomb in Niucun, Houma, Shanxi Province, 1959. Shanxi Museum [Exhib.]

Figure 84. Actor in the Comic Role (fu jing). Jin dynasty, 1210. Pottery, height 7¾ in. (19.7 cm). Found in a tomb in Niucun, Houma, Shanxi Province, 1959. Shanxi Museum [Exhib.]





80

58

Slightly later in date are five small pottery figures found in a Jin-dynasty tomb (dated 1210) of the Dong family, at Houma, Shanxi Province (fig. 79).49 Painted with bright pigments, these figures reveal even more about the actors of the period, especially their costume and makeup. They were found standing in a row on a miniature model stage set in the wall of the chamber tomb, as if taking curtain calls in front of an audience. The actor in the lead role was positioned in the center, impressive in his long, broadsleeved red robe and black gauze hat with wings at the sides (fig. 82). To his left stood the secondary male lead, dressed in a long black robe and a soft black hat (fig. 81). At far left was the official, wearing a hard gauze hat and a robe open at the chest (fig. 80). To the right of the lead was the "narrator" (yin xi), who introduced the play (fig. 83). This figure is a female actor, dressed in a man's red robe and black hat with round wings; her twisting body and bent knees suggest the movement of a dancer. At the far right was the comic actor (fig. 84). His soft headcloth has a knob on top, and the short skirt of his yellow robe is painted with a large laughing face. He holds a slapstick in his left hand and whistles through his

thumb and index finger. Unlike all the other members of the group, he wears face makeup—white with black streaks over his eyes.

The model stage where the figures were assembled consists of a raised platform with two octagonal columns in the front supporting a square lintel, above which are three brackets that support an elaborate roof with flying eaves and ridge ornaments. The model bears a striking resemblance to a wood-and-brick stage at Erlang Temple in the village of Wangbao, Gaoping, Shanxi Province, whose earliest period of construction dates to 1183 (fig. 85).50 Because the model was built into the wall of the chamber tomb, it remains unknown whether some stages of the period were open on all four sides; nevertheless, it illustrates an important advance in the development of the theater stage, as it evolved from a marked-off area of open ground to a permanent wood-and-brick structure with a sheltering roof.51

A Yuan-era wall painting in Mingyingwang Hall in Huoxian, Shanxi Province, captures the spirit of a *zaju* troupe in performance (fig. 86).⁵² The elaborately costumed actors and musicians face their audience from a







82 83

59



Figure 85. Theater stage, earliest construction 1183. Erlang Temple, Wangbao, Gaoping, Shanxi Province

richly furnished stage with tiled floor. Above the stage is a long drape with an inscription written in large characters that reads, "Zhong Duxiu, the favorite of Yao's capital and entertainer from Taihang, performed here, in the fourth month of the first year of the Taiding reign [1324]." The date given in the inscription clearly indicates that the performance took place at the high point of Yuan theatrical art.53 At the back of the stage hangs a black curtain embroidered with roundel designs, over which are suspended two large backdrops decorated with dramatic paintings. One depicts a man with a sword in front of a pine tree and the other a spirited dragon writhing through clouds. At the far left corner of the stage, a woman peeks out from behind the curtain. The gap in the curtain where she stands must be the entrance through which the actors accessed the stage; at the other end of the curtain was the exit.

The ten performers are arranged in three rows: in the front row are the five principal actors; behind them is a group of secondary actors and musicians; and in the back stands a flute player. In the middle of the front row is the lead actor. He wears a long red robe with broad sleeves and a black official hat with narrow wings and holds a tablet with both hands. The actors on either side of him have painted faces. The one on the left wears heavy makeup, including white rings around his eyes, exaggerated eyebrows, and a full artificial beard. He is dressed in an orange robe, open at the neck and chest, with black markings and embroidered borders. Gesticulating with his hands, he appears to be speaking or singing. The actor on the right wears a light green robe with ornamented borders and collar. He, too, has white pigment around his eyes, and he wears a false beard consisting of long, thin mustaches and side whiskers. The actors at either end of the front row are dressed in long robes with sumptuous embroidered designs. The one at far

