

A Man or a God? Interpreting the First-Person Singular in the Coffin of the Overseer of the Treasury *Wh-htp* (MMA 12.182.132a, b)

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



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
Abstract



In the coffin of *wh-htp* (MMA 12.182.132a, b), the first-person singular is often written with the hieroglyphic sign  (A40). This article argues that this use of the  (A40) is not based on cultural or religious reconceptualization of the deceased, but rather that this variation stems from the stroke patterns of the  (A1) versus the  (A40) when written in the more cursive form of writing of the scribe.

في تابوت وخ-حتب (MMA 12.182.132a, b)، غالبًا ما يُكتب ضمير المتكلم المفرد باستخدام الرمز الهيروغليفي  (A40). تحاول هذه المقالة أن تبرهن على أن استخدام الرمز  (A40) لا يستند إلى إعادة التصور الثقافي أو الديني للمتوفى، بل إن هذا الاختلاف ينبع من شكل الكتابة النمطي للرمز  (A1) مقابل  (A40) عند استخدام الكاتب لأسلوب يميل إلى الكتابة المتصلة (المشبكة).

Keywords

hieratogram, Coffin Texts, classifier, First-person singular, scribal influence

In the *Coffin Texts*, the first-person singular can be written in multiple ways when it occurs in the *personal texts*.¹ In most supports,² the scribes use the sign  (A1)³ as one would expect,⁴ for example in the coffin of *sn* (BME EA 30841),⁵ the coffin of *msht* (Cairo CG 28118),⁶ or the coffin of *ikr* (Turin S. 15744).⁷ As pointed out by Schenkel,⁸ alternative strategies for writing the first-person singular⁹ were employed by the scribes of the *Coffin Texts* as well. For example, in some

of the *Coffin Text* material, the first-person singular in the *personal texts* was changed to the third-person singular by using the name of the owner.¹⁰ In others, the scribe did not use human hieroglyphs, but rather used  (M17)¹¹ or  (Z1)¹² or a combination of the two.¹³

There are two other variants of writing the first-person singular attested in the corpus of the *Coffin Texts*. One occurs in Deir el-Bersha, and the other occurs in Meir. In Deir el-Bersha, specifically in the coffins¹⁴ that are dated to the reign of Amenemhat II to Sesostri III, the first-person

¹ Hays 2012: 11.

² In this article, ‘support’ refers to any object carrying texts. For example, coffins, papyri or tombs.

³ Hieroglyphic sign numbers in this article are based on those of Gardiner 1957: 442–543. See also grapheme A0010 (AKU-PAL 2024 <<https://aku-pal.uni-mainz.de/graphemes/1>> (accessed 22.02.2024)).

⁴ Goldwasser and Grinevald 2012: 26–28; Lincke and Kammerzell 2012: 62–63.

⁵ Sigla B4L, see <https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/Y_EA30841> (accessed 22.02.2024). The sigla used in this article are based on those of de Buck, see CT I–VII.

⁶ Sigla S1C.

⁷ Sigla G1T.

⁸ Schenkel 1996: 122–127.

⁹ Either the independent pronoun, dependent pronoun, suffix pronoun or the first-person singular stative ending.

¹⁰ For example B2Bo; B3Bo; B4Bo.

¹¹ See grapheme L0210 (AKU-PAL 2024 <<https://aku-pal.uni-mainz.de/graphemes/368>> (accessed 22.02.2024)).

¹² See grapheme Y0010 (AKU-PAL 2024 <<https://aku-pal.uni-mainz.de/graphemes/739>> (accessed 22.02.2024)).

¹³ For example, Sq1C; Sq7C; M1C; M54C.

¹⁴ For example, B1Be; B1C; B5C; B7C; B9C; B10C; B12C; B15C; B17C; B1L; B2L; B1P; B1Y.

