

# Atypical Attributes of B3 (Woman Giving Birth) Signs Created by Deir el-Medina Painters

Elizabeth BETTLES

NINO, Leiden Universiteit


**Function**

Classifier

**Value**

[Woman giving birth]

At Deir el-Medina, in the as yet unpublished tomb of Amenemopet (TT 265), a Royal Scribe in the Place of Truth under Seti I and Ramesses II, five black-painted B3 signs (woman giving birth) occur among the Book of the Dead spells painted on the burial chamber walls. These B3 signs display atypical features consisting of a prominent stomach, arms which curve outwards and downwards (features normally associated with an A7 [weary man] sign), and two lines projecting diagonally from the crown of her head (see photo and facsimile of a B3 example in Figure 1, on the left). This particular B3 functions as classifier in the word *ms.wt* (births) (Figure 2, below). Such uncommon features in a B3 sign are also observed in the tomb of Sennedjem (TT 1), a Servant in the Place of Truth who worked at Deir el-Medina contemporaneously with Amenemopet (Haring 2006: § 21, p. 36, 161). Haring suggests the diagonal lines projecting from the top of the woman's head may denote hair or ribbons. This head attribute similarly appears among cursive hieroglyphs e.g. <https://aku-pal.uni-mainz.de/signs/52673> as well as in hieratic, where the head projection takes the form of a long drooping extension e.g. <https://aku-pal.uni-mainz.de/signs/3004>, which describes the hairstyle as relating specifically to maternity. It is also reminiscent of the hairstyle of a breast-feeding woman seated in a birthing bower as painted on the Deir el-Medina ostracon Louvre E 25333. In addition, a B3 sign which displays a bulging stomach and 'weary' arms is attested in the tomb of Servant in the Place of Truth Irynefer (TT 290), another tomb dating to the early years of Ramesses II, although the projections from the top of the head are lacking in this case (Bruyère and Kuentz 2015: pl. 38 [2]). Further examples of B3 signs with the attributes of two diagonal projections from the crown of the head and 'weary' arms also appear in the early 19th Dynasty tomb at Deir el-Medina of Neferhotep (I) and Nebnefer (TT 6) (Wild and Driaux 2022: p. 26–27, pls. 12–13). However, in contrast to the bulging rendition of the stomach, these instances show the belly as being 'classically' slender and, unusually, with one knee raised, akin to the profile of an A1 (seated man). This B3 profile, carved in stone but whose draft outline would have been painted by a Deir el-Medina *ss-qd*, closely resembles a



B3 hieroglyph which dates much later, to the late 19th Dynasty/early 20th Dynasty royal tomb of Tausert/Setnakht (KV 14) . To what extent this variability of B3 signs at Deir el-Medina reflects differences in handwriting training and styles among members of the two prominent painter families living in the workmen's village during this Dynasty (Menéndez 2023) is a topic under current investigation by the author.

References:

- Haring, B.J.J. 2006. *The tomb of Sennedjem (TT 1) in Deir el-Medina: Palaeography*, Paléographie Hiéroglyphique 2: §21 p. 36, 161. Cairo, Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale.
- Bruyère, B. & Kuentz, C. 2015. *Tombes thébaines, la nécropole de Deir el-Médineh : la tombe de Nakht-Min ; la tombe d'Ari-Néfer* [Nos 291 et 290], 2nd ed.: pl. 38 (2). Cairo, Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale.
- Wild, H. & Driaux, D. 2022. *La Tombe de Néferhotep (I) et Neb-Néfer à Deir el-Médina [No 6] et autres documents les concernant*. Mémoires de l'Ifao 103/1, Vol. I: 26–27, pls. 12–13. Cairo, Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale.
- Menéndez, Gema. 2023. "An Analysis of the Two Families of Painters Employed on the Gang during the Early Nineteenth Dynasty and the Possible Identification of their Artistic Styles." In: *Dispatches from Deir el-Medina*, ed. by B.G. Davies: 125–165. Liverpool, Abercromby Press.



Document: Burial chamber of Royal Scribe Amenemopet (TT 265)

Date: Seti I/early Ramesses II, 19th Dynasty; ca. 1290–1274 BCE

Provenance: *In situ*

Current location: The western necropolis of Deir el-Medina

Object type: Rock-cut wall of burial chamber

Material: Stone wall covered by layers of mud and straw mounds, white plaster and a yellow wash



Hieroglyphic source

MdC: F31\*S29:X1&G43:B3:Z2

Transliteration: *ms.wt*

Translation: births

Location: North wall, Register 2, Column 50