

## Paul Singer

1904–1997

### Physician and Collector of Chinese Antiquities



Born in Presburg, Hungary, Paul Singer moved with his family to Vienna, Austria, in 1905. He acquired his first Asian object at age seventeen, when he began his studies at the Real Gymnasium in Vienna. From the onset of his collecting, Singer ignored the prevailing interest in enamel porcelain of the Qing dynasty (1644–1911), preferring Chinese archaeological artifacts instead.

Singer sometimes purchased objects that others thought were forgeries; some of them were authenticated through subsequent archaeological discoveries. At other times, Singer knowingly acquired copies and forgeries to highlight characteristics of authentic objects. A self-taught amateur collector, Singer's published opinions and observations amount to about twenty catalogues and position papers. Lacking the language skills to translate Chinese easily, Singer formed his judgments of ancient objects through highly disciplined direct study.

A trained psychiatrist, Singer shared an interest in ancient Chinese art with Dr. Arthur M. Sackler (1913–1987). They first met at a Sotheby's auction in 1957. Sackler underwrote a large portion of Singer's collecting activities. Singer, in turn, sometimes corrected attributions of individual pieces in Sackler's collection. At the time of his death in 1997, Singer had nearly five thousand ancient Chinese metal works, ceramics, and jade objects in his two-bedroom apartment in Summit, New Jersey. Singer bequeathed his holdings to the Smithsonian's Arthur M. Sackler Gallery. The bequest included the largest collection of ancient Chinese art—nearly three thousand objects—that the Smithsonian had received since the Sackler Gallery opened in 1987.

#### Literature

Writings by Singer:

*Memoirs*, first draft unpublished memoirs.

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"Pre-Dynastic and Dynastic Shang Material: A Postscript," *Oriental Art* 6, no. 3 (Autumn 1960).

"'Unique' Object in Chinese Art," *Oriental Art* 7, no. 1 (1961), pp. 2–4.

"Puzzling Object," *Archives of Asian Art* 41 (1988), pp. 91–92.

Max Loehr, *Relics of Ancient China from the Collection of Dr. Paul Singer* (New York, 1965).

Henry A. La Farge, "Archetypical China," *Art News* 63, no. 10 (February 1965), pp. 32–35.

Thomas Lawton, ed., *New Perspectives on Chu Culture during the Eastern Zhou Period* (Washington, DC, 1991).

Thomas Lawton, "Paul Singer, A Sage Among Collectors," *Oriental Art* 31, no. 5 (May 2000), pp. 35–42.

*One Man's Search for Ancient China: The Paul Singer Collection*, exhibition at the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, January 19–July 7, 2013.

Lee Rosenbaum, "The Crafty Collector," *Wall Street Journal* (March 5, 2013), pp. 1, 4.

February 29, 2016