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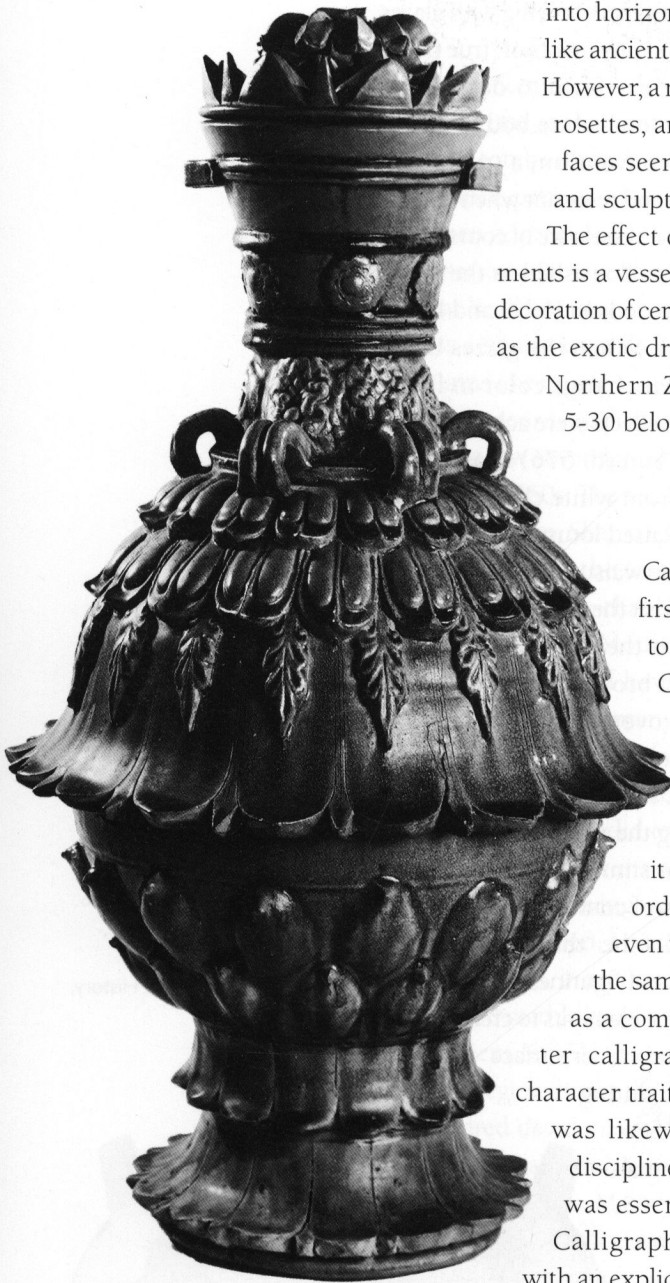
Half-title page: Fu Shan (1607–1684/5), *Poem in Cursive Script*. Ming–Qing. Hanging scroll. Shanghai Museum

Frontispiece: Att. to Han Gan, *Night-shining White*. Tang, 8th century CE. Handscroll. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

Title page: Kneeling bowman. Qin, c. 210 BCE. Earthenware. Museum of Qin Figures and Horses, Lintong



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5-22 Tall jar with appliqué decor
Northern Qi, c. 565 CE.
Stoneware, height 27½" (70 cm). Tomb of Feng Shihui, Jing County, Hebei. National Museum of History, Beijing

into horizontal registers, not unlike ancient bronze ritual vessels. However, a medley of lotus petals, rosettes, and even the monster faces seen in Buddhist reliefs and sculptures cloak the body. The effect of these applied elements is a vessel that recalls the rich decoration of certain metal types, such as the exotic drinking vessel from a Northern Zhou tomb (see FIG. 5-30 below).

Calligraphy

Calligraphy became the first of the "visual arts" to be recognized within Chinese society as an appropriate elite pastime. As with the "fine arts" in European societies, it demanded more than ordinary skills or craft, even if a practitioner used the same tools and materials as a common clerk. To master calligraphy required the character traits of a gentleman. It was likewise an intellectual discipline, and serious study was essential to its mastery. Calligraphy was an art form with an explicit relation to its own

history and to works of the past. As calligraphic specimens were collected, critical terminology was borrowed from other fields to express ideas about and reactions to this abstract art. Terms first employed in evaluating human character for bureaucratic purposes became part of the critical parlance of calligraphy. With collecting also came catalogues and, not surprisingly, forgery and debates about authenticity. History was written about the most famous masters and their works, and this lore in turn affected the perception of and reception of brush writing.