left holds a fan, the other a long-handled sword. From left to right, the figures in the second row are a drummer in a white robe and wide-brimmed Mongolian hat; a secondary actor wearing a Mongolian hat, a false beard, and heavy makeup that includes dark eyebrows and white eyelids; a female musician playing a large set of clappers; and a secondary female actor holding a fan. The flutist also wears a Mongolian hat. The actor in the center of the front row is likely Zhong Duxiu, advertised in the large banner above the stage. Like the narrator in the troupe of pottery figures found at Houma, this performer is an actress in male costume. Because families often made up the acting troupes, and women often played leading roles, an actress dressed as a man would not have been unusual.⁵⁴

The similarities between the actors in the Yuan wall painting, especially those in the front row, and the figures on the Jin pottery tiles and miniature model stage are obvious. The correspondence in posture, costuming, makeup, and props indicates that there was a continuation of theatrical conventions from the Jin to the Yuan period. In addition, the painting shows that the musical instruments played in Yuan drama were the drum, clappers, and flute, thus providing important visual evidence that reinforces descriptions of Yuan theatrical music in contemporary historical texts.⁵⁵

The stage depicted in the Mingyingwang Hall wall painting probably resembles a real theater that stood in a temple in the same rural area of Shanxi. Thus it surely differs somewhat from commercial theaters in Dadu, which, as described in historical texts, were roofed structures with seats arranged in ascending rows around the three sides of the stage. They must, however, have had certain features in common. Indeed, both had a performing area visible from three sides, a backstage area separated from the stage by a curtain, and a design that provided essential elements of professional performance, including decorated backdrops and places for entrance and exit.⁵⁶

In the early years of Khubilai's reign, Yuan drama flour-ished largely in North China, including what is today Hebei, Henan, Shandong, and Shanxi provinces. Its influence gradually reached Jiangsu and Zhejiang on the eastern coast as the empire expanded southward. And after Khubilai defeated the Song and unified the country in 1271, it rapidly spread to South China—to Anhui, Jiangxi, Hubei, and Hunan. Recent discoveries of three exquisite Qingbai porcelain pillows made in the kilns at Jingdezhen, Jiangxi Province, reveal the burgeoning of theater in the south.

The pillows are in the shape of a theater stage whose flat top and base form, respectively, the roof and floor. Small figures representing actors and actresses in

