

Ushabti For Ker-Ta

Egypt

New Kingdom 1550 - 1077 B.C.

Alabaster

H: 30 cm x W: 9 cm

Alabaster ushabti in mummiform, with arms folded over the chest. Wearing an un-striated tripartite wig and false beard. Inscribed down the front are hieroglyphics for Ker-Ta, a cavalry officer and commander of archers, including excerpts from chapter VI of the Book of the Dead, the so-called 'shabti text'. Ushabtis bearing excerpts from chapter VI of the Book of the Dead became a standard part of funerary goods from around the end of the Second Intermediate Period, circa 1550 B.C. Ushabtis were servants of the deceased, intended to do the manual labour of their owner in the afterlife, and the excerpt from the Book of the Dead is a spell, designed to animate and instruct the ushabti. The inscription relating to the deceased Ker-Ta describes him as a cavalry officer and commander of archers. By the 19th-20th Dynasty, during a period known as the New Kingdom, from when this ushabti dates, the Egyptian military underwent a period of considerable evolution, becoming a fully-fledged standing army made up of professional soldiers. At the core of this army was the cavalry, made up of light chariots drawn by two horses. These carried two men, the charioteer and an archer equipped with a powerful composite bow and long, metal-tipped arrows stored in leather quivers in the chariot. It is likely that Ker-Ta was a commander of just such a fearsome unit. The fact that this ushabti is in alabaster, an expensive stone, relatively large and of such high quality is indicative of his high status.

Literature:

Sotheby's, London, 27th June 1955, lot 103

Christie’s, New York, Antiquities, 8th June 2005, lot 11, illus.