Wang Xizhi (307–365) was born into an elite family prominent in the Eastern Jin court society of his day. Even in his lifetime, Wang's calligraphy became highly prized by his social peers and was the object of determined collectors soon after his death. His legacy was evidently perpetuated within his family and their social circle. By the Sui and early Tang periods, it came to dominate the practice of calligraphy. Lothar Ledderose has characterized the works of Wang and his son, Wang Xianzhi (344–388), as the "Classical Tradition" because they served as a reservoir of models for calligraphers working in all three modern script types, especially running and regular (see "Script Types," page 175). Brush-written specimens (*tie*) of the "Two Wangs" are exceedingly rare; it is unlikely any piece now extant is actually from their hands. However, a number of tracing copies with excellent pedigrees do exist. These copies were made in the early Tang, when the enthusiasm for such works was at its peak. We cannot second-guess the claims made in that period for these specimens. However, these works and others now known only from rubbings became the core of the classical tradition in the eyes of Tang-period and later students of calligraphy.

Among brush-written specimens, we illustrate the *Sangluan tie* (FIG. 5-23). This work does not appear in premodern Chinese literature on the Wangs by virtue of the fact that it was preserved in Japan, presumably from the eighth century onward. The text is actually a letter written by Wang Xizhi discussing the funeral of a relative. The title is taken from the fifth and sixth graphs (*sang, luan*) in the first column at the right. The ink employed is a rich, saturated black applied in generous, often wide strokes. These thick touches are, however, juxtaposed with much thinner strokes, with exceedingly thin ligatures (connections) between the strokes. Some strokes betray split brush hairs or the drying of the brush as its ink was expended. The impression of unstudied, spontaneous writing is reinforced by the internal structure of each graph. Horizontals tilt from lower left to upper right. Vertical, axial strokes are skewed, so that they also incline left. The traces of the brush create an impression of animation as if the graphs were dancing

Script Types

Three script types developed during the Han period through the collective efforts of thousands of scribes and officials wielding their brushes. In contrast to the types already introduced, these new script types were written with a soft brush on silk or paper, the latter becoming increasingly important from Later (Eastern) Han onward. Each type is therefore indebted to habits of brush writing. The new medium must, however, have given calligraphers greater freedom to experiment with different sizes of graphs, different relationships from top to bottom and side to side, and also the different effects of brush and ink on paper. Early examples of writing on paper recovered from such Central Asian sites as Dunhuang (Gansu) and Astana (Xinjiang) show a variety of handwriting, more or less controlled, more or less free, more or less in debt to the habits of Han clerical script (*li shu*; see FIG. 4-3 above).

Cursive script (*cao shu*; also commonly called "grass" or "draft" script) first appears in documents of the Han period. Its essential features are rapid execution and simplification. Individual graphs are written more economically by connecting or eliminating strokes and dots. Over time these new "spellings" became conventionalized. When individuals created their own abbreviated forms, they risked illegibility. The cursive script that became normative during the period of the Southern Dynasties was a gentleman's informal and personal medium for communication, well suited to letters and other non-

official purposes. It retained this unofficial identity until later periods. By the Tang period even works written in cursive script were engraved on stone monuments.