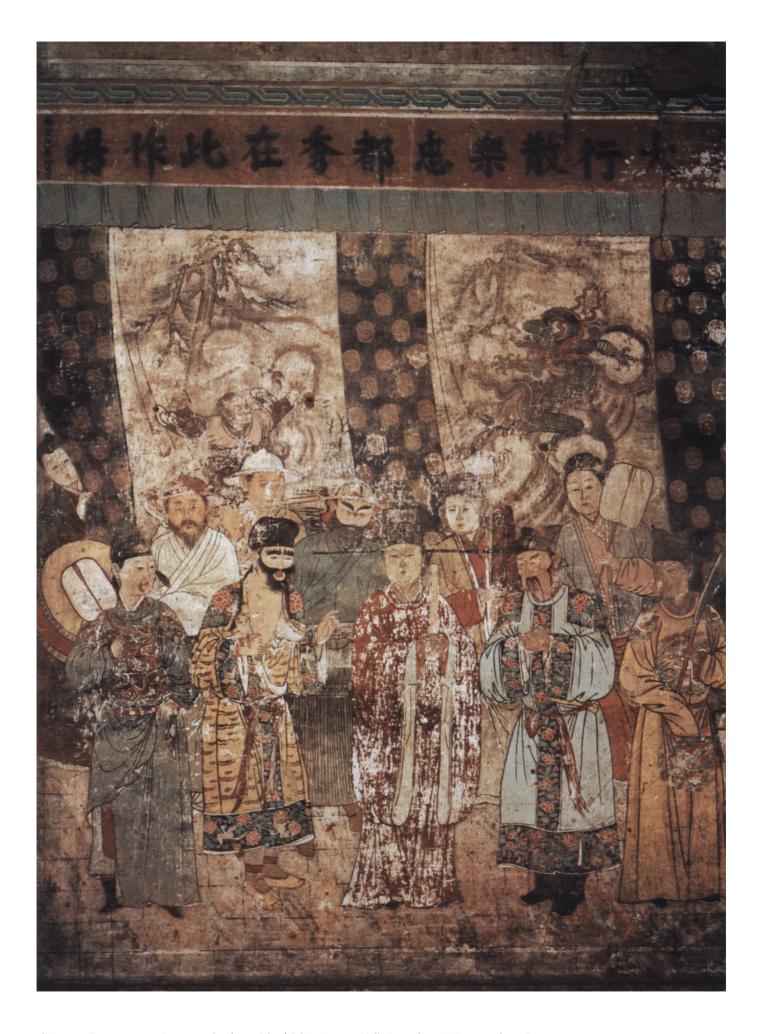


Figure 86. Troupe of Actors in Performance, dated 1324. Mural. Mingyingwang Hall, Guangshengsi, Huoxian, Shanxi Province



Figure 87. Pillow in the form of a theater. Porcelain, height 7 in. (17.8 cm). Yuexi Administrative Office of Cultural Relics, Anhui Province [Exhib.]

Front



Back

performance stand about dressed in various costumes. The superb example found in Yuexixian, Anhui Province (fig. 87), has been identified as representing the Eight Immortals at a birthday celebration, a popular theme of Yuan drama.⁵⁷ The setting is a three-bay building with latticed window panels, beaded curtains, and a carved

balustrade. At the center of the building is a platform with a staircase, on which is a female figure with an elaborate headdress, identified as the Queen Mother of the West. Four guests bent over in salutation stand next to her. The other side of the pillow shows a male figure, thought to be the Jade Emperor, on a similar platform and

also flanked by guests. The Eight Immortals, gathered in the side rooms and arranged in conversing pairs, are readily recognizable by their well-known attributes. Li the Iron Crutch, for example, holds his medicine gourd, while Cao Guojiu plays his clappers.

Of the two other examples, the pillow found in Datong, Shanxi Province, represents the play *Legend of the White Snake*, a poignant love story, ⁵⁸ and the other pillow,

- I. During the early years of his reign Khubilai maintained a dual-capital system. He held his court in Shangdu (Xanadu) in summer and in Yanjing in winter. He renamed Yanjing Zhongdu (middle capital) in 1264, making clear his intent to establish his primary capital in Yanjing. This essay uses Yanjing instead of Zhongdu to avoid unnecessary confusion, since Yanjing was also called Zhongdu during the Jin dynasty.
- 2. JS 11, juan 23, wuxing zhi: 541.
- 3. Sun Houren 2000: 106-8.
- 4. KGJ, vol. 1, juan 41 (1998 ed.: 277); Steinhardt 1983: 152.
- 5. Steinhardt 1983: 153.
- 6. Ibid.: 137.
- 7. Zhongguo kexueyuan kaogu yanjiusuo, Beijing shi wenwu guanlichu, Yuan Dadu kaogudui 2000: 309.
- 8. Ibid.: 310.
- 9. Ibid.: 310-11.
- 10. Moule and Pelliot 1938, vol. 1: 212-13.
- 11. Yang Kuan 2006: 262-82.
- 12. Moule and Pelliot 1938, vol. 1: 213.
- 13. XJZ (1983 ed.: 206)
- 14. Ibid.: 5-6.
- 15. CGL, juan 21 (1985 ed.: 297).
- 16. Fu Xinian 1999: 88-90.
- 17. Moule and Pelliot 1938, vol. 1: 208.
- 18. Jiang Shunyuan 1990: 31-32.
- 19. CGL, juan 21 (1985 ed.: 298).
- 20. Fu Xinian 1993: 130-32.
- 21. CGL, juan 21 (1985 ed.: 298).
- 22. Steinhardt 1998.
- 23. Wei 2008: 52-53.
- 24. Moule and Pelliot 1938, vol. 1: 210.
- 25. Hansford 1950: 77.
- 26. XJZ (1983 ed.: 115).
- 27. YS, juan 6 (1976 ed.: 109).
- 28. Hunan sheng bowuguan 2003: 161.
- 29. Moule and Pelliot 1938, vol. 1: 213.
- 30. Zhongguo kexueyuan kaogu yanjiusuo, Beijing shi wenwu guanlichu, Yuan Dadu kaogudui 1972: 2–11.

