

A Most Unusual Pair

China | *Pair of Tomb Guardians*



VISIT THE BMA
and see *Pair of Tomb Guardians* when
the Asian galleries
reopen in 2015.

Top: Detail, *Tomb Guardian with Lion's Face*.
Bottom: Detail, *Tomb Guardian with Human Face*.
c. 725–750. China. Tang Dynasty, White earthen-
ware with unfired pigments, gold leaf. Top:
28 ¹³/₁₆ inches high. Bottom: 28 ¹/₈ inches high.
The Baltimore Museum of Art: Purchase with
exchange funds from Bequest of John M. Glenn,
Gift of Alexander B. Griswold, Gift of Mr. and
Mrs. L. Manuel Hendler, The Mary Frick Jacobs
Collection, Gift of Randolph Mordecai, Gift from
the Estate of Ruth Marshall Mugford, and Gift of
Elizabeth Remsen; and Julius Levy Memorial Fund,
BMA 1991.119.1–2

What a curious pair, this wild-eyed, snarling lion and frowning, four-legged man! One of them displays fearsome fangs and sticks out his tongue; the other receives sounds from near and far through enormous ears. Sitting erect on their haunches with their chests puffed out and their bellies sucked in, both creatures set their cloven hooves down on rocky pedestals. Flames shoot out of their wings, sharp spikes surround their shoulders and extend down their spines, horns or antlers grow from the tops of their heads, and beautiful painted flowers decorate their bodies from chin to waist.

These clay figures were created more than 1,000 years ago to guard the entrance to the tomb of a Chinese person of great wealth, perhaps a prince or nobleman. The pair protected the tomb from grave robbers and scared away evil spirits so that the soul of the deceased person would never be disturbed.

There is nothing peculiar about wings, antlers, teeth, ears, legs, or hooves. They are all part of the natural world. However, by reimagining and combining these animal parts in surprising ways, the artist created unearthly creatures that seem to possess protective powers. The roaring beast could strike fear in the heart of any intruder with his bared teeth, flared nostrils, and flaming wings, yet his antlers suggest the gentle qualities of the deer, a symbol of long life and prosperity. The beast's ever-vigilant companion would be alert to the slightest threat, thanks to his supersensitive ears and bulging, all-seeing eyes. Steadfast and unyielding on strong, rigid legs, this inseparable pair was created to cast away all evil and ensure the eternal well-being of a departed soul.

CHALLENGE FOR STUDENTS

Create a graphic organizer, such as a Venn diagram, that illustrates the physical features shared by both guardians, as well as those that are unique to the lion and to the man.

List places where security guards and crossing guards protect your community. Discuss the qualities (alertness, physical strength, fitness and speed, reliability, common sense, knowledge, and bravery) that each type of guard must possess. How would you express those qualities in a picture or sculpture?

Choose an object that you feel is especially precious or valuable and then draw or construct an imaginary guard to keep it safe. Your guard could combine features of animals and people.

PRINT THE IMAGE ON PAGE 2 FOR YOUR STUDENTS.



**BALTIMORE
MUSEUM OF
ART BMA**

China.

Left: *Tomb Guardian with Lion's Face*. Right: *Tomb Guardian with Human Face*.

c. 725–750. Tang Dynasty, White earthenware with unfired pigments, gold leaf. Left: 28 ¹³/₁₆ inches high. Right: 28 ¹/₈ inches high. The Baltimore Museum of Art: Purchase with exchange funds from Bequest of John M. Glenn, Gift of Alexander B. Griswold, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. L. Manuel Hendler, The Mary Frick Jacobs Collection, Gift of Randolph Mordecai, Gift from the Estate of Ruth Marshall Mugford, and Gift of Elizabeth Remsen; and Julius Levy Memorial Fund, BMA 1991.119.1–2