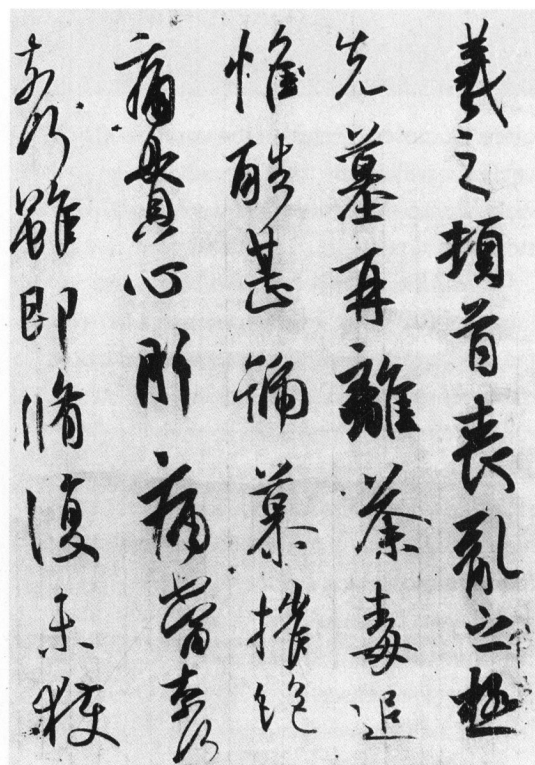
The running script (*xing shu*; also called "semi-cursive") is an intermediate stage between the license of the cursive script and the standardization of regular script (see below). Like cursive, running script is written at some speed and admits abbreviations or shortcuts. However, the structure or "spelling" of each graph is more closely related to the full, regular script forms, so recognition is not endangered. The great names of the Eastern Jin period, especially the "Two Wangs," put their stamp of approval on running script (see FIG. 5-23). This favored status affected the development of its formal traits and its critical reception.

Regular script (*kai shu*) descends most directly from Han clerical script. It is the most formal of the three script types discussed here and became the standard writing of the period of division. In this script type, individual strokes and dots are normally separate actions of the hand and brush, without any connections between strokes in sequence. By definition, all components of each graph are fully rendered without abbreviation, although variant spellings are known. The implied pace of execution is steady, even stately. Individual graphs are of consistent size, and ink is applied to the brush consistently. Regular script was used for public purposes, such as inscriptions and court documents.

on the paper. All of these nuances of applying ink to paper add interest. The very unsuitability of these graphs for official or formal purposes is part of their appeal. The first two graphs of the first column (*xi*, *zhi*) are Wang Xizhi's own name.

This kind of personal writing can be contrasted with a more studied and controlled work in regular script, the "Preface to the Gathering at the Orchid Pavilion" (*Lanting xu*; FIG. 5-24). According to the lore on the "Two Wangs," the

original version was recovered by the Tang emperor Taizong in the mid-seventh century and then interred in his tomb. Thus no one since has claimed to have access to anything but copies, and it is known only through reproductions. We illustrate the so-called "Dingwu Version," a highly regarded rubbing from a stone-cut copy originally in a place of that name in modern Hebei. The text begins by narrating the date and location where the famous gathering of poets took place. Wang's graphs



5-23 Att. to Wang Xizhi,
Sangluan tie

Eastern Jin, c. 356 CE (Tang-period copy). Ink on paper.
Private collection, Japan

5-24 Att. to Wang Xizhi,
Lanting Preface, Dingwu
Version

Eastern Jin, c. 353 CE.
Rubbing. National Palace
Museum, Taipei, Taiwan

are completely legible and are composed of discrete strokes and dots of relatively consistent thickness and visual weight. At the same time, this work has many qualities of a draft. The number of characters varies from column to column, some graphs are crossed out and rewritten, and omitted graphs are inserted between columns. Moreover, the resilient quality of every stroke invigorates the graphs; there are no wooden or

dead strokes. Some of the qualities found in the *Sangluan tie* are also found here, although this script is written with a more controlled rhythm. There is sufficient variation among the many versions of the "Lanting Preface" to make some of these observations debatable. For example, in certain copies some graphs exhibit more ligatures and other running-script features than the same graphs in this Dingwu version. Such variety within a single model only complicates questions surrounding Wang's own writing and its contribution to later works.

Secular Painting

Calligraphy may claim to be the first "visual art" accorded the status of a gentleman's pursuit, but painting was only a few paces behind. Some peers of the "Two Wangs" were highly regarded for their abilities at painting. By the early sixth century we have texts that rank and criticize named painters from the Han period onward. Both the record compiled by Xie He (c. 500–535) evaluating ancient painters (see "The Six Laws of Xie He," page 177) and its continuation by Yao Zui (535–602) employ critical terms borrowed from calligraphy and poetry. Their judgments assume some level of identity between the personality or character of the man and the quality of the painted work. As with calligraphy, the combination of elite social status and skill at a craft



led to problems. In the *New Account of Tales of the World* (*Shi shuo xin yu*), an early fifth-century anthology, we read of a calligrapher admonishing his sons not to pursue his art. The reason: he had been humiliated at court by being forced to inscribe a plaque already in place high above the throne hall. In other words, he had been treated like a common artisan. A parallel humiliation befell the early Tang court official and painter Yan Liben (d. 673). Yan senior too advised his sons to abjure his art.