Guanghan Palace, a celebrated fairy tale. ⁵⁹ Although the pillows are stray finds and thus lacking archaeological data, their sophisticated architectural form, the motif of the beaded curtains in relief, and the accomplished Qingbai glaze all point to a date in the Yuan period. More important, their representation of Yuan drama in its efflorescence justly places them in the days of Khubilai Khan, the golden age of Chinese theatrical art.

- 31. XJZ (1983 ed.: 207).
- 32. Ibid.: 54-94.
- 33. Xu Pingfang 2000: 572.
- 34. Ibid.: 572-75.
- 35. Ibid.: 575.
- 36. XJZ (1983 ed.: 111).
- 37. YS, juan 32 (1976 ed.: 711).
- 38. Ibid.: 1926–27. See also Shi Weimin 1996: 316–17.
- 39. Shanxi sheng kaogu yanjiusuo 1983b: 64-72, fig. 16.
- 40. Liao Ben 1989: 92-93.
- 41. Henan sheng bowuguan, Jiaozuo shi bowuguan 1979: 1–17, figs. 13, 31–39.
- 42. Liao Ben 1989: 197-99; Sun Chuanxian 1983: 51-54.
- 43. Information and rubbings of these stone carvings are provided by Anhui Provincial Museum.
- 44. *QLJ*, 1959 ed.
- 45. For Zhao Mengfu and Xianyu Shu, see the essay by Maxwell K. Hearn in this catalogue.
- 46. OLJ, 1959 ed.: 7.
- 47. Liao Ben and Liu Yanjun 2006: 53-54; See also Xu Fuming 1981: 30.
- 48. Shanxi sheng kaogu yanjiusuo 1983a: 45-63, pl. 5: 4.
- 49. Shanxi sheng wenwu gongzuo weiyuanhui Houma gongzuozhan 1959: 50–55, fig. 18. For further discussion on this topic, see Liao Ben 1989: 185–89; Liu Nianzi 1986: 40–55; and Maeda 1979: 138–48.
- 50. Liao Ben 1989: 187.
- 51. Tsang 2003: 51-52.
- 52. Chai Zejun and Zhu Xiyuan 1981: 86–91; Liao Ben 1989: 215–27; Maeda 1979: 152–55.
- 53. Chung-wen Shih 1976.
- 54. Liu Nianzi 1986: 74-78; Liao Ben 1989: 219-20.
- 55. Liu Nianzi 1986: 66-67; Liao Ben 1989: 333-34.
- 56. Tsang 2003: 49-58.
- 57. Ma Lan 2007: 69; see also Chu Chengfa 2006: 110–11; Zhou Yibai 1986: 153–54.
- 58. Yu Bingwen 2003: 54–59. For the pillow from Datong, see Shanxi sheng kaogu yanjiusuo 1983a: 54, figs. 1–3; for the pillow from Fengcheng, see Fengcheng xian lishi wenwu chenlie shi 1984.
- 59. Fengcheng xian lishi wenwu chenlie shi 1984: 82-84.