

Rebecca Fisch

3/7/06

Art 413

Wolfgram

The “Fairy mountain incense burner” found on pg.82 of Sullivan’s Arts of China caught my attention. After looking at another source, Watson’s Arts of China To AD 900, the fairy mountain incense burner falls under iconography. I’d like to find out about its significance in the decorative bronze arts of the Han dynasty, because for the first time I heard the word “fairy” as a name of piece of art. This fairy mountain holds another key element when it came to funeral, or ritual practices. According to Watson, the Chinese, during the time of the Western Han, there is a journey that the soul of the deceased must take before the reaching the divine heavens. This journey consists of many dangers that soul might encounter, so the incense burner is shaped like a mountain, or in this case, an obstacle for the soul to climb. Animistic beings were often found in the earlier arts of the bronze before the Han. Now, the artists seem to not only to have made improvements to the detail and shape of these beings, but they serve almost as a narrative for this piece. I’ve always liked the term fairy, and little did I know that such a subject existed in the time of early Chinese civilization. I’d like to research this type of iconography, and find out why it was a continuous subject for ritual practices.