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can be written using the sign 𓂏 (A50).¹⁵ As this sign is used as a classifier of the name of the owner as well, it is not surprising to observe the development of the function of 𓂏 (A50) from a classifier of the name of the owner to a classifier of the first-person singular referring to the deceased. Because all the owners of coffins decorated with *Coffin Texts* would be high-level elites,¹⁶ the use of the 𓂏 (A50) – which represents a noble or revered person seated on a chair¹⁷ – can be considered intentional, specifying the noble status of the deceased, even when referred to in the first-person singular.¹⁸

The variant pattern attested in Meir replaces the 𓂏 (A1) with 𓂏 (A40)¹⁹ for the first-person singular in the *Coffin Texts*. To my knowledge, this occurs in only one support, the coffin of the overseer of the treasury (*im.y-r-htn.t*) *wh-htp*.²⁰ The coffin from Meir²¹ with the sigla M1NY²² is dated to the reign of Amenemhat II.²³ This coffin has both *Pyramid Texts*²⁴ and *Coffin Texts*²⁵ as part of the internal decoration. These texts are written in cursive hieroglyphs, primarily of Fischer type 3a,²⁶ which is closer to hieroglyphic script than hieratic script. In this article, only two spells are of any interest, CT spells 335 and 405, because the first-person singular is only used there; there are no attestations of the first-person singular²⁷ in the other texts from the coffin.²⁸ For the layout of the internal decoration see figure 1.

Because the strategy of using 𓂏 (A40) for the first-person singular only occurs in one coffin, one wonders why this happened. In the New Kingdom and later, the use of the

𓂏 (A40) for the first-person singular is well attested,²⁹ but only when referring to the king or a god. Since *wh-htp* is ‘only’ an overseer of the treasury, the use of 𓂏 (A40) based on cultural or religious grounds is harder to defend. That said, during the Old Kingdom, the 𓂏 (A40) is used for figures of the realm of the dead or human figures.³⁰ Thus, if one considers the deceased *wh-htp* an Osiris, and the fact that *wh-htp* is already dead when he is placed in his coffin, one could argue that this could be the basis on which 𓂏 (A40) is used in the first-person singular.

Instead, I would suggest that the religious interpretation for the variation in the first-person singular represents a less likely scenario in the case of this coffin. One of the first issues in considering the intentional use of 𓂏 (A40) by the scribe based on religious grounds is that the use of 𓂏 is not consistent in the texts, but sporadic. In CT spell 335 𓂏 (A40) is used in the majority of cases for the first-person singular. However, for the suffix pronoun *-i*, two out of the 33 attestations use 𓂏 (A1) instead of 𓂏 (A40).³¹ The independent pronoun *ink*, which occurs eleven times, has two cases with 𓂏 (A1),³² seven attestations with 𓂏 (A40), and two cases without any classifier.³³ The dependent pronoun *wi* has four attestations, two with 𓂏 (A1).³⁴ The first-person stative ending *.kwi* is attested five times, of which four are classified with 𓂏 (A40)³⁵ and one without a classifier.³⁶ Beyond the first person singular, in other lemmas like *rh.yt* and *rmf.w*, the classifiers were 𓂏 (A1) beside 𓂏 (B1),³⁷ without changing the 𓂏 (A1) to 𓂏 (A40).³⁸

The name of the owner has a human hieroglyph as classifier only in eight of the twenty attestations in CT spell 335. In six of these cases, the name of the owner is classified by

¹⁵ See grapheme A0890 (AKU-PAL 2024 <<https://aku-pal.uni-mainz.de/graphemes/29>> (accessed 22.02.2024)).

¹⁶ Willems 2014: 158–165.

¹⁷ See as well in the logographic function of the signs when used for *špsi* (to be noble). See Sign TSL_1_794 <<https://thotsignlist.org/mysign?id=794>> in: *Thot Sign List* <<http://thotsignlist.org>>, edited by Université de Liège and Berlin-Brandenburgische Akademie der Wissenschaften (accessed 27.02.2024).

¹⁸ Due to the use of the sign in *ink*, *wi* and the stative ending, it cannot be considered the logogram for *šps*.

¹⁹ See grapheme A0750 (AKU-PAL 2024 <<https://aku-pal.uni-mainz.de/graphemes/2>> (accessed 22.02.2024)).

²⁰ MMA 12.182.132a, b, Metropolitan Museum of Art, <<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/546303>> (accessed 05.12.2023).

