Yingqing-glazed Ceramic Pillow

影青釉印嬰戲紋瓷枕

Length: 17.5 cm. (6 7/8 in.)
Height: 10.9 cm. (4 7/8 in.)
Depth: 12.5 cm. (4 7/8 in.)
Northern Song period
11th century

長17.5厘米
高10.9厘米
深12.5厘米
北宋

The ceramic pillow is of ingot shape with molded decoration. On the dished headrest two plump boys float on a dense floral diaper ground with a cash symbol between them. The boys' balloon-like bodies are rump to rump, each looking over his shoulder at the other, one with a little smile on his face. On the front panel of the pillow is a playful lion in strong relief on a scrolling and feathered vine ground. The lion's large head is lowered to grab a brocade ball with teeth bared while his clawed feet are splayed out. The back of the headrest is decorated with another deeply molded scene of a boy sleeping in an oversize peony. The blossom is borne on a thick vine with trefoil leaves scrolling like a beanstalk on a dense ground that appears like a network of cells or honeycomb. On each end of the pillow is an 'S'-shaped dragon-fish, also on a honeycomb ground. The mythical beast is crisply molded with scales and elaborate fanning fins. A white glaze with very slight greenish tinge covers the entire pillow including the base where a small firing hole is visible. In each corner on one end of the pillow four circular unglazed areas indicate where the pillow rested when it was up-ended during the firing.

Although pillows were not a major product of the kilns at Jingdezhen, a number survive predominantly of kidney bean and ingot shape and a good number of these are decorated with the most auspicious subject of young boys. The desire to produce male offspring and the belief in the efficacy of images on the surfaces of pillows would have made these a popular commodity during the Song period when they were being produced. The published pillows excavated from Jingdezhen with these designs are difficult to read and appreciate due to the shallowness of the impressed decoration (fig.1). Other extent pieces, however, do have more clearly visible designs on the headrests and furthermore were produced with strong and clearly defined sculptural images sweeping around the sides, as exemplified by a pillow formerly at Kaikodo (figs. 2-3).[1] The extraordinary images of the lion on the front and dragons on the sides of the pillow here would have added, as far as popular belief went, to the potency and effectiveness of the pillow, for the

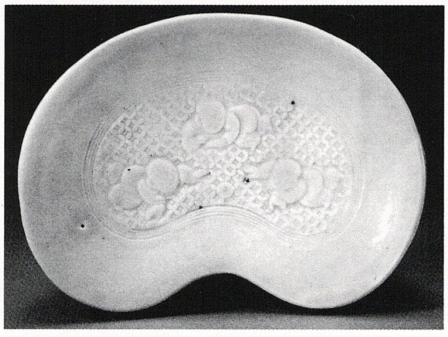

Fig. 2: *Yingqing*-glazed ceramic pillow (side view), Northern Song period, after *Kaikodo Journal* I, Spring 1996, no. 74, p. 157.

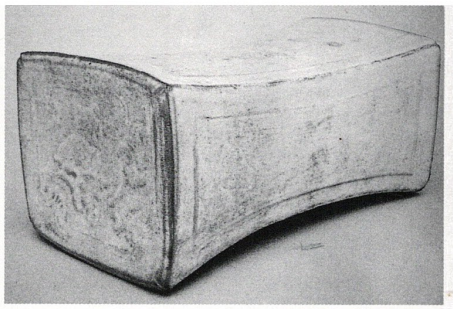

Fig. 1: *Yingqing*-glazed ceramic pillow with design of boys, Song dynasty, Palace Museum, Beijing, after *Zhongguo taoci quanji*, vol. 16 (*Song Yuan qingbaici*), Shanghai and Tokyo, 1984, pl. 92.

Fig. 3: Headrest of pillow in fig. 1.

individual who used it and perhaps for the offspring as well.

