

THE QUEEN MOTHER OF THE WEST AND THE BELIEF IN PARADISE

1.

Paradise Lamp

Grey pottery with traces of polychrome

Total height 73.5 cm

Base: height 36 cm, diameter 38.5 cm

Top piece: height 37.5 cm, diameter of chalice 25.5 cm

Four detachable lamps, each: height 20 cm, diameter 8 cm

Han dynasty (206 BC–AD 220)

Royal Ontario Museum

Gift of Joey and Toby Tanenbaum, 2000



Alternate view, base, Cat. no. 1

In many Han tombs composite tree-shaped lamps of pottery or bronze have been found decorated with paradise imagery. The lamps on their branches can number as high as twenty-nine. The ceramic lamps have a base in the shape of a mountain with trees, animals, and immortals. It is very likely that this mountain represents the Paradise Mountain of the West, Kunlun.

On the ROM's lamp, a heavy, sinuous relief line runs around the mountain-shaped base, indicating three summits. Four large trees grow on the mountain, with traces of the painted branches and foliage still visible. Seventeen appliques with figures and animals are affixed to the mountain, all made in molds and between 7 and 10 cm high or long. With the exception of a large red hare and a small leopard, all animals move clockwise: a ram with a rider, two figures riding on horseback (made in the same mold), two barbarian archers on horseback (made in the same mold), a dragon, a rider on a galloping horse, a large tiger attacking an animal prey, a fox, a deer with large antlers, a lion with mane, and a packed camel. In addition there are a standing figure leaning on a staff, a dancer surrounded by what seem to be flames, and an immortal with outspread arms, who seems to be dancing with an animal, possibly a bear. A cloud pattern in red and black is painted on the mountain as a background.

On a ledge around the narrow neck of the base are five more figures: a dancer with wide sleeves, a zither player, a squatting storyteller, an old woman with a small child standing in front of her, and an immortal sitting with one leg pulled up and