²¹ Supposedly from tomb A3, see Kamal 1912: 108–110; PM IV: 249; Lapp 1993: 286–287, who added a question mark.

²² Following CT IV: xi and Willems 2014: 268–269.

²³ Based on Willems 1988: 98–99.

²⁴ PT 52–53a (head); PT 72–100 (back); PT 58c, 59a, 59c, 59d (front). See Lesko 1979: 71.

²⁵ CT spell 925 (head); CT spell 924 (two versions, one on the foot and one on the back); CT spell 335 (lid); CT spell 405 (bottom). See Lesko 1979: 71.

²⁶ Fischer 1976: 41.

²⁷ With the exception of two reconstructed first-person statives in PT 82,a and PT 82,b.

²⁸ Note that the name *wh-htp* does occur in the other texts attested on the coffin, but that the name is structurally without a classifier, except for one case in the ornamental hieroglyphic texts.

²⁹ Function *Classifier* with value ‘first-person singular’ of Sign TSL_1_631 <<http://thotsignlist.org/mysign?id=631>> in: *Thot Sign List* <<http://thotsignlist.org>>, edited by Université de Liège and Berlin-Brandenburgische Akademie der Wissenschaften (accessed 27.02.2024).

³⁰ Shalomi-Hen 2006: 133.

³¹ Both attested in CT IV,219,b. Note that there is one case (CT IV,221,a) where 𓂏 (B1) was used instead. For the overlap between 𓂏 (A40) and 𓂏 (B1), see Shalomi-Hen 2008: 183. Note that this occurs often in other lemmas as well, for example CT IV,221,a (*itm.w*); CT IV,227,a (*it*); CT IV,301,b (*nb-r-dr*); CT IV,318,a (*r*). I could not locate any case where the 𓂏 (A40) was replaced by 𓂏 (A1), which suggest that the variation only occurred in one direction.

³² CT IV,199,a and CT IV,203,c.

³³ CT IV,185,b and CT IV,193,a. Both cases occur with the form *nnk*.

³⁴ CT IV,303,a and CT IV,312,b.

³⁵ CT IV,187,a; CT IV,193,a; CT IV,197,a; CT IV,295,e.

³⁶ CT IV,306,b.

³⁷ CT IV,213,b; CT IV,313,b; CT IV,319,e.

³⁸ It is hard to say with certainty that compounds like *im.yw-ht* (CT IV, 257, a) were intentionally written with 𓂏 (A40) in M1NY, as other witnesses (M7C, T3Be) used 𓂏 (A1) as the classifier for *im.yw-ht*. Most entities mentioned in the *Coffin Texts* could be argued to be divinities, so the use of 𓂏 (A40) would not be unexpected.

