

Once Upon a Roof: Vanished Korean Architecture Media Images



Tile with temple in a landscape

Korea, Three Kingdoms, Baekje, Sabi period (538–660)

Excavated from the temple site at Oe-ri, Buyeo, South Chungcheong province

Earthenware

H x W x D: 29.3 x 29.1 x 4.5 cm

National Museum of Korea, *bon* 13972

© Buyeo National Museum

This clay tile is decorated with a landscape scene featuring a boulder-filled stream and groups of three-peaked mountains covered in pine trees. A closer examination of the lower central mountain reveals a building with two standing ridge ornaments on its roof. This pictorial evidence suggests the use of roof ridge ornaments in their time. If you look in the lower right-hand corner, you can see a priest walking toward the retreat. This tile also represents an early stage of landscape representation in Korea.



Brick with dragon, buildings, and landscape

Korea, Unified Silla kingdom (676–935)

Excavated from Jungsan-dong, Ulsan
Earthenware
H x W x D: 6.9 x 15.8 x 11.6 cm
Gyeongju National Museum, *gyeongji* 4655
© Gyeongju National Museum

This clay brick renders structural elements of ancient wooden buildings in great detail. The front façades of the buildings feature columns, brackets, and a tiled roof. Roof ridge ornaments are also clearly visible at both ends of the main peak. The buildings float on clouds against a distant landscape that is represented by horizontal lines and triangular mountains, suggesting the structures may be heavenly palaces in a Buddhist paradise.



Roof ridge ornament (*Chimi*)

Korea, Three Kingdoms, Baekje, Sabi period (538–660)
Excavated from the temple site at Mount Buso, Buyeo, South Chungcheong province
Earthenware
H x W x D (greatest): 91.4 x 73.7 x 56.1 cm
Buyeo National Museum, *buy* 1085
© Buyeo National Research Institute of Cultural Heritage

Excavated at a Buddhist temple site in the capital of the Baekje kingdom, this roof ridge ornament is believed to have crowned the main hall where images of Buddhist deities were installed. The arched opening at the bottom would have been used to secure it to the main roof ridge. The stepped pattern on the body matches the lines of adjacent piled tiles that originally covered the main ridge of the roof. The lotus medallion on the smooth, flat surface between the wings resembles the design on round roof tile ends that were unearthed at the same site.



Roof ridge ornament (*Chimi*)

Korea, Three Kingdoms, Baekje, Sabi period (538–660)

Excavated from the Mireuksa temple site, Iksan, North Jeolla province

Earthenware

H x W x D (greatest): 99 x 94.8 x 58.4 cm

Iksan National Museum, *mireuk* 4949

© Buyeo National Research Institute of Cultural Heritage

Unearthed at the site of a Baekje temple founded with royal patronage during the reign of King Mu (reigned 600–41), this roof ridge ornament was discovered among the remains of its eastern monastic living quarters. One notable feature of the roof tile is it is cut into two halves for easier firing in a kiln. The wings are marked by a stepped pattern, and their edges are punctuated with round holes. Thin branches or sticks may have been placed in these holes to either adorn the *chimi* or to keep away birds.



Roof ridge ornament (*Chimi*)

Korea, Unified Silla kingdom (676–935)

Excavated from the Wolji pond at the East Palace site, Gyeongju, North Gyeongsang province

Earthenware

H x W x D (greatest): 73.6 x 45.5 x 33.8 cm

Gyeongju National Museum, *ana* 815

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Not restricted to Buddhist temples, roof ridge ornaments also graced secular palaces. This *chimi* was excavated from Wolji, a royal garden pond at the site of the East Palace in the capital of the Silla kingdom. Its undecorated body and dramatically protruding round spine in front of the wings are characteristics of *chimi* dating to the Unified Silla kingdom.



Roof tile end

Korea, Three Kingdoms, Baekje, Sabi period (538–660)

Excavated from the Mireuksa temple site, Iksan, North Jeolla province

Earthenware

Diam x L: 14 x 39.4 cm

Iksan National Museum, *mireuk* 5916

© Iksan National Museum

Round roof tile ends like the one seen here capped the end of convex roof tiles at the eaves above the rafters, where they were intended to direct water off the roof. A notable feature of this roof tile end is the attached convex roof tile that has survived intact. Excavated at the site of a Baekje temple called Mireuksa, this type of roof tile end with six-petal lotus design was found in the greatest number, suggesting they were produced at the time of the temple's foundation.



Roof tile end

Korea, Three Kingdoms, Baekje, Sabi period (538–660)

Excavated from the Mireuksa temple site, Iksan, North Jeolla province

Earthenware

Diam: 13 cm

Iksan National Museum, *mireuk* 9760

© Iksan National Museum

This round roof tile end is adorned with a molded lotus design. The central circular pod contains seven lotus seeds, and the interior of each petal is decorated with a sprouting seed. The lotus—a symbol of purity in Buddhism—was the most popular motif across both secular and religious architecture during the Three Kingdoms period. The tile is further ornamented with applied vermilion pigment on its surface.



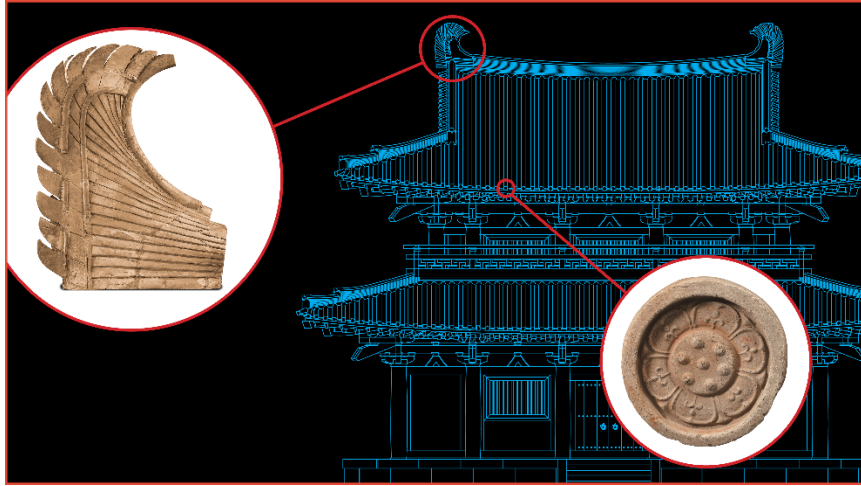
Architectural model of historical building

Lacquered wood and rubber

H x W x D: 42.6 x 74.7 x 48.8 cm

© Iksan National Museum

This architectural model replicates in great detail fundamental elements of a traditional timber-frame building: a ceramic tile roof; wooden supporting framework; and a foundation consisting of stone pillar bases, compacted earth, and a stone facing. It is based on the remains of a large-scale building in Iksan that is believed to have been a main palace hall of the Baekje kings. Rendered at a scale of 1:50, the actual construction measured over 115 feet wide and had an area of almost 7,000 square feet.



Composite image with roof tiles and architectural drawing
Images from Baekje Cultural Land in Chungcheongnam-do, Buyeo Research Institute of Cultural Heritage, and Iksan National Museum

