



18th century  
Porcelain with  
underglaze cobalt blue  
16 1/8 x 14 7/8 inches (41 x 37.8 cm)  
Korean

Purchased with Museum funds,  
1950, 1950-106-1

## DRAGON JAR

Dragon jars were immensely popular among the Korean ruling class during the Joseon dynasty (1392–1910). This example is painted with cobalt, a luxury pigment imported from the Middle East that creates a beautiful blue color when fired. The use of cobalt for decorating porcelain was restricted to items produced for members of the ruling class or the royal household. In Korea, dragons are considered ancient, auspicious (favorable or lucky) mythological creatures, a symbol of the authority of the ruler and balance in nature. There are many folktales and stories associated with dragons, which are said to control the weather that farmers' and fishermen's livelihoods depend on. The creature is the twelfth sign of the Eastern zodiac (more commonly known as the Chinese zodiac). Those born in the year of the dragon are said to be excitable, stubborn, honest, sensitive, brave, confident, trustworthy, and eccentric. The kings of Korea also adopted this powerful image as their special symbol; some even claimed that they were descendants of dragons. The royal bed was called the dragon bed, the throne was known as the dragon seat, and the king's ceremonial clothes were referred to as dragon robes. A pregnant woman who dreamt of dragons was told that she would bear a son who would be a future king.

## RESEARCH IDEA: COBALT

Cobalt, a mineral which made the beautiful blue color so highly prized in Chinese and Korean ceramics, was imported from the Middle East. How did this mineral travel such a great distance? What other items were traded? Research the silk routes from the Middle East to China to learn about the active trade in this part of the world many centuries ago.

*This object is included in Learning from Asian Art: Korea, a teach-ing kit developed by the Division of Education and made possible by a grant from the Freeman Foundation of New York and Stowe, Vermont.*