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235 EAST 60TH STREET
NEW YORK NY 10022
212.989.9743 / 646.326.0820
WWW.HIXENBAUGH.NET
INFO@HIXENBAUGH.NET

Egyptian Wood Shabti: Suemshenu

An ancient Egyptian large wood shabti, the mummiform figure wears a tripartite wig, the crossed hands hold agricultural implements and seed bag, an inscription in six horizontal lines names the owner: "Suemshenu, servant in the Place of Truth," continuing with his titles and a spell from chapter six of the Book of Going Forth by Day.



New Kingdom, 18th Dynasty,
Ca. 1570 - 1293 BC.
Height: 10 1/4 in. (26 cm).

Shabtis were first introduced in the Middle Kingdom as substitutes for the the mummy in case it was destroyed. During the Second Intermediate Period inscribed wooden figures called shawabtis (after the Egyptian word for wood, shawab) began to be placed in tombs. During the New Kingdom, shabtis assumed a new role as servant figures for the deceased. They were now depicted with agricultural equipment. By the Third Intermediate Period, the number of shabtis placed in the tomb was set at 401 (365 workers and 36 overseers). During the Late Period the tomb figures became known as ushabtis ('answerers'), these figures represented servants who would magically answer when called upon to perform agricultural duties for the Pharaoh (in the form of Osiris) in the afterlife. Their main function was to ensure the individual's comfort and freedom from daily labor in the next life.

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Formerly in the De Bayser collection, France mid-20th century; Marc-Arthur Kohn auction, Drouot, Paris, April 20, 2005, lot 111.

inventory number: 8317

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