Evidence for painting in this period comprises two categories of images. The first is a growing number of authentic works: tomb murals from

North China (see FIGS. 5-4, 5-5, and 5-6 above); murals at the Mogao chapels (FIGS. 5-19, 5-20); and reliefs, engraved stones, and impressed bricks with pictorial content (see FIGS. 5-26 and 5-29 below). These works were never studied by premodern scholars and for the most part were not even accessible until the twentieth century. A second category of evidence is a much smaller number of compositions preserved in portable, hand-scroll format that are traditionally attributed to this time. Until recently, art historians conceived and understood the history of Chinese painting and painters exclusively from textual sources and these attributions. From

"The Six Laws of Xie He"

Critical writings went beyond ranking painters. Aesthetic criteria for judging good painting also appear, as does prescriptive advice. The most famous of these desiderata are the so-called "Six Laws" (*liu fa*) found in Xie He's text and copied into Zhang Yanyuan's ninth-century history of painting (see pages 218–219). How to read and understand these utterances depends both on which text one reads and on how one imagines their usage. Below are three sets of translations by William Acker, Alexander Soper, and James Cahill.

(1) Spirit resonance which means vitality. (Acker)
Animation through spirit consonance. (Soper)
Engender a sense of movement through spirit consonance. (Cahill)

(2) Bone method which is a way of using the brush. (Acker)
Structural method in the use of the brush. (Soper)
Use the brush with the bone method. (Cahill)

(3) Correspondence to the object which means the depicting of forms. (Acker)
Fidelity to object in portraying forms. (Soper)
Responding to things, depict their forms. (Cahill)

(4) Suitability of type which has to do with laying on of colors. (Acker)
Conformity of kind in applying colors. (Soper)
According to kind, describe appearances. (Cahill)

(5) Division and planning, i.e. placing and arrangement. (Acker)
Proper planning and placing elements. (Soper)
Dividing and planning, positioning and arranging. (Cahill)

(6) Transmission by copying, that is to say the copying of models. (Acker)
Transmission in making copies. (Soper)
Transmitting and conveying earlier models through copying and transcribing. (Cahill)

The six "laws" are actually several kinds of statements. The first four employ a syntax in which a preliminary phrase yields a following result. (Cahill's translations of 3 and 4 preserve this order; in 1 and 2 he inverts the phrases.) On the other hand, by their syntax laws 5 and 6 pair nearly synonymous phrases, all technical aspects. Law 1 in particular is susceptible to a variety of interpretations. Most readers have seen it as an invocation to convey "vitality" or "animation" (*sheng dong*). Works of quality do so, but inferior works lack this characteristic. Law 2 is also open to various readings since "bone method" (*gu fa*) is not clearly defined, either here or in other texts on painting or calligraphy. As a set, the six laws establish a combination of qualitative standards and technical requirements. By contrast, late Tang texts on painting take much of this for granted and instead emphasize the importance of brushwork as the overriding concern of the critic.

(Acker, *Some Tang and Pre-Tang Texts*; Cahill, "The Six Laws and How to Read Them," pp. 372–381; Soper, "The First Two Laws of Hsieh Ho," pp. 412–423)



5-25 Att. to Gu Kaizhi, *Admonitions of the Court Instructress*

Eastern Jin, 4th century CE (Tang-period copy).
Handscroll, ink and pigment on silk, 9¾" x 11'4½" (25 cm x 3.45 m). The British Museum, London

our perspective, however, literary sources and portable works must be judged against authentic extant evidence. Neither category can stand by itself for "painting" in this period. Judgments about either category must be informed by an understanding of the other.