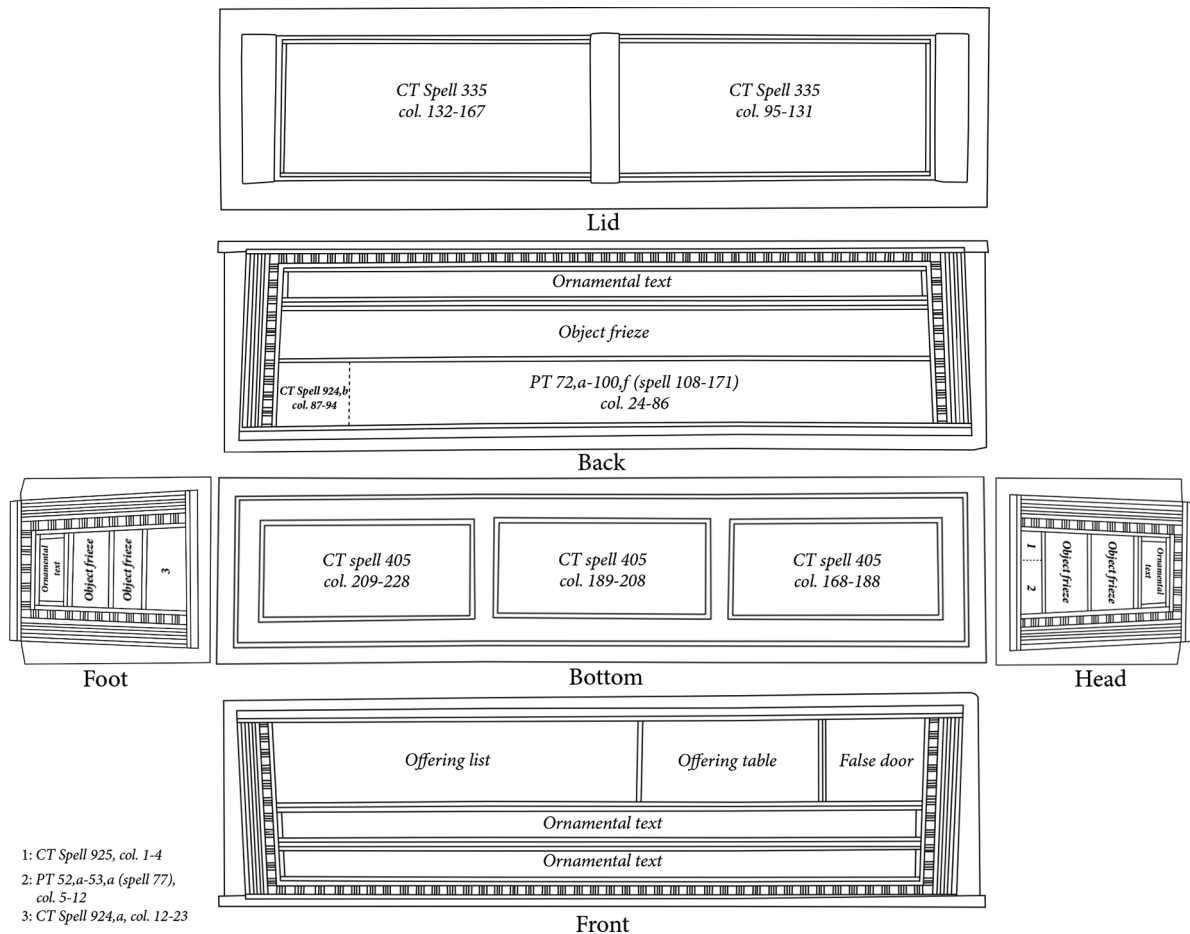


Fig. 1 The internal decoration layout of MINY, column numbers are based on those of de Buck (drawing: author).

𓄿 (A40).³⁹ In one case the name is classified by 𓄿 (B1),⁴⁰ but the most interesting instance occurs in the first column of CT spell 335, where the rare sign 𓄿⁴¹ is used, a seated figure that looks similar to 𓄿 (A40), but with a short straight beard. This sign with a short straight beard occurs one more time as a polychrome sign in the coffin, as a classifier of the name of the owner.⁴² The use of the short beard instead of the long and curved beard with this sign shows that the sign should be interpreted as distinct from 𓄿 (A40), reflecting a figure of noble rank, rather than divine. In general, there are four types of beards used in the hieroglyphic script:⁴³ short and straight (noble); long and straight (king); long and curved (god); and bushy beard (foreigner). That the scribe chose here to use a figure with a short and straight

beard 𓄿⁴⁴ over the 𓄿 (A40) suggests that the scribe understood that *wh-ḥtp* is a noble, not a god.

In CT spell 405, there is a higher use of the 𓄿 (A1) in comparison to 𓄿 (A40), with both signs used nearly at the same rate. This calculation is based on the visible attestations, as CT spell 405 occurs on the bottom of the coffin (see fig. 1), and is poorly preserved.⁴⁵ So only visible cases of either 𓄿 or 𓄿 are cited, instead of reconstructions based on M1C.⁴⁶ In this spell, there are nine attestations of 𓄿 (A1) used as a classifier for the first-person singular suffix pronoun *=i*.⁴⁷ There are eleven visible attestations of the 𓄿 (A40) used for the first-person singular, with seven attestations of

³⁹ CT IV,247,a; CT IV,257,b; CT IV,305,b; CT IV,310,b; CT IV,324,c; CT IV,326,n.

⁴⁰ See grapheme B0010 (AKU-PAL 2024 <<https://aku-pal.uni-mainz.de/graphemes/58>> (accessed 22.02.2024)).