During the course of the Song period a humanistic treatment of children in the decorative arts came into play, as evinced in Cizhou-pillow decoration which took actual painting as a springboard for new approaches. In comparison to the pictorial and realistic representations of the Cizhou pillows, the figural designs on *yingqing* pillows, and other *yingqing* shapes as well, are more formal and emblematic. The decoration on the present pillow is, in fact, reminiscent of the little angelic or *putti*-like

Fig. 4: Gilt-silver jar, Tang dynasty, Zhenjiang City Museum, Jiangsu province, after *Chūgoku no Kin-gin Garasu-ten*, Osaka, 1992, no. 36, p. 57 (right).

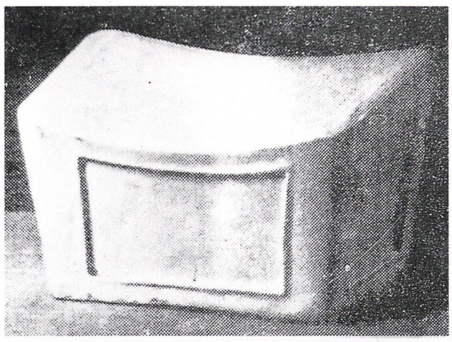

Fig. 6: White ware pillow, from a tomb in Jiangsu province dated to 943, after *Wenwu*, 1957:3, fig. 16, p. 72.

boys wrapped in scrolling vines of Tang period metalware decoration. Even the children at play on the ring-punch ground of a Tang-dynasty gilt-silver jar is more "motif-like" than naturalistic (fig. 4). Exemplified by the décor on a 13th century *meiping*, the decorators of the *yingqing* wares of Jingdezhen remained conservative in their approach throughout the Song dynasty, ever in the clutches of the Tang metalworking tradition (fig. 5).

The relatively tall but quite compact form of the present pillow was produced by the mid-10th century as evinced by a pillow from a tomb in Jiangsu province dated to 943 (fig. 6). The pillow was presumably a product of Jingdezhen, similar in shape to excavated material of Northern Song date from the Hutian kiln (fig. 7). Another pillow, excavated in Nanjing, was produced with deep relief modeling on the sides and its lions quite similar to

Fig. 5: *Yingqing*-glazed ceramic *meiping* with design of boys among scrolls, late Song period, 13th century, after *Sekai Tōji Zenshū*, vol. 12 (Song), Tokyo, 1977, fig. 166, p. 171.

Fig. 7: *Yingqing*-glazed ceramic pillow decorated with iron spots, Northern Song period, found at the Hutian kiln site, Jingdezhen, Jiangxi province, after *Wenwu*, 2001:2, color pl. 1 (inside front cover).

those of the present pillow (fig. 8). These pillows, so similar in style and distinctive in character, were likely produced over a rather short period of time at Jingdezhen during the Northern Song period, and likely early, before the true-blue *yingqing* glazes were consistently used.[2]

1. An identical bean-shaped pillow from the Eumorphopolos collection is in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. See John Ayers, *Far Eastern Ceramics in the Victoria and Albert Museum*, London, 1980, fig. 91 or *Sekai Tōji Zenshū*, vol. 12 (Song), Tokyo, 1987, figs. 34-35, p. 176, and another is published in *Chinese Ceramic Pillows from the Yeung Wing Tak Collection*, Osaka, 1984, no. 125.
2. For a related pillow and further discussion see *Kaikodo Journal* XXIII, Spring 2007 ("The Aesthetics of Change"), no. 69, pp. 202-203 and 267-268.

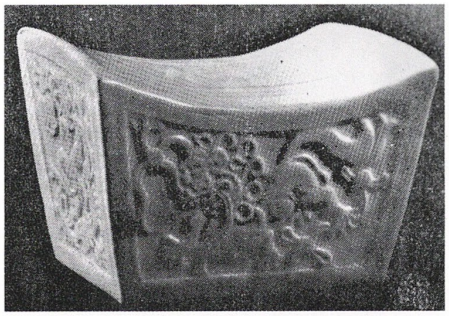

Fig. 8: *Yingqing*-glazed ceramic pillow with molded decoration, Northern Song period, found in Nanjing, after Feng Xianming, "Zonglun wo guo Song Yuan shichao 'qingbaici,'" *Zhongguo gu taoci lunwenji*, Beijing, 1982, pl. XXXIV:3.