Gu Kaizhi (c. 344/345–406), a gentleman of the Eastern Jin period, is one of the great names in the early literature of Chinese painting. Gu's biography is included in the official *Jin History* (*Jin shu*), compiled in the seventh century. Many of the anecdotes associated with Gu there were in

fact drawn from the fifth-century *New Account of Tales of the World*. In these anecdotes, Gu is praised as a maker of portraits of notables of his social circle but also as a cultivated literatus, both wise and foolish. By Tang times, a sizeable number of titles were associated with Gu's name. The catalogue of the Northern Song imperial collection recorded still more. *The Admonitions of the Court Instructress* (*Nu shi zhen*; FIG. 5-25), now in the British Museum, London, was attributed to Gu by the Song scholar, calligrapher, and connoisseur Mi Fu (eleventh century). The scroll bears a signature that may well be a later addition, as well as a purported seal from a Tang imperial academy of the eighth century. Few modern scholars would claim this silk handscroll is from Gu's hand or even his time. It is more likely a copy of an early work, preserving a pre-Tang composition.

Zhang Hua (232–300) compiled the text that inspired the scroll. It mixes simple prescriptions ("Favor must not be abused, and love must not be exclusive") with longer historical episodes in which ladies of the past acted virtuously. One passage describes an episode in which Lady Ban of Former Han times refuses an improper imperial favor:

The Lady Ban declined, despite her desire, to accompany the Emperor in his palanquin. How could she not have been sad, but, forfending the unseemly, she acted with prudence.

(Hsio-yen Shih, "Poetry Illustration," pp. 10–12)

The issue would seem to be an emperor allowing a consort improper privileges. Whatever the

5-26 Seven Worthies of the Bamboo Grove (rubbing)

Eastern Jin, late 4th century CE. Stamped bricks, overall length 7'10" (2.4 m). Tomb at Xishan Bridge, Nanjing, Jiangsu. Nanjing Museum

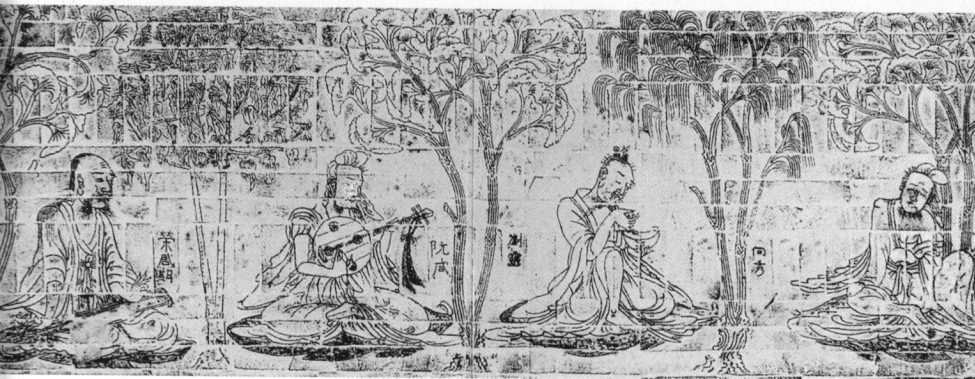


ruler's lack of virtue, the lady is admonished to uphold proper standards, feminine virtue in this instance compensating for the Son of Heaven's own weaknesses. Implicit is a long-held belief that female companions tempted the ruler and had to be limited to prescribed roles. In this scheme of things, the woman is virtuous for not exceeding her social role; she knows her place. The pictorial illustration is complex: a woman in profile at right faces a man within a large sedan chair carried by an awkward company of male attendants. The eye contact of the two protagonists must signify their conversation. The unseemly privilege being offered must be the honor of riding with the Son of Heaven.

We have discussed this episode from the nine in the scroll because its main compositional device is part of a lacquered miniature screen found in a nobleman's tomb near the first Northern Wei capital (modern Datong, Shanxi). The tomb was that of one Sima Jinlong (d. 484), a southern refugee nobleman who served the Tabgatch (Tuoba) rulers. One scene on the screen (FIG. 5-27) represents the same historical episode involving Lady Ban. Here, however, the sedan chair is somewhat different and the number of bearers reduced. Perhaps the most marked contrast with the handscroll is the incongruities of scale between the four bearers, the emperor, and Lady Ban. The screen from Sima Jinlong's tomb may well have been produced in a southern workshop. Its subjects and compositions were probably conventional by this time. Even if the screen is dated only as imprecisely as some time in the fifth century, it is aligned with the end of Gu's own lifetime and the following generations. Thus a screen found in a northern tomb may testify to the pictorial art of the south.

