



265 Lokapala

China, Tang Dynasty (618-907)

Height: 63cm

TL-Tested by Oxford Authentication Ltd

A pottery tomb guardian known as a Lokapala (Tianwang or Heavenly King), modelled in the extravagant high-tang style. He is dressed in full body armour, elaborately detailed with dragon-mouth sleeves; on his head he wears an ornate cap with a high-tailed pheasant. He stands on a high plinth, holding down a rather sulky looking evil spirit with his right foot. There are traces of the original bright coloured pigments.

The ostentatious hat (heguan) in the shape of a bird – was also worn by high-ranking Tang military officials. This fowl, a particular species of combative pheasant, had been adopted by the Tang army as its emblem and symbol of courage. Because the Heavenly Kings were fearless warriors, this particular head-dress was considered the appropriate accessory to accompany the full combat armour.

Such guardians, often in pairs, were placed near the entrance of the burial chamber to protect the deceased and the treasures from evil spirits. They derive from the Buddhist Lokapāla, and have typical Middle Eastern facial features, such as a moustache and big round eyes. These elements were considered the perfect scary combination to frighten off evil spirits and thus protect the deceased.

A similar figure was excavated near Xian (Shaanxi Province) from the tomb of Wu Shouzhong (748 AD). This figure was purchased from Vanderven & Vanderven at the Grosvenor House Antiques fair, London in 1997.

Provenance:

with Vanderven & Vanderven, 1997
Private Collection, The Netherlands, 2014