



Roof Tile

7th to 8th century

Korea

(Unified Silla Dynasty, 668–935)

Earthenware with molded decoration

9 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 2 $\frac{5}{8}$ inches (24.8 x 6.69 cm) depth at top,
6 $\frac{5}{8}$ inches (16.79 cm) at deepest point



Roof End Tile

6th century

Korea

(Silla Kingdom, 57 BCE–668 CE)

Earthenware with molded decoration

Height 1 $\frac{1}{16}$ inches (4.25 cm),
diameter 5 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches (14.6 cm)

These two molded tiles once served as decorative eave endings to a ceramic tile roof on a Korean building. Roofs and ceilings are important focal points of many traditional East Asian structures. Roofs often extend several feet beyond the walls of the structure, creating large, overhanging eaves. These two tiles would have been part of the decorated outer edge of such an eave.

Ceramic roof tiles were introduced to Korea from China around the first century BCE. By the time these two examples were made, during the Silla kingdom (57 BCE–668 CE) and the Unified Silla dynasty (668–935), Korean ceramic tile roofs had reached their peak in intricacy and design. Roofs made from interlocking ceramic tiles kept cold air, wind, and rain from entering a house. Due to their heavy weight, the structure supporting the roof had to be very strong. Expensive to produce, tile roofs were typically found on the homes of aristocrats and government officials, and on Buddhist and Confucian ceremonial buildings.

The designs on the tiles were appreciated not only for their beauty but also for their power as symbols of security and prosperity. The circular tile shown here includes an image of a lotus blossom with three tiers of six petals radiating from the center. The lotus, a sacred Buddhist flower, symbolizes purity. The long, curved tile, now partially broken, once contained the image of two long-tailed birds—perhaps mythical phoenixes—flying toward each other, flanking a central blossom. Each bird holds a flower in its beak. The central blossom, again a lotus, is surrounded by green foliage, and a band of raised small dots surrounds the tile.

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