Both the screen and the handscroll draw on a conventional composition devised for Lady Ban's story. In addition to specific props, both works share such fundamentals as a plain background and the juxtaposition of text and images in the visual field. The *Admonitions* scenes stand in a tradition of narrative illustration that shares conventional compositions for specific episodes with other, earlier works such as the screen. Comparisons might be taken yet another step. The ladies in the handscroll are slim figures standing in rigid profile (see, for example, FIG. 5-25). Their long dresses drag across an imaginary ground, while long sashes flutter behind, as if in a breeze. Much the same formal description applies to the Lady Ban on the lacquer screen. Her face and torso are turned, rather than in strict profile, but the fall of her hem and her animated sashes are similar. The manifest points in common strengthen the probability that the *Admonitions* scroll is a pre-Tang composition and that its stylistic vocabulary dates from the era of Gu Kaizhi.

The most sophisticated figural design from the time and place of Gu Kaizhi depicts the so-called "Seven Worthies of the Bamboo Grove" (*Zhu lin qi xian*), well-known eccentrics of the third century, with another more ancient legendary figure, Rong Qiqi (see FIG. 5-26). Gu is in fact recorded as a painter of this subject matter, as are a number of other well-known painters of the southern courts. The design has been transmitted to the twentieth century by the happy accident that three tombs with this theme on their walls have been excavated near Nanjing. The best known and most accomplished is a tomb of late fourth-century date at a site called Xishan Bridge outside





5-27 Lady Ban

Detail from lacquer screen.
Northern Wei, 5th century
CE. Tomb of Sima Jinlong,
Datong, Shanxi. Datong City
Museum

By contrast with the better known composition of the same theme attributed to Gu Kaizhi (see FIG. 5-25), in this detail Lady Ban faces down Emperor Cheng, shown seated alone in his sedan chair. The scroll attributed to Gu amplifies the composition but, like the lacquer screen, must depend ultimately on a common model.

the city. Two other examples in Danyang, the county east of Nanjing where the Qi and Liang imperial tombs are situated, preserve the same design. These walls are less well done and indeed mislabel some figures. The technique employed required stamping the narrow edges of bricks into a master mold so that when they were assembled in proper order a larger composition took shape. The making of the master molds presumes drawing a full-scale cartoon that was transferred to the molds. The cartoon, in turn, must derive from an original design, whether conventional or from one of the famous painters of the period. Whatever its ultimate origin, the “Seven Worthies” best epitomizes the figural art of the early Southern Dynasties.

In the Xishan Bridge tomb, the wall surface given over to this subject is about 32 inches (80 cm) high and almost 8 feet (2.4 m) long. Several hundred bricks were required for the composition. Each panel begins and ends with ginkgo trees of the region, and other trees—pine, locust, and willow—punctuate the design, separating the seated figures. On the south wall (FIG. 5-26), the figures are paired, two and two, by their inward gazes, and some communication may be implied. On the north wall, however (again, see FIG. 5-26), three of the figures look right, to the tomb entry, while the figure at the right end is frontal. The designer gave great attention to varying details of posture and action among these gentlemen: one plays a lute, another whistles, one raises a wine cup, another twirls a back scratcher. All are seated upon mats on the ground, either in cross-legged postures similar to a Buddha image or in more

casual attitudes with a leg raised or stretched out. Although facial details also differ, the physiognomies are more alike than different. Six of the men are shown in a three-quarters position, with the same chins, noses, brows, and ears.

The “Seven Worthies” truly represents the court art of the Southern Dynasties, the society of such painters as Gu Kaizhi. As a theme, it also epitomized social and intellectual currents of the time: the emphasis on self-cultivation and reclusion, in contrast to the normative “Confucian” injunction to serve the state and promote family values. The worthies are individuals, even if generated from a common figural and stylistic idiom, and this too accords with the social values of the day. In the two Danyang tombs, moreover, the “Worthies” are placed on walls within a matrix of other subjects including auspicious animals, celestials, and immortals. The fusion of such worldly and other-worldly types was long ago established in Han tomb decoration and here must also respond to the rise of elite interest in Daoism.