⁴¹ CT IV,185,a.

⁴² Front, interior, second band of ornamental text, see the images available at <<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/546303>> (accessed 06.12.2023). Note that this is the only instance of the name *wh-ḥtp* having a humanoid hieroglyph as classifier in the ornamental texts of the coffin, as habitually the name *wh-ḥtp* is not classified in the ornamental texts.



⁴³ Werning 2021.





⁴⁴ Sign TSL_1_7146 <<https://thotsignlist.org/mysign?id=7146>> in: *Thot Sign List* <<http://thotsignlist.org>>, edited by Université de Liège and Berlin-Brandenburgische Akademie der Wissenschaften (accessed 27.02.2024).






⁴⁵ Thus it is possible that the rate might not have been the same when the text was added to the coffin.





⁴⁶ The parallel version of this spell in the corpus of the *Coffin Texts*. Most of the text visible in MINY was verified with an image. However, everything that was visible for de Buck (see CT V,200,e–CT V,208,o) was used here, as I could make out less in the images than de Buck could.


⁴⁷ CT V,200,f; CT V,200,g; CT V,200,h; CT V,201,c; CT V,201,d; CT V,201,f; CT V,203,b; CT V,206,k; CT V,207,d




Table 1. Number of attestations of  (A1),  (A40) used for the first-person and the name *wh-htp* in CT spell 335 and 405.

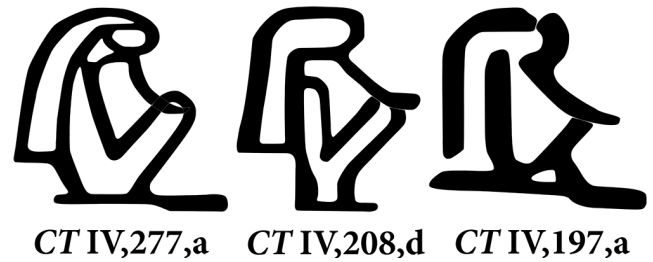

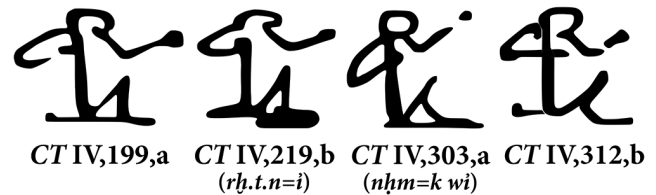
	CT spell 335				CT spell 405			
	 (A1)	 (A40)	Other	None	 (A1)	 (A40)	Other	None
Independent pronoun (<i>ink</i>)	2	7	-	2	-	-	-	-
Dependent pronoun (<i>wi</i>)	2	2	-	-	-	-	-	-
Suffix pronoun (<i>=i</i>)	2	30	-	1	9	7	-	-
Stative ending (<i>.kwī</i>)	-	4	-	1	-	4	-	-
Classifier name (<i>wh-htp</i>)	-	6	2	12	-	-	-	3
Total:	6	49	2	16	9	11	-	3




the suffix pronoun *=i*,⁴⁸ and four attestations of the use of  in the first-person singular stative ending.⁴⁹ Interestingly, in this spell, the use of  (A1) over  (A40) occurs primarily at the start of the spell, where the use of  (A40) over  (A1) becomes more prevalent towards the end. The few barely visible attestations of the name of the owner⁵⁰ do not seem to have a classifier.


In the two spells, CT 335 and CT 405, there is a clear variety between the use of  (A1) and  (A40). Such evidence would not yet discredit the suggestion that there is a religious reason for the use of  (A40) in the first-person singular. For example, the few cases of  (A1) in CT spell 335 could be easily dismissed as random variation. However, with the near-equal distribution of the two signs in CT spell 405, it would be harder to consider this a random variation.





As an alternative, I suggest looking at the hieratograms⁵¹ used in the coffin. The type of cursive script used in this coffin is Fischer type 3a, varying from a script that is almost hieroglyphic to a more cursive script. For example, there are in general three types of  (A40), with decreasing levels of detail (see fig. 2).

