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PATRICIA EICHENBAUM KARETZKY

A SCENE OF THE TAOIST AFTERLIFE ON A
SIXTH CENTURY SARCOPHAGUS DISCOVERED IN LOYANG

Engraved designs on pre-T'ang sarcophagi and other funerary stones from North China have provided art historians with a primary source of figural and landscape design in the absence of reliable extant paintings. The relatively small number of such carvings makes the recent discovery of another Six Dynasties sarcophagus an important addition to this artistic body of works. Because the subject of the decorations is the most complete early rendering of a scene of the Taoist afterlife, the stone coffin is of extreme interest in the analysis of the development of Taoist iconography, a subject which has not been fully explored due to the paucity of Taoist works of art. Study of this coffin also reflects popular practices concerning death, in marked contrast to the Buddhist custom of cremation.

Although epigraphical evidence is lacking, the circumstances of the discovery of the stone coffin and the extraordinary excellence of its carving style attest to its integrity. The sarcophagus was unearthed near a brick tile factory in the suburbs of Loyang during the excavation for an engineering project.¹ Two members of the Loyang Museum staff were sent to observe and record it. These men reported that the chamber walls had fallen in. There was ample evidence of the grave's having been robbed: the coffin lid had been pried open and thrown aside, and the burial objects were gone; but the sarcophagus had not been moved, its head still facing west. Burial in this district, near Meng Hill, they noted as consistent with both the imperial Northern Wei ordinance that required all residents of Loyang to be buried in that area, and with other finds like the tomb of Yüan Hui found before Liberation.

Description, Front Stones

The blue limestone coffin was complete in 6 planks: lid, two long sides, front, back, bottom and tenons for assembly. All over the surface of the stones are dense ornamental carvings. The lid's exterior is plain in appearance, but on the inside there is a drawing of the sun and moon with decorative flowers. The simulated door, the "Great Gate of the House of Darkness," has red drawings of an animal's head in the center. At the sides of the gate two door guardians are engraved (fig. 1). They stand with their hands at chest level, pushing down on the hilts of their long straight swords. On their heads they wear small caps through which starched ribbons are horizontally threaded; below are long lacquered leather breast plates secured at the shoulders with cross belting, trousers and slippers. In the right and left corners of the panel are two *feng-*

¹ *Kaogu*, 1980, no. 3, p. 229ff.

huang birds turned upwards as if ready to unfurl their wings. In the center is a Mani pearl; cloud swirls and floral sprays complete the design (which is too faint to reproduce here).

Rear Panel

The rear panel is carved into three narrative zones, of which only one is completely preserved, and another only partially (fig. 2). The subject of the panel is questionable. In a lively landscape of tall leafy trees, rocks and grasses two men, one young and the other older, carry an emaciated, bearded naked man on a litter; there is an empty cartouche. Parallels in composition and motifs invite comparison with the scene of the filial grandson Yüan Ku on the sarcophagus with scenes of filial piety in the Nelson Gallery, including the distinctions between youthful garments and stately robes, although it might seem somewhat incongruous to portray the grandfather as a naked figure.² (In the context of the Taoist scenes on the other parts of the coffin, however, the man borne on the litter might be seen as some famous Taoist adept—emaciated from the celestial diet, naked due to Taoist inclinations and holding a cup with the elixir of immortality, like the nude figures playing *liu po* on the tomb tiles from Hsin-chin, Szechwan.³) The adjacent fragmentary scene shows a landscape setting in which a courtier in a tall cap and formal gown turns toward the frame; and a youth with double top-knot hairdress turns the other way.

Long Sides

The carvings of the long sides of the coffin have processions of flying immortals; small wooded landscapes rise at either end of the compositions. The left side wall (figs. 3–6) begins with two deities flying in tandem quite large in relation to the landscape. These immortals have long, oval faces, delicate chin and jaw whiskers, and oversized ears—an important iconographic feature.⁴ They wear tall narrow caps tied beneath their chins, scoop-necked undergarments, long sleeved “cloud jackets” tied at the waist with fluttering scarfs and “cloud trousers” over animal rear legs. Wings sprout from their shoulders and each holds a lotus flower and a heart-shaped jeweled feather fan. Both turn their heads to see the procession sweeping behind them. The top of the reversed head of the third figure is damaged; he is similarly dressed but rides a magnificent winged dragon. The latter takes up the whole middle section of the panel. Care is lavished on the drawing of his feathered wings, scaly body and long tail, sharp claws, goggle eyes, and open-jawed reversed head (fig. 4). A fourth celestial with a profile head occupies the bottom of the composition. Above and below the figures scudding clouds and jeweled flowers fill the sky. Three much smaller sky monster deities are part of the retinue: grimacing fanged monster faces top almost human, winged, trousered bodies. One at the top is badly damaged; two at the bottom run with their heads turned to see behind them. An empty rectangular cartouche is near the top of the stone. In the last section the tomb master, a dignified older figure wearing a tall cap and formal robe, rides in a chariot drawn by two lateral dragons (fig. 6). He is quite small

² A. Soper, “Early Chinese Landscape Painting”, *Art Bulletin*, vol. 2, 1941, p. 159 ascribed the Nelson sarcophagus to the second quarter of the sixth century and discussed the coffin at great length.

³ R. Rudolph, *Han Tomb Art of Western China*, (Berkeley, 1951) pl. 56.

⁴ Sun Zuoyun “An Analysis of the Western Han Murals on the Luoyang Tomb of Bo QianQiu” translated by S. Cahill, *Chinese Studies in Archaeology*, vol. 1, no. 2, 1979, p. 71.

in comparison to the deities. Only three-quarters of his body is drawn; the rest is obscured by the boatlike dragon chariot. Following him is a celestial orchestra also drawn in small scale. Three of the musicians play horizontal “pan-pipes”, the fourth, in the center plays vertical pipes; a fifth holds a drum stick ready to strike a tall drum surmounted by a jeweled canopy with suspended bells. Dressed like celestials, these divine musicians lack wings, and so are transported by dragons.

