
Title of Object

Sarcophagus of Prince Cheng Ching (Yuan Mi)

Photo of Object (optional)



Object Information

Artist: Unknown

Culture: Chinese (Northern Wei Dynasty)

Date of Object: 524

Country: China

Accession Number: 46.23.1a-d

File Created: 5/5/2016

Material/Medium: black limestone

Author of File: G Reid Skjervold, Kit Wilson

Department: Chinese, South and Southeast
Asian Art

Reviewer of File: Kara ZumBahlen

Last Updated/Reviewed: 6/2/2016

Tour Topics

Group 2 tour, Group 4 tour, ancient culture, animals/birds, entertainment/music, funerary/afterlife, innovation/avant-garde, leaders, nature power/status, relationships/family, ritual/ceremony, spirituality/sacred, stories/storytelling, Buddhism, Daoism, Confucianism

Questions and Activities (list 3 to 4 sample questions here):

(Questions/Activities of G. Reid Skjervold):

1. Complete the four 'Look For' items on the worksheet provided. First you will be finding the landscapes on both long sides of the sarcophagus that frame layered images in space. Then, you will find Taoist, Confucian, Buddhist and Imperialist symbols following worksheet directives.
2. What would you want depicted and/or said about you on your sarcophagus?
3. How are modern day burials similar to Prince Cheng Chung's? Different?
4. Compare this ancient Chinese sarcophagus with an Egyptian sarcophagus. What do they have in common? How are they dissimilar?

(Or these questions, K. Wilson):

1. Take a minute to walk around this object. There is so much to see on this object, so as you look, find images of humans and animals that intrigue you. I'd like to look at images from all four visible sides.
2. What figures do you see of interest? Use this question to jump off into the three philosophies.
3. How do we or how do we not show filial piety in our society?

Key Points (Form: subject matter, medium and techniques of manufacture, style, etc.)

Who was Prince Cheng Ching? He was a successful military general and member of the Northern Wei Dynasty. His name meant 'fitting example'. He valued family, with 10 major examples of Confucian filial piety (Paragons of Piety) carved on his sarcophagus. He was important enough for the ninth emperor of the Wei Dynasty to build a tomb to honor him. At a time when Buddhism and Daoism were on the rise, the Northern Wei people were reclaiming Confucian morality, though not the Confucian wariness of excess and extravagance in burial.

Tomb location: Just outside Luoyang, China. The Sarcophagus tomb was inside an earthen mound that had frescoed walls, plus many tomb items such as sacrificial vessels, figurines, and utensils. In the south corner was the epitaph tablet with cover. It contained the eulogy, biography and date of death of Prince Cheng Ching (pronounced Chung Cheeng)...formerly known as Yuan Mi (pronounced ewan me).

The rich carving on this stone sarcophagus show signs of Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism all on one object. This illustrates the multiple influences on the spiritual beliefs of the Northern Wei people. The low-relief carving is a more permanent representation of the painting style of the day.

The lion-like figure with a ring in its mouth on the center of both long sides is a common figure to ward off evil spirits. It is also seen on or above doors and on vessels.

The Sarcophagus is carved with 10 Confucian stories of filial piety along the lower half of the long ends, five on each side.

Taoist images along the top. From the short end to the long end a bird riding couple flies into the visual field, are dropped at the window. They are thought to represent Yuan Mi and his previously deceased wife in an afterlife reunion. Or they could be immortals.

On the head end, there is a lotus pond representing the Buddhist belief in spiritual rebirth and 24 Buddhist bells.

The foot end has an apotropaic imperial symbol connecting the Prince to the King.

Key Points (Context: use, history, cultural information, artist bio, etc.)

Trendsetting and artistic contributions of the Wei Dynasty: (one of the Six Dynasties during this period, 220-589 CE) Wei is considered most important for the spread of Buddhism, unparalleled building, perfection of sculpture, and laid the foundation for the tradition of landscape painting. Sarcophagi are some of the only surviving examples of this tradition...silk, wood and paper were perishable surfaces. Established parallel perspective (as opposed to linear) perfecting better scale between figures and landscape. Wei architects built a 'city of splendor', Luoyang, where Prince Cheng Chung lived and died. They build Buddhist temples, added frescoes, and sculpture which became more fluid, less bulky.

When this object was made, the Northern Wei people of China were living in a chaotic, unstable society. Though Taoism and Buddhism were on the rise, the Wei people looked to the stability of Confucianism as well. There are symbols of all three beliefs systems shown on this sarcophagus.

Paragons of Filial Piety (dominant visual theme) and Symbolism (imagery on the sarcophagus): A mix of text and images: Taoist, Buddhist, Imperial and Confucian. (Use worksheet designed by G. Reid Skjervold where some of the imagery is explored, explained, and identified.)

Current Mia Label Information (optional)

This stone coffin, as well as the accompanying epitaph tablet and cover, were reportedly recovered from the tomb of Prince Yuan Mi located in Lijiaao southwest of Loyang in Henan province. The long sides are engraved in an intensely linear style with ten scenes illustrating paragons of piety. In the early sixth century, the fundamental Confucian virtue of filial piety reemerged as a favorite subject of northern carvers. Another significant aspect of the décor is the rather rudimentary and highly decorative landscape setting. The coffin documents an important stage in the development of the pictorial tradition in Chinese art.

Sources of Information and/or Prop Ideas (photos/videos)

IPE Website: 46.23.1a-d, Sarcophagus of Prince Cheng Ching (Yuan Mi) Northern Wei Dynasty 524 CE, China

Oriental Art Magazine, Volume 30, Number 6, June 1999, *Sarcophagus of Prince Cheng Ching* by Eugene Y. Wang

Docent files: Sarcophagus of Prince Cheng Ching (Asian: China)

Oxford Art Online, Northern Wei of China search

Encyclopedia Britannica: Six Dynasties (Wei included) and definition of filial piety (xiao)

Web search: map showing location of Luoyang

The Twenty-four Exemplars (Paragons) of Filial Piety, (used for basic story search), Wikipedia

See separate document showing a Paragon of Piety Space Cell and and Search and Find Exercise.

Confucian Paragons of Filial Piety Depicted in 10 Space Cells

ILLUSTRATE LOVE AND RESPECT FOR PARENTS AND OLD AGE

On the Sarcophagus of Prince Cheng Ching (Yuan Mi)

Search And Find Exercise

Find the Taoist, Buddhist and Imperial symbols described in the four LOOK FOR searches listed below.



Drawing/Illustration by Eve Selim
Search and find exercise by Reid Skjervold

LANDSCAPES RISE IN VERTICAL PERSPECTIVE SURROUNDING THE SPACE CELLS: OTHER VISUALS FLOAT "OVERLAPPING" IN SPACE CREATING THE ILLUSION OF DEPTH. HEAVEN IS AT THE TOP FILLED WITH BUDDHIST, TAOIST AND IMPERIAL SYMBOLISM. DEPICTING LANDSCAPES THIS WAY SET AN EXAMPLE FOR CHINESE LANDSCAPES TO FOLLOW.

1

Some **Buddhist** iconography is merged with Taoist and Confucian symbols. **LOOK FOR** a lion like monster in the center of each long side that protects against demons and is usually placed over doorways and found on important vessels.

3

LOOK FOR two scholars in a square composition appearing four times, two on each side. Their presence indicates their approval of the filial piety they view enhancing the reputation of the tomb occupant and family.

Note

Each drawing exemplifies ancestors who are demonstrating filial piety.

Confucian Cartouches: 5 each side showing examples of filial piety

2

LOOK FOR (find as many as you can)

1. **Taoist Immortals that represent Immortality of the soul.** (Wispy feet and hands merge with the clouds.)
2. **Taoist Sky Spirits** with pig like faces and glaring eyes, big stomachs. **Called Thunders:** scare away other demons, and protect.

4

Imperial symbolism: LOOK FOR wiry dragons among rainclouds. Five claws indicate imperial connection and the esteemed rank of the Prince. Dragons, in general, are associated with Imperial power.

Note

Layered space: rocky outcrops shape the bottom of the space cells; behind are trees and gardens that reach upward to the sky.