



PILLOW

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CELADON WITH INLAID SLIP DECORATION

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To protect the elaborate hairstyles that were fashionable at the royal court, ceramic pillows were designed to raise the head while supporting the neck. They allowed comfortable napping with the added advantage that ceramic objects stayed cool to the touch during the hot summer months. The long, upper portion of this headrest is described as being in the shape of an ox tongue. Although pillows were used in everyday life, this small pillow was probably made for a tomb.

Two pug-faced lions, roaring with open mouths, support the tongue-shaped surface. Their curling manes, short bodies, and tufted tails are characteristics of Buddhist lions, defenders of Buddhist law, and were considered emblems of valor and energy. The ever-vigilant lion is often positioned as a sacred guard at entrances to Buddhist temples. In Korea, the lion was also treasured as a home guardian for protection against fire.

During the Koryo dynasty (918–1392), Korean artists, inspired by Chinese ceramics, crafted their own version of the green-glazed wares called celadons. Like the Chinese originals, Korean celadons were made to resemble the mystical and rare green color of jade. Korean artists further embellished their celadon wares with inlays, perhaps to imitate the effect of more expensive inlaid bronzes. The striking black and white design, inlaid on the top of this pillow, features a lotus surrounded by willow trees. The artist filled the incised designs with white or reddish-brown creamy clays (or slips). When glazed and fired, the white slip remained white, while the red slip turned black, resulting in an elegant and captivating design.

Notes:

Although celadon ware originated in China, the term “celadon” takes its name from a seventeenth-century character from French literature who wore green clothing.

For a similar version of this rare style of pillow (only a few Korean celadon pillows supported by pairs of lions remain in the world), see *5,000 Years of Korean Art*, Asian Art Museum of San Francisco, p. 96, figure 119.