The less clear right side wall is similar to the left (figs. 7–8). Two courtier-like Immortals lead the processions, their heads turned to look behind them. Their garments are similar to those on the left stone, but for the headdresses; one has a petal-shaped cap; the other has his hair tied in a top knot and holds a smoking censer. The main figure is a female deity who wears an ornate petalled crown adorned with pearls, a pearl necklace, and a long “cloud gown”. Holding a fan in her left hand, she sits on a platform dais drawn by a winged tiger. On the bottom of the panel a tiny hare runs through the hillside. Alongside the lower flank of the tiger is a fourth Immortal seen in profile: aged, big-nosed, dressed in long “cloud robes”, flowing scarfs, and a tall cylindrical hat held to the hair by a long cross-pin. In the sky are distant mountains, a sky monster, a chimera, and bird spirits. Five “Jade Maidens” riding phoenices close the composition. These girlish goddesses wear v-necked garments with short pleated sleeves and fluttering scarfs; their upswept hair, baring the back of the neck, is drawn up in a double chignon. Above the heads of three of the maidens are ornate canopies.

Bottom Panels

The front and back sides of the bottom of the coffin have spirit monsters, twelve to a side, separated by plain frames (fig. 9). These are composite creatures; some are identifiable like the deer-headed birds, rabbit-headed birds, unicorns, winged tigers and dragons. Others resemble the sky monsters on the side panels, about whom a great deal has been written.⁵ On the upper side of the bottom panel of the coffin a tiger and dragon flanking a monster mask are carved; on the reverse side a dragon and tiger flank a central vegetal motif.

Dating

Comparable engravings of the Six Dynasties period include several funerary stones of the third decade of the sixth century. One of the closest parallels in both style of carving and figure, and landscape depiction is the coffin with scenes of filial piety in the Nelson Gallery, undated but ascribed by style to the second quarter of the sixth century. There too the composition is densely crowded with natural elements—distant mountain ranges, piled-up hills, leafy trees, and occasional animals provide a backdrop for the narrative. The pictorial convention giving the impression of a strong wind animating the landscape is similarly employed. Courtly figures wearing flowing garments with slender elongated bodies and fine facial features are distinguished by age, station and class. The scene of the filial Yüan Ku, already mentioned, presents an almost

⁵ T. Nagahiro, *Representational Art of the Six Dynasties Period*, (Tokyo, 1969) p. xiii; Susan Bush, “Thunder Monsters and Wind Spirits in Early Sixth Century China and the Epitaph of Lady Yüan, *Bulletin of the Museum of Fine Arts*, Boston, Vol. 72, no. 367, p. 25 ff. and Bush, “Thunder Monsters, Auspicious Animals and Floral Ornament in Early Sixth-Century China,” *Ars Orientalis* vol. X, 1975, p. 19 ff.

exact parallel. The Loyang stones however are more refined—the face of the female deity riding the tiger on the right stone, her jeweled crown and necklace, the intricately worked belts with scarfs and heart-shaped jeweled feather fans all demonstrate exquisite carving. The landscape is not quite as mannered; no paper-thin rocks or striated clouds are drawn.

Other well known parallels in figure type include the imperial procession and jātaka tales set in landscape that frame the door of the Pin Yang Cave at Lung-men in Honan dated to the middle of the first quarter of the sixth century,⁶ or the Teng Hsien tomb tiles from Honan, ca. 500 A.D. A stone sarcophagus found before Liberation in Loyang, now in the Honan Provincial Museum, has carvings of Immortals riding the directional animals, in processions of celestials on its long sides.⁷ The left stone begins with two Immortals, *hsien*, running through the skies as herald for a third who rides a dragon. Landscapes frame the compositions and provide a ground for the entourage. Filling the skies are cloud and floral swirls, and above the tail of the dragon is a sky monster. Similarities in the delineation of the characters, costume, landscape and iconography are evident. But this composition is simpler: there are no celestial musicians, nor a representation of the tomb master in a dragon chariot. On the right stone two *hsien* again open the composition. The central figure here too is a female deity riding a winged tiger. A third celestial follows holding a fan, but there are no Jade Maidens riding phoenixes. The landscape is severely reduced—there is none at all at the end of the left stone, and no distant mountains are portrayed.

A third related example of a Six Dynasties carved stone is the epitaph cover of Erh-chu Hsi dated 529 which was found in Loyang and is now in the Shensi Provincial Museum.⁸ The four directional animals ridden by gods and goddesses are the main decoration that encircles the calligraphic inscription. Two of the symbols are placed in a landscape: on the left a goddess rides the Red Bird of the South accompanied by a deer-headed bird, birds, and scudding clouds. The symbol of the North, a snake coiled around a tortoise is placed above a ground of grasses, rolling hills and trees; in the sky is a spirit monster. For the East, a male deity rides a dragon and in the West a goddess is mounted on a tiger. Costumes, figure types, and theme now have become familiar decorative devices sharing common characteristics. The four also appear on the engraved epitaph cover of Prince Chen Ching dated 542 in the Minneapolis Institute of Art, or the Boston tablet of Yüan Hui buried in 520; they figure on tomb ceramic jars, and in combination with the twelve constellations, on ceramic tomb tiles in the Shōsōin.⁹ Celestials riding dragon and deer even appear in the decorative trapezoidal frame of a niche housing a Buddha in the Ku Yang Cave at Lung-men dated to the first decades of the sixth century.¹⁰ Similarities of style of carving and composition among these various funerary objects are commonly agreed upon.¹¹ Close affinities between these Six Dynasties tomb objects from Loyang in particular and northern China in general indicate a date late in the first quarter of the sixth century.

⁶ S. Mizuno, *Lung Men*, (Tokyo, 1941) fig. 18.

⁷ Wang Tzu yun, *Chung kuo shih k'u hua hsüan chi*, (Peking, 1957) pl. 6-8.

⁸ *Ibid.*, pl. 9-10.

⁹ Yüan Hui's tablet is reproduced in Bush, "Thunder Monsters and Wind Spirits", fig. 2 and 3; W. Cohen, "Deities of the Four Cardinal Points in Chinese Art," *Oriental Ceramic Society Transactions*, vol. XVII, 1940, p. 70 and 68, respectively points out the use of the *ssu-shen* in funerary jars and the Shōsōin tiles.

¹⁰ *Lung men shih k'u*, (Peking, 1961) pl. 32.

¹¹ Nagahiro and Bush discuss the funerary art of the Six Dynasties in detail.