Cao Zhi (192–232), a prince of the imperial Wei house, established a reputation as a poet. One of his best known works, *Nymph of the Luo River* (*Luo shen fu*), narrates an encounter with a fairy spirit in the year 223. The preface describes the prince’s departure from the capital and his vision of the nymph. Four extant handscrolls



illustrate Cao's poem: a twelfth- or thirteenth-century work on silk in the Freer Gallery of Art (Washington, D.C.), another of similar date in the Liaoning Provincial Museum (Shenyang), and two more, dates less certain, in the Palace Museum (Beijing). Two of these scrolls have the text of Cao's poem written in open areas within the composition. All are regarded today as copies at various removes from an early, pre-Tang design. Considered as a group, one can appreciate how the visual design conveys the narrative of the poem and how an early figural painting might have incorporated landscape settings. In the detail shown here (FIG. 5-28), the seated prince and his standing retinue gaze at the "nymph" from the river bank. Across the bottom margin of the silk are the rudiments of an outdoor setting with rocks, shrubs, and diminutive trees. These kinds of landscape elements characterize all four scrolls, although details vary. The tentative use of landscape elements was noted in the discussion of two Buddhist narratives above: the "five hundred robbers" (FIG. 5-19) and the "hungry tigress" (FIG. 5-20). In fact, these compositions share many traits: relatively large figures, out-of-scale landscape elements, an episodic exposition of the narrative, the use of land forms to punctuate episodes, generous open space, and sometimes the interpolation of texts. Painters of the fifth and sixth centuries

had already begun the gradual integration of setting and human actors. All of our examples demonstrate the primacy of story telling at this stage.

The virtues of "filial" sons (*xiao zi*) figure prominently in early pictorial art. An impressive design, not later than the first quarter of the sixth century, was engraved on the two long sides of a sarcophagus now in the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City (FIG. 5-29). Everything about this object—its stone, the decorative borders that frame the composition, the line engraving—declare it to be a product of a court workshop at Luoyang, the late Northern Wei capital. On the other hand, the pictorial design has roots in the art of the southern courts. Like the "Seven Worthies" composition, it could have been devised in the first instance by a noted painter or perhaps simply transmitted by a workshop. The scene we illustrate recounts the tale of a filial grandson. On the right, Yuan Gu helps his father carry Yuan's grandfather out to the wilds to die. The family cannot support itself, and the old man must be sacrificed if the family is to survive. In the scene at left, the boy carries the litter under his arm as his father turns back. "Why are you carrying that hateful thing," the father inquires. "I'll need it for you some day," replies the boy, thereby effecting a rapid change in his father's heart. Father and son then reclaim

5-28 *Nymph of the Luo River*

Eastern Jin (Northern Song copy). Handscroll, ink and pigment on silk, 10½" x 18'9" (27 cm x 5.72 m). The Palace Museum, Beijing



5-29 Filial Yuan Gu

Northern Wei, c. 525 CE.
Engraved stone, height 24½"
(62.2 cm), length 88" (2.23
m). The Nelson-Atkins
Museum of Art, Kansas City



grandfather, determined somehow to make do in spite of their hardships. Thus the proper respect and love accorded a parent, filial piety, works its good influence on society.

The two scenes are cleverly enfolded in a more fully rendered landscape setting. Strange pillarlike rocks establish the near and far edges of the "stage" on which the figures move. Long-trunked trees, again reminiscent of the Nanjing "Seven Worthies," alternate at front and rear. The figures are now more appropriately smaller than the trees. A ground plane has been worked in by means of scattered rocks and a stream flowing across to the left. The narrative is presented as two groups of figures: three protagonists with a telling prop. Thus the story is divided into scenes, with a handy rock dividing the two moments. The upper register reveals agitated trees, puffing clouds, and birds with long tails whipped by the wind. Altogether six scenes of filial virtue, many of them stories in circulation since Han times, occupy the two sides of the sarcophagus, which demonstrates the persistence of Han-period subject matter, as well as the strides in pictorial art associated with the Nanjing courts and the high quality of mortuary art under the Northern Wei.

