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China - Funerary Brick With Deer Decoration - Han Dynasty

8 000 EUR

Period : Before 16th century

Condition : Bon état

Material : Terracotta

Width : 36 cm

Height : 43 cm

Depth : 24 cm

Description

An imposing sculpted terracotta brick, part of the corpus of funerary architectural elements from the Han dynasty, a period marked by a strong symbolic codification of the afterlife and the rise of a narrative and protective funerary art. The composition, organized around a large deer in central relief, unfolds on a thick, rectangular brick of monumental proportions. The deer is depicted frontally, its head powerfully emerging from the plane of the slab, creating an almost sculptural, three-dimensional effect. The antlers, broadly displayed and stylized, structure the upper and lateral space, occupying almost the entire surface, while the forelegs are suggested in low relief, giving the animal a posture that is both hieratic and dynamic. Above the animal appears a small secondary quadruped, schematically rendered,

Dealer

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probably a dog or a domestic animal, a frequent element in Han funerary iconography, evoking guardianship, vigilance, or the accompaniment of the soul. The forms are deliberately simplified, prioritizing symbolic impact over naturalistic precision. The reverse, entirely smooth and undecorated, shows clear traces of shaping, with vertical striations and irregularities indicating molding or slab work, characteristic of funerary architectural productions intended for integration into wall structures or burial chambers. The rectangular perforation visible on the upper face suggests an anchoring or interlocking system, confirming the object's architectural function, likely as part of a larger ensemble such as a tomb wall, pillar, or symbolic threshold. The terracotta, with its dense and heavy clay, displays a homogeneous mineral patina in shades of gray-beige, marked by concretions, ancient erosion, and slight losses along the edges, consistent with prolonged burial. The piece exudes a strong archaic presence, typical of Han sculpture, where expressive power takes precedence over decorative detail. The state of preservation is remarkable for an object of this nature and period. Despite superficial wear, some old chips, and general erosion of the reliefs, the sculpture remains perfectly legible and structurally intact, without any visible restorations or modern additions. Within the context of Han funerary thought, the deer holds a major symbolic place. Associated with longevity, prosperity, and immortality, it is frequently linked to emerging Taoist beliefs and the quest for the elixir of life. Its representation within a funerary setting aims to ensure the deceased protection, abundance, and a harmonious passage to the afterlife. Origin: China Period: Han Dynasty (206 BC - 220 AD) Dimensions: Height: 43 cm; Width: 36 cm; Depth: 24 cm Provenance: Former French private collection. This terracotta funerary plaque is a rare and powerful example of Han Dynasty architectural sculpture. Through the monumentality of its relief, the symbolic power

of the deer, and the quality of its antique patina, it fully embodies the high-ranking funerary art of this foundational period in Chinese art. This object, which is at once sculptural, ritual and architectural, has a definite museum and heritage interest, both for a specialized collection of Chinese funerary art and for an institutional presentation. A similar piece is held at The British Museum under inventory number 1914,0512.4.