Iconography

The iconography of the Loyang sarcophagus presents a rather complex system of ideas. By the sixth century Taoism had developed into several schools of thought, an evolution which reflects the complex ideology of Taoism as well as the changing needs of Chinese society. The ancient belief in the dual souls separating at death originally did not specify any life independent of the body nor describe a heavenly abode.¹² Mirror inscriptions of the late Chou/early Western Han period pray for terrestrial longevity, but soon give way to the desire for other-worldly immortality.¹³ The belief in a few extraordinary individuals who were able to win immortality or who could mount the empyrean heights is found in the late Chou “Songs of Ch'u”.¹⁴ The quest for immortality found imperial support with the Ch'in emperor and during the Han with Wu Ti (r. 141–87 B.C.). By the Han period practice of dietary restrictions, hygiene, breathing exercises and the imbibing of chemicals were performed in the hope of prolonging life. Popular myths recant the fantastic experiences of individuals with Immortals: for example the emperor Mu's journey to the celestial city of gold and silver, pearls and jade in the region of the rain clouds or the meeting of Han Wu Ti and Hsi Wang Mu.¹⁵ In 31 B.C. six hundred and eighty three sacrificial halls were erected throughout the empire for the purpose of meeting gods and *hsien* and were placed in the hands of the *Fang shih*, necromancers.¹⁶ Poems of the Later Han such as the “Yüan Yu” tell of the celestial journeys in chariots drawn by black dragons. In “On Transcendent Beings” attributed to Ssu-ma Hsiang-ju ca. 2nd century B.C.:¹⁷

“The chariots of transcendent beings roll along the black clouds.
They are drawn by black dragons and ornamented with feather banners.
Their descent is rapid like the wind; like a horse let loose;
On the left the Green Dragon, on the right the White Tiger escort...”

The image of these chariots racing through the sky recalls the Western solar myths which were present in Indian art as early as the second century B.C.¹⁸

Early in Han art Immortals, *hsien*, were represented as winged and feathered men. Sometimes they have wisps for hands and feet and are seen running through the magic mountains of P'eng lai in the West. Numerous examples of *hsien* are found in Han art: flying through landscapes on censers shaped like P'eng-lai, on ceramic tomb tiles and cosmetic jars, or even on jewel-encrusted chariot fittings.¹⁹ The outer lacquered coffin of the wife of the Marquis of Tai

¹² J. Needham, *Science and Civilization in China*, vol. 5, part 2 (Cambridge, 1974) p. 85 ff.

¹³ Ying-shih Yu, “Life and Immortality in the Mind of Han China”, *Harvard Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 25, 1964–5, p. 89.

¹⁴ E. Schafer, *The Divine Woman*, (San Francisco, 1980) is a most complete treatment.

¹⁵ L. Wieger, *A History of the Religious Beliefs and Philosophical Opinions in China* (translated by E. Werner, reprint, 1969), p. 191 quotes Lieh Tzu's version of the meeting; the Lieh Tzu was compiled around the third century A.D. according to Welch, p. 90; the significance of the meeting is discussed in M. Loewe, *Ways to Paradise*, (London, 1979) p. 119 ff.

¹⁶ Yu, *op.cit.*, p. 96.

¹⁷ The “Yüan Yu” is quoted by Needham, p. 97; the poem “On Transcendent Beings” is quoted by Wieger, p. 287.

¹⁸ A. Coomaraswamy, *History of Indian and Indonesian Art* (N.Y., 1955) Pl. XVII, fig. 61 from Bodh Gaya.

¹⁹ A hill-shaped censer was found in the tomb of Princess Tou Wan at Man Ch'eng, Hopei ca. late second century B.C., in W. Watson, *An Exhibition of Archaeological Finds of the Peoples' Republic of China*, (London, 1973) catalogue entry no. 155, p. 104; A. Wenley, “The Question of the Po-Shan-Hsiang-Lu”, *Archives of Asian Art*, 1948–9, vol. III, p. 5 ff. discusses the hill censer. A tomb brick with this scene in the Cleveland Museum of Art, is illustrated in L. Sickman and A. Soper, *The Art and Architecture of China*, (N.Y., 1974) fig. 21c, d; the chariot fitting is a bronze tube excavated at Ting Hsien, Hopei, ca. first century B.C., in Watson, catalogue entry no. 173, p. 110.

in Ch'ang sha had *hsien* in the dozens flittering among cloud swirls.²⁰ Han bronze mirrors may include Immortals among the directional animals in small areas of the designs that recreate a cosmic diagram.²¹

The four directional animals, *ssu shen*, also have their origins in Han art although literary sources pre-date Han by centuries.²² They initially appear in early Han mirrors in relatively small scale, but in successive periods as their importance increases so does their size, and they win eventual independence as a decorative motif on mirrors and tombs.²³

New Taoist deities to whom requests for immortality were directed emerge in the Han. For example, Ssu ming, god of the hearth, is also keeper of the list of the names of the Immortals. Prayers addressed to him may beg that the petitioner's name be affixed to the list. Hsi Wang Mu, Queen Mother of the West, is believed to reside on Mt. K'un-lun surrounded by her attendants, *hsien*, and the lunar hare and toad. The Former Han Dynastic History records her worship as early as 3 B.C.²⁴ Han mirrors are inscribed with prayers for rebirth in her Western paradise.²⁵ Han and Three Kingdoms mirror backs may be decorated with Hsi Wang Mu's image. She is either frontally seated on a mountain shape with her attendants by her side, or is paired with her consort, Tung Wang Kung, Lord of the East, who is placed diametrically opposite to her.²⁶ One variant of the celestial pairing shows racing sky chariots in the other two quadrants of the mirror.²⁷ Funerary shrines with engraved decorations like those from Shantung from the later half of the second century A.D. have Hsi Wang Mu in her mountain paradise as on the pedimental end stone of the Wu Liang Tzu shrine, or in the company of a heavenly retinue comprised of constellations, Fu Hsi and Nu Kua, *hsien*, and a host of composite creatures—part cloud, part man, part animal or fish; Tung Wang Kung approaches from the distance in a dragon-drawn chariot with an entourage of *hsien* riding dragons.²⁸ On the basis of comparative myths describing the yearly meeting of the Polestar and the Weaving Maid, or the meeting of the Chou King Mu and Hsi Wang Mu, the meeting of the deities of East and West has been interpreted in mythological terms as the renewal of the cosmic cycle; in the context of sepulchral art this theme connotes the renewal of life after death.²⁹ A painted example of the meeting of the gods in late Eastern Han art is on a pillow-like object found in the tomb of Wang Tu in Hopei.³⁰ Another role of Hsi Wang Mu in funerary art is as the welcomer of the deceased's soul. Painted on the ceiling of the tomb of Pu Ch'ien-Ch'iu in Loyang are Hsi Wang Mu accompanied by the directional animals, Fu Hsi and Nu Kua, chimera and *hsien* coursing through the sky to greet the deceased.³¹

²⁰ Fong Chow, "A Treasure Trove from the Western Han Dynasty", *Artibus Asiae*, vol. XXV, no. 1, 2; 1973, p. 5 ff.