In comparison to other coffins from Meir from the same period of M1NY the scribe(s)⁵² here liked to make the beard long and clip over the knee. When compared to M3C,⁵³ the  (A40) is written with a straighter beard with a less forward curve, except for the tip of the beard: .⁵⁴ In the coffin of *wh-htp*, the hieratograms should be read as  (A40), especially



**Fig. 2** Different cursive types of  (A40) in M1NY (drawing: author).**Fig. 3** Varied hieratograms of  (A1) from M1NY (drawing: author).

with the forms  and . Even so, I would argue that the use of  (A40) does not stem from a religious reinterpretation of the status of the deceased, but rather it represents a variation that occurred through the script.

The shape of the  (A1) in M1NY varies, but the attestations carry a similar shape structure between the different hieratograms (fig. 3).

As was the case with the shapes of  (A40), there is no doubt that  (A1) should be read here. Note that the scribe(s) used a more elaborate style of cursive to write  (A1), which included the head visualized as well.⁵⁵ Nonetheless, there are some features of the drawing style of the hieratograms that could allow for some uncertainties. In M1NY, the head of the man is rarely a fully closed circle, and the front arm is always connected to the head, exactly in the place where one would expect a beard to occur. In most cases the back arm slightly crosses the vertical line of the back. However, the back arm could be interpreted to be hair or a wig as well, since the connection of the head to the back is only made through the arm. Thus, I would argue that both arms could suggest body parts other than those that are intended here. If the legs of the  (A1) are then

⁴⁸ CT V,201,i; CT V,204,b; CT V,204,c; CT V,204,g; CT V,204,k; CT V,205,b.

⁴⁹ CT V,203,b; CT V,204,b; CT V,204,i; CT V,204,k. Note that there are some cases with some doubt. For example CT V,202,a, where the  (A40) could be either the suffix pronoun in *nb=i*, or a classifier of *nb* (the parallel text of M1C does not suggest reading a suffix pronoun) or CT V,203,a, where the  group should either be read as the particle and suffix pronoun *iw=i*, or as phonetic complements and classifier of the group *nb-im3h.w*.

⁵⁰ CT V,202,h; CT V,202,k; CT V,203,a. The other attestations of the name I was not able to verify with the available images (see CT V,202,d; CT V,203,j; CT V,204,a; CT V,206,j; CT V,208,o).

⁵¹ See Verhoeven 2001.

⁵² Even though the level of detail in the cursive signs varies across the texts, I do believe that the texts were written by a single hand, or two at the most. Note that I was not able to do a full paleographic study of this coffin to verify the number of hands.

⁵³ Published in Meyer-Dietrich 2006.

⁵⁴ CT V,120,b (*hr*). All the hieratograms were drawn by the author.

⁵⁵ See Ali 2001: 14–15, 20.

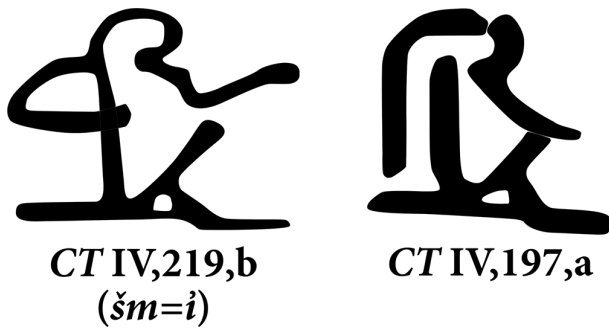
















Fig. 4 Comparison between the  (A1) and the most cursive  (A40) in MINY (drawing: author).

compared to the most cursive form of the  (A40), they are quite similar (see fig. 4).

I would suggest that in the more cursive handwriting of the scribe(s), it is theoretically possible to confuse the signs due to shared similar features. It needs to be noted that in these examples, the start of the line which creates the head occurs in different places between the two signs, with an inversed ‘c’ shape for  (A40) starting at the top of the head.⁵⁶ In the same vein, the back arm starts at a different height than the wig. Nonetheless, I would argue that the general movements needed to draw the two signs are similar, even though their starting position and ending position might vary. This is illustrated by