BEYOND THE MIDDLE KINGDOM

The period of division would seem at first an unlikely time for significant foreign contacts. With the north occupied by non-Han states, the refugee regimes centered on Nanjing found themselves effectively cut off from the Gansu corridor and hence the Western Regions. Similarly, the Northern Dynasties had less ability to communicate with the peoples of the southern oceans because of their enemies in the south. Yet, in spite of these obstacles, cultural relations with peoples from India, Southeast Asia, and Central Asia figure more prominently at this period than at any time before. The best known episodes and personalities are tied to the *dharma*. Consider the supposed arrival of an Indian prince, Bodhidharma (Damo), the patriarch of Meditation (Chan) Buddhism in China, whose travels took him first to the Nanjing court and then across the Yangzi to the slopes of Mount Song, outside Luoyang. The Songyue Temple pagoda of the early sixth century (see FIG. 5-14 above) provides tangible proof of Indic or Southeast Asian contacts with the Northern Wei capital, whether direct or indirect. The Northern Wei received foreign embassies from West Asian powers. Numerous visitations from Ferghana,

Sasanian Persia, and Sogdia are duly recorded in the dynastic history. The Nanjing courts likewise maintained relations with the states of peninsular Southeast Asia and the Korean peninsula.

Foreign emissaries, traders, and residents in Chinese cities left behind a residue of exotic artifacts. Glass, which played a minor role in the material culture of ancient China, had begun to appear in the Han period. Both northern and southern elites seem to have had some access to foreign glass, Byzantine and Sasanian work in particular. A clear glass bowl with a faceted surface made by grinding the exterior comes from a tomb at modern Datong (Shanxi), the Northern Wei capital until 494. A mere 4 inches (10 cm) in diameter at the mouth, this kind of bowl was widespread in the Persian lands. A similar object survives among the eighth-century donations placed in the Shōsōin (Nara, Japan). Precious metal objects also date to this period and testify to other sources of exotica. Byzantine and Sasanian silver objects appeared at about the same time that the Northern Wei consolidated their control over the north, the mid-fifth century. Several caches and tombs with such objects have been recovered from the Datong area, suggesting they had become the property of Tuoba court figures. A tall ewer of gilded silver (FIG. 5-30) adorned with repoussé classical figures may be of Sasanian or Sogdian manufacture. This beautiful example belonged to one Li Xian, an important figure at the Northern Zhou court who was ensconced on the frontier (modern-day Ningxia). His great-granddaughter, Li Jingxun, will be mentioned below in chapter 6 (see pages 221–222). Classical motifs traveled to East Asia on such precious objects, but also via architecture, such as the classical orders and moldings of Gandharan *stupas* and other Buddhist monuments.

The centuries of division contributed much to the later growth of Chinese society and culture. The forced removal of the capital and its elites from the north prompted the demographic and economic development of the south, especially the Middle and Lower Yangzi macro-regions. The admixture of non-Han peoples to

the population of North China and the impact of non-Han rulers over several centuries also left lasting traces in elite society. The rulers of Sui and Tang and their peers from the northwest would have grown up in a hybrid culture with martial traditions and affinities to peoples of the steppe lands that distinguished them from their southern peers. The Buddhist “conquest” of both north and south, on the other hand, constituted the greatest single force for cultural change, affecting social practices, intellectual developments, and material culture alike. The energies of the cultivated elite, especially in the southern courts, initiated cultural practices, such as calligraphy and painting, that continued with increasing vigor in the unified Sui–Tang age. The foundations of a cosmopolitan culture, so closely identified with the Tang, actually took shape in the Northern Dynasties and their frequent interactions with the cultures of Western Asia. In all of these ways, the period of division transcends any pejorative judgment as the age when the Han imperium had collapsed.

5-30 Ewer with classical figures

Sasanian or Sogdian, 6th century CE.
Silver with gilding, height 14¼" (36 cm).
Tomb of Li Xian, Guyuan, Ningxia. Guyuan County Museum, Ningxia

The shape of ewers like this one became relatively common in Tang ceramics, but few Chinese gold and silver examples survive. Figural friezes, however, were not much emulated. Exotic objects, like all aspects of foreign cultures, were appreciated selectively and integrated based on existing tastes and practical needs.