²¹ *Masterpieces of Chinese Bronze Mirrors in the National Palace Museum*, (Taipei, 1971), p. 13 and 25.

²² Cohen, p. 63 cites a reference to the *ssu shen* in the *Chou Li*, ascribed to the fourth century B.C.

²³ *Masterpieces of Chinese Bronze Mirrors*, pl. 13, is just one example; another from tomb decorations is from Nan Yang, see *Han Hua Hsiang Chi*, (Shanghai, n.d.) pl. 19.

²⁴ Homer Dubs, *Pan Ku's History of the Former Han*, vol. III, (Oxford, 1948) p. 33-4.

²⁵ Loewe, p. 68 ff.

²⁶ *Masterpieces of Chinese Bronze Mirrors*, pl. 16.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pl. 14.

²⁸ The end stone is illustrated in W. Fairbanks, *Adventures in Retrieval*, (Cambridge, 1971) fig. 4; a similar image of Hsi Wang Mu on her mountaintop is painted on a lacquer plate ca. A.D. 64 from Lolang, in A. Soper, "Early Chinese Landscape Painting", fig. 8; the heavenly procession is illustrated in E. Chavannes, *La Chine Septentrionale*, (Paris, 1909) fig. 110.

²⁹ Loewe, p. 121.

³⁰ Sun, fig. 12; (From *Wang-tu erh bao Han mu* (Peking, 1959, p. 29, fig. 37).

³¹ Sun, fig. 7, 8.

The quest for immortality continued to find increasing support among the common people and court during the break-up of the Han and throughout the period of disunity. Legends and myths of individuals attaining immortality grew more numerous. A common legend related the conditions of “how such and such a person being deceased, when for one reason or another, they opened his coffin, they found his burial clothes and a kind of empty skin.” This was the theory of the stripping of the deceased, which was likened to the transformation of the butterfly and its cocoon.³² In the post-Han myth of the extraordinary prince-author of the *Huai Nan Tzu* who died in 122 B.C., it is told that he ascended to heaven with his whole family and retinue.³³ By 400 A.D. the Northern Wei court had already established an Office of Erudite of Transcendent Beings and laboratories for the confection of transcendental drugs.³⁴ Taking the elixir of immortality at the moment before death, or as a form of ritual suicide, enables the soul to leave the body and to attain immortality in heaven. The *Chen Kao*, compiled around 492 A.D. described the transformation:³⁵

When your body has been laid out it will suddenly disappear and only your clothing will remain. Thus you will be an immortal released in broad daylight by means of his waistband. If one knows the name of the drug (or, perhaps the secret name of its ingredients) he will not feel the pain in his heart, but after he had drunk a full *hu* he will still die. When he is dead, he will become aware that he had left his corpse below him on the ground. At the proper time, jade youths and maidens will come with an azure carriage to take it away...

Early sixth century Loyang saw a climax in the search for transcending the human condition. In Buddhist thought a kind of millenium was anticipated with the arrival of the Buddha of the Future, Maitreya, on the basis of mathematical calculations of the number of years since the historic Buddha's Parinirvāṇa.³⁶ Epigraphical evidence of the desire for immortality is found in Buddhist devotional inscriptions carved on the wall of the cave-chapel of Ku Yang at Lung-men: in several examples the prayer for rebirth in paradise is expressed as the desire to be born in the “purple zenith” or in the “nine tiers of space”.³⁷ These are the heavens of Taoist astrology; couched in such terms the common sixth century sentiment transcends the boundaries of religious teachings. Taoist stelae, conversely, are fashioned like sixth century Buddhist ones with a depiction of the Taoist trinity made for the purpose of personal devotion.³⁸ The Taoist pantheon, like that of Mahayana Buddhism, swells with the addition of new divinities and celestials. An increase in the number of individuals who are able to achieve immortality is apparent

³² Wieger, p. 391 discusses the theories of Ko Hung, ca. fourth century A.D.

³³ Yu, p. 107.

³⁴ R. Mather, “K'ou Ch'ien-chih and the Taoist Theocracy at the Northern Wei Court 425-451”, *Facets of Taoism*, ed. H. Welch, (New Haven, 1979) p. 107.

³⁵ M. Strickmann, “On the Alchemy of T'ao Hung-ching”, *Facets of Taoism*, p. 137.

³⁶ A. Waley, *A Catalogue of Paintings Recovered from Tun Huang by Sir Aurel Stein*, (London, 1931) p. 17.

³⁷ A. Soper, *Literary Evidence for Buddhist Art in Early China*, (Ascona, 1959), p. 135: “She will be born in the Purple Zenith and be a stranger to suffering”, dated 502; or “The previous generation..., in the afterlife soar in spirit through the 9 (tiers of space) while their paths mount into the 10 regions”.

³⁸ Welch, p. 37 discusses the worship of the Taoist trinity; stele with their depictions are found in *Pictorial Encyclopedia of China*, col. I published by Kadokawa, (N.Y. 1969) fig. 163 dated 508-511; and 164 from the Ōhara Art Museum in Tokyo.

in a new doctrine which specifically describes the various levels of immortality attainable; it is explained in the Taoist thinker T'ao Hung-ching's writings of the early sixth century:³⁹

Through the performance of meritorious deeds, some in their own body become terrestrial immortals and do not die. Others leave their bodies and depart through liberation by means of a corpse. After death some are able to enter the cavern palaces deep within the earth and continue their studies there, others go to the Palace of the Vermilion Fire where their bodies are smelted and remoulded.

It is significant to note that the Buddhist visions of a paradise in the West were being formed at this time, the earliest extant Chinese artistic example of which is the set of bas reliefs from Hsiang T'ang Shan of the 560's, though literary evidence is considerably earlier.⁴⁰

Although each element of the decoration of the Loyang sarcophagus has its precedent in Han art, the complexity and completeness of the presentation provides a new stage in the depiction of a Taoist afterlife which is indicative of the sixth century concern for immortality. The scenes on the coffin have a clear function: like the *fei-i* banner, the TLV mirrors, or the feathers of white cocks interred with the corpse, the designs were an aid in the soul's transport to heaven.⁴¹ All of the decorative images of this intricate iconographical scheme have symbolic meaning. The vegetative designs on the front flap and on the bottom plank for example are representative of regenerative growth, the cycle of rebirth. The birds with wings unfurled, here as in so many other cultures, are a metaphor of the ascent of the soul. The sun and moon painted on the lid symbolize the heavens. Although long associated with Buddhist iconography, the Mani pearl on the front panel now takes on a Taoist connotation: the writings of the fifth century Taoist master, T'ao Hung-ching, instructed the alchemist to: "bedeck his person with pearls—the final transformation of the elixir of immortality, for these luminous substances would help him achieve his transformation and enjoy a mastery over all of space".⁴² In this context the pearl adornments on the goddess on the right stone may be viewed. The front door valve provides the exit for the soul, and the head facing west allows the proper orientation for the journey. At the portals guardians remain to protect the corpse; other images such as the *ssu shen* and monster mask are apotropaic. It is curious that only the symbols of the east and west are drawn, appearing on both sides of the bottom plank.

The twenty-four drawings of monsters on the bottom of the coffin are also protective devices. Although these spirit demons are similar to the sky deities who appear as part of the retinue of the gods and goddesses along the side stones, they have another function. Active demons are one of the most common themes on late Han and Six Dynasties sepulchral art. At I Nan they appear in great numbers; they are the dominant theme on the stone epitaph cover of Lady Yüan where monsters are accompanied by inscribed names; a mortuary bed in Kansas also has demons as its primary theme.⁴³ The engraving of spirit demons on these grave articles reflects

³⁹ Strickmann, p. 181.

⁴⁰ In Sickman fig. 77, now in the Freer Gallery.

⁴¹ Loewe, p. 81 discusses the function of the TLV mirrors in tombs.

⁴² Strickmann, p. 175.

⁴³ Tseng Chao-ye, *I-nan ku hua-hsiang shih mu fa-chüeh pao-kao* (Nanking, 1956), p. 29 and 34-9; S. Bush, "Thunder Monsters and Wind Spirits" p. 25 ff.; and Nagahiro, pl. XV, fig. 33-35.

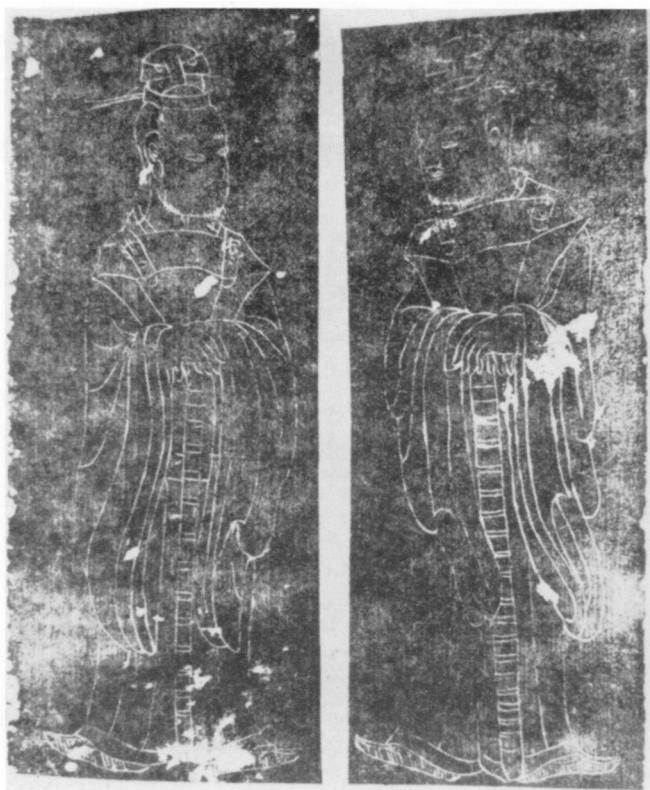


Fig. 1 Late Northern Wei stone sarcophagus from Loyang;
rubbings of human guards on doors

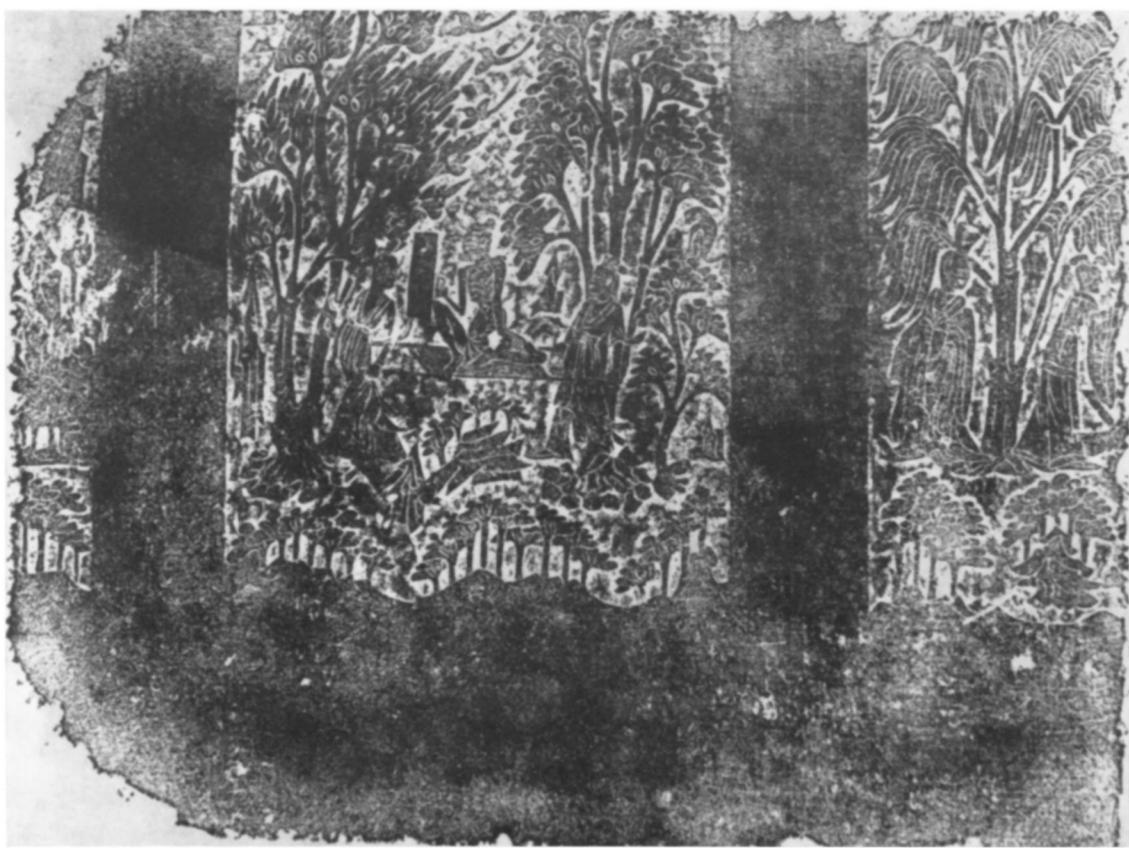


Fig. 2 Loyang sarcophagus, rear; remains of three figure panels, the central one showing a scene of filial piety



Fig. 3 Loyang sarcophagus, left side wall, front end: engraving

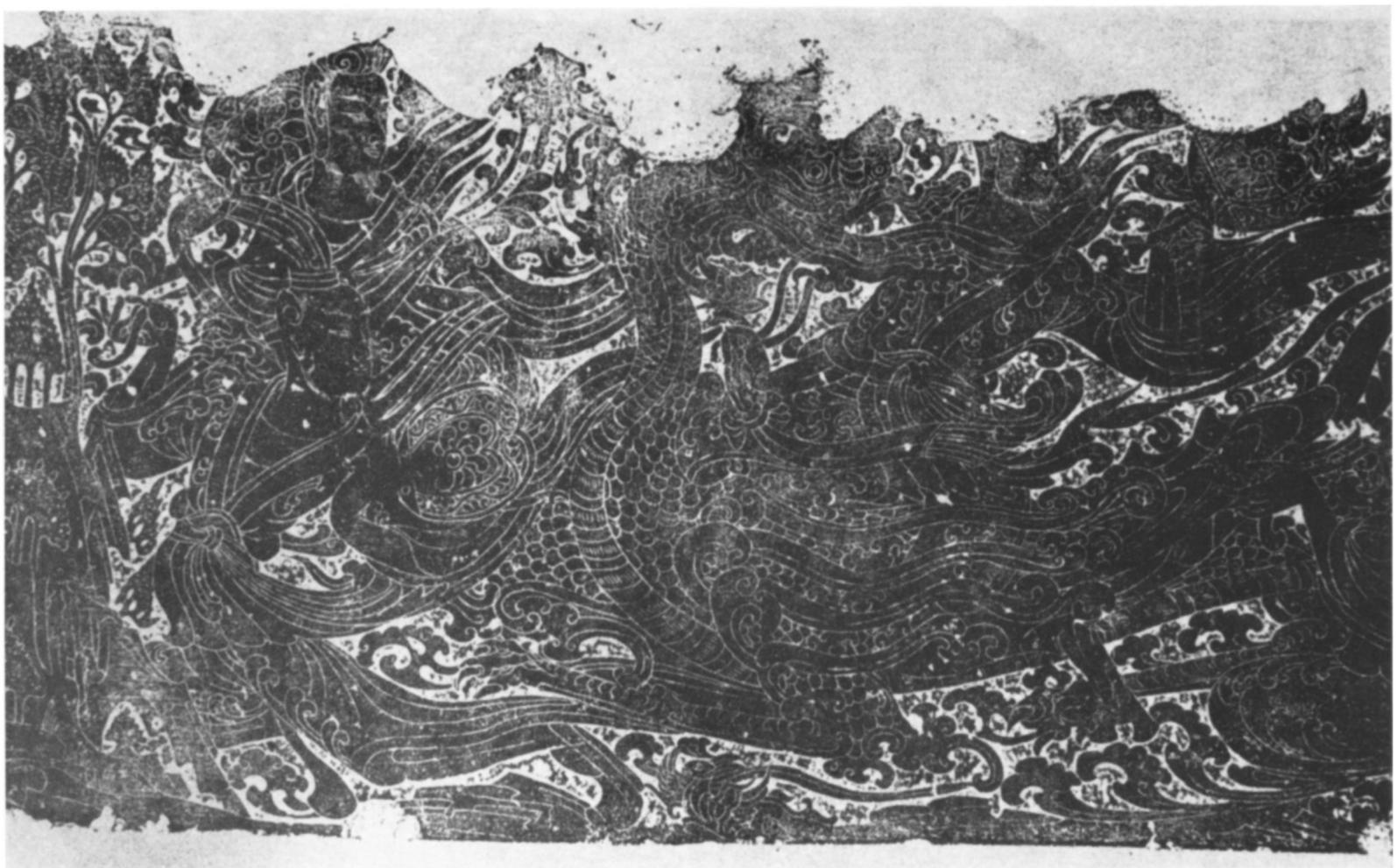


Fig. 4 Sarcophagus, left side wall, front end: rubbing



Fig. 5 Sarcophagus, left side wall, rear end: engraving

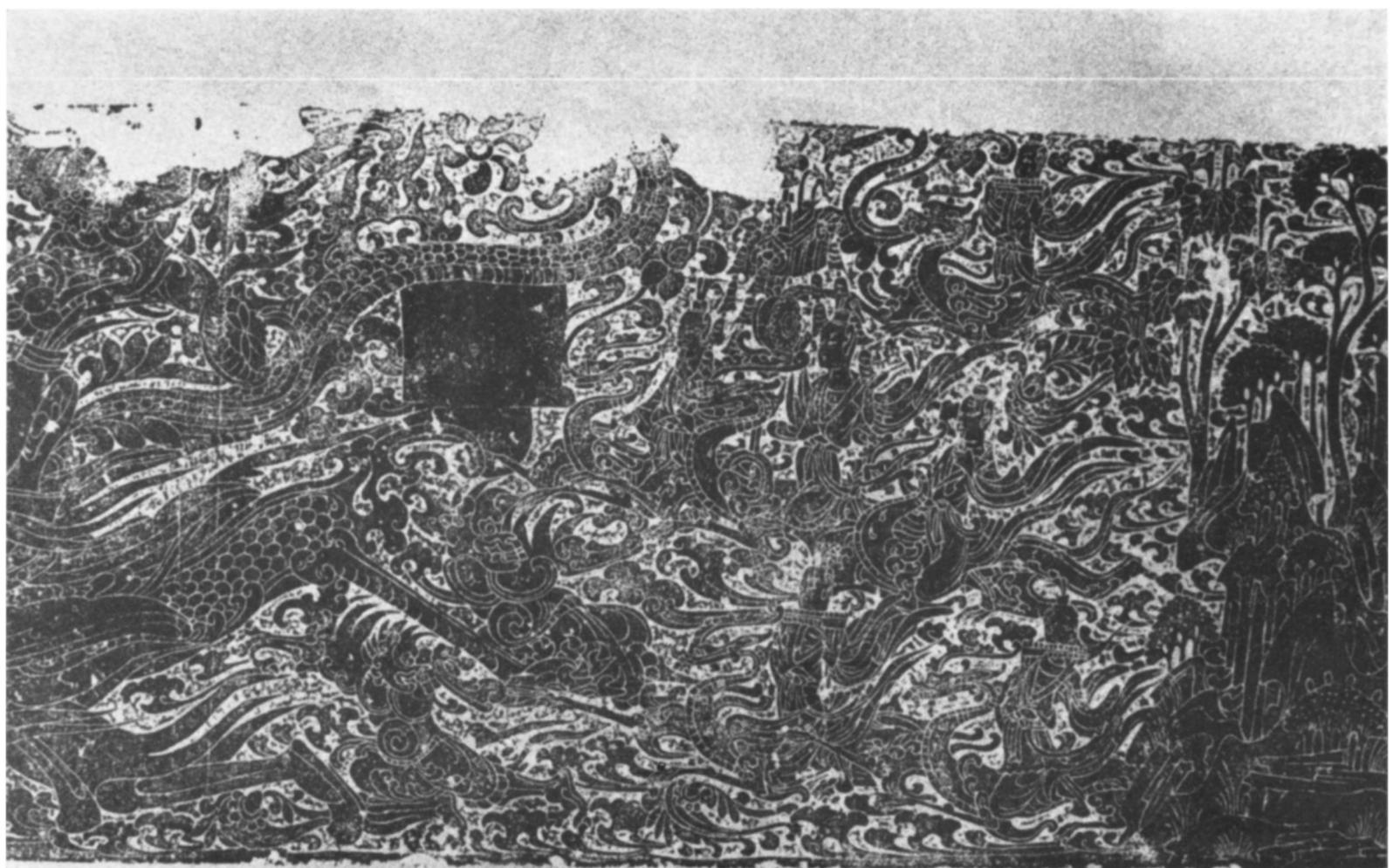


Fig. 6 Sarcophagus, left side wall, rear end: rubbing

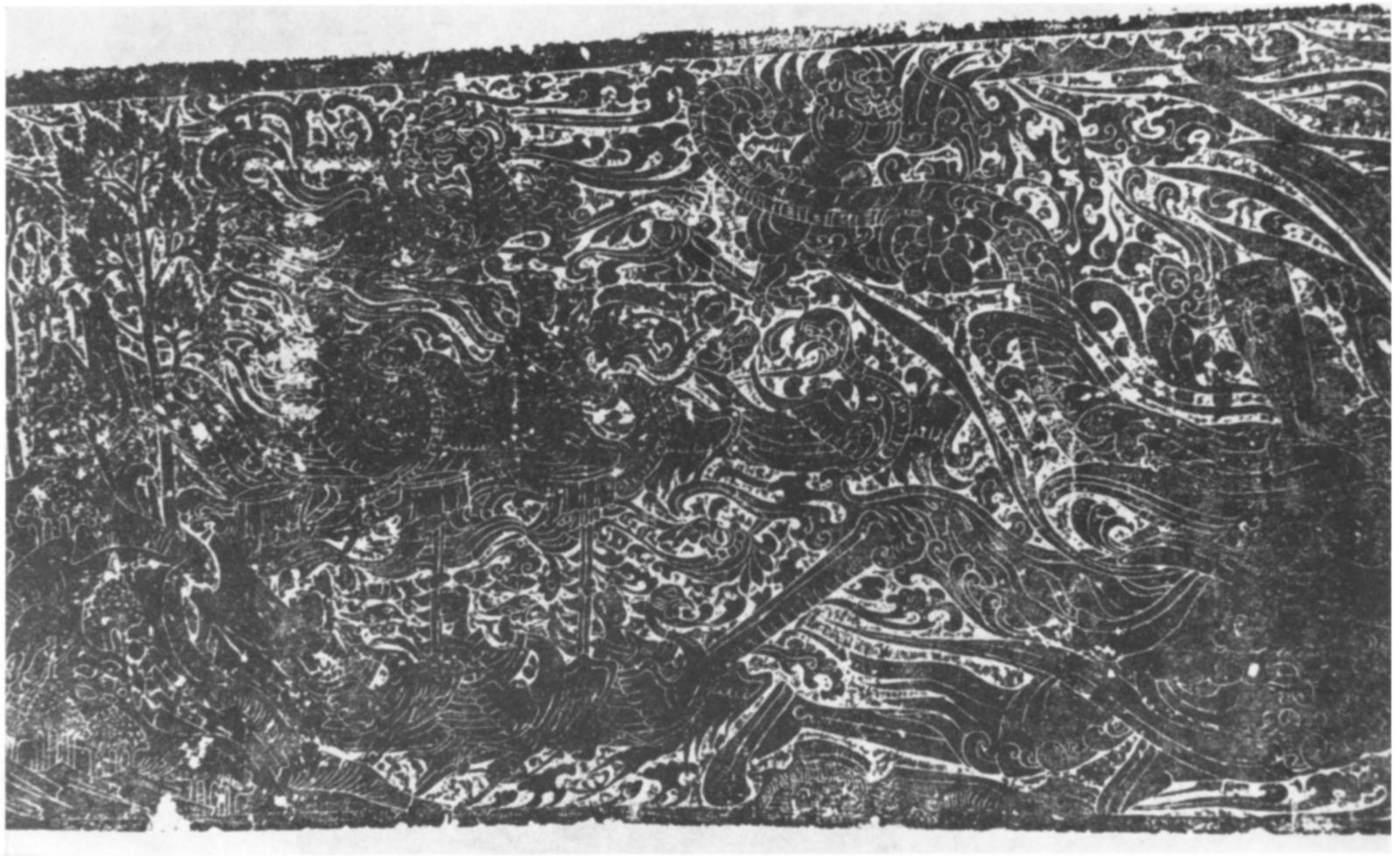


Fig. 8 Sarcophagus, right side wall, rear end: rubbing



Fig. 7 Sarcophagus, right side wall, front end: rubbing



Fig. 9 Bottom of sarcophagus, rubbings of sky demons and monsters

a practice of popular Taoism—to enlist the support of the spirit demons for protection. For example a plot of land for the tomb is purchased from the resident demon: sacrificial offerings of food and wine are proffered to the demon who is then drawn into a contract obliging him to protect the tomb. Such contracts, extant from the second half of the first century B.C., have closing formulas that guarantee the execution of the contract invoking the gods of popular Taoism such as Hsi Wang Mu or the soil deities.⁴⁴ Kitchen festivals were also held in honor of the god of the Hearth to bring about liberation from pollution and sin, which were connected with tombs or sacrifice grounds. Examples of demons invoked for protection by assuagement and bribery are quite common since the Han.⁴⁵

The processions on the long sides of the coffin, unlike other Han and Six Dynasties examples, actually depict the celestial entourage dispatched to escort the soul to heaven. The *fei-i* banner of the early second century B.C. represents the wife of the Marquis of Tai bidding farewell to her attendants.⁴⁶ The tomb master is portrayed several times in a Han Dynasty fresco from Ying-ch'eng-tzu in Liaoning: the suppliant is shown three times performing devotions in the lower region and is welcomed by a male figure above who is flanked by *hsien*, dragon, birds and monster.⁴⁷ The ceiling painting of the Han tomb of Pu Ch'ien-ch'iu has the deceased flying on mythical beasts towards Hsi Wang Mu.⁴⁸ The identity of the major deities of the Loyang sarcophagus is uncertain. Strict hierarchical relationships indicated by scale between the landscape setting, tomb master, "Jade Maidens", celestial musicians, divinities and *hsien* make their importance certain. The ornate petalled headdress, pearl necklace, throne drawn by winged tiger, distant mountain setting, and rabbit running through the hillside suggest Hsi Wang Mu. The head of the god riding a dragon is obliterated, but the mount is enough to relate the deity to Tung Wang Kung and the theme of celestial reunion. The divine meeting is a theme present in Six Dynasties art, surprisingly on the Buddhist ceiling paintings in the cave-chapels of Tun Huang, where in dragon-drawn chariots Hsi Wang Mu and Tung Wang Kung approach one another among a host of flying celestials and deities. The theme is painted in caves 249, 265, and 296 ranging in date from 538/9 to the Sui Dynasty.⁴⁹

The inclusion of a divine orchestra in the male procession is an innovation; it had not previously been depicted. Musical parties were often drawn on tombs of the Han, but these were part of banquet scenes like those in Szechwan of the second century A.D., or Liao-yang in Liaoning.⁵⁰ Lute music was linked with the quest for immortality and musicians playing the lute were part of the decoration of bronze mirrors, some of which included scenes of Hsi Wang Mu and her consort.⁵¹ The playing of music was also associated with Taoist parties like

⁴⁴ R. Stein, "Religious Taoism and Popular Religion from the Second to Seventh Centuries", *Aspects of Taoism*, p. 73.

⁴⁵ Chin-lang Hou, "The Chinese Belief in Baleful Stars", *Aspects of Taoism*, p. 96 ff.

⁴⁶ Loewe, p. 57.

⁴⁷ Fairbanks, fig. 13.

⁴⁸ Sun Zuo yun, fig. 7 and 8.

⁴⁹ *Art Treasures of Tun Huang*, (N.Y., 1981) cave 249 pl. 25; cave 296, of Northern Chou, pl. 41; Sui caves 305 pl. 44 and 419, pl. 4.

⁵⁰ Rudolph, pl. 77; Akiyama, *Arts of China*, vol. II, (Tokyo, 1968) fig. 207 from Pang-t'ai-tzu, Liao-yang, Liaoning; J. Fontein, *Han and T'ang Murals* (Boston, 1976) fig. 21, 22, an Eastern Han tomb near Holingol, Inner Mongolia, or Tomb no. 2 at Ta-hu-t'ing. Mi-hsien county, Honan, p. 50ff.; or the Wei-Chin tomb at Chia-yü-kuan, Kansu p. 54, fig. 45 and 53.

⁵¹ Van Gulik, *The Lore of the Chinese Lute*, (Tokyo, 1968) p. 47, 51.

those of the Seven Sages depicted at Nanking, or the four hermits on a tomb brick from Teng Hsien.⁵² But celestials playing heavenly music in the retinue of the deceased are unknown. The association of music making and miraculous events is made in Buddhism where for example in an Indian illustration from Gandhāra of the Birth of the Buddha flutes and drums are suspended from the trees.⁵³ Music-making angels also appear in Chinese Buddhist art in a more general context as represented as part of the mandorla of the Buddha on bronze altarpieces of the first quarter of the sixth century;⁵⁴ they appear much earlier among the painted decorations of Tun Huang. Contemporary historical evidence provides an interesting description of a celebration held to commemorate the birthday of the Buddha in which a paradise was created replete with musical accompaniment for Empress Ling in the 520's.⁵⁵ The theme of the ascent of the soul of the deceased is reminiscent of the doctrine of rebirth in the Western Paradise of Amida Buddha, when at death the Buddha Amida appears to personally transport the faithful to paradise.⁵⁶ In conclusion, much has been written about the influence of Han art and Taoist thought on Buddhist art of the late fifth early sixth century. But by analyzing the creation of the new scene of a Taoist heaven on the Loyang sarcophagus, it becomes apparent that Buddhism was formative in the development of scenes of Taoist Heavens.

⁵² Akiyama, fig. 217 (tomb at Hsi Shan bridge, Nanking), ascribed to the 5th century; and fig. 216, (Teng-hsien tomb tiles). For the latter also see Annette Juliano, *Teng-hsien, an Important Six Dynasties Tomb*, Artibus Asiae, Supplement XXXVII, Ascona 1980.

⁵³ Ingholt, *Gandhāran Art in Pakistan*, (N.Y., 1957) from Sahri Balhol, in the Peshawar Museum, fig. 13.

⁵⁴ Sickman, fig. 64; bronze altarpiece dated 524 in the Metropolitan Museum, and fig. 66, bronze altarpiece dated 529 formerly in the Bernhard Berenson Collection, Florence; or *Tun Huang Art Treasures*, Cave 257 from the mid fifth century, pl. 11, or Cave 435 pl. 17, and Cave 285, pl. 26.

⁵⁵ Soper, *Literary Evidence*, p. 104.

⁵⁶ The levels of rebirth are described in the *Amitayur dhyana sutra*, translated by Kalayasas, A.D. 424, in J. Takakusu, *Buddhist Mahayana Texts*, Sacred Books of the East, vol. XLII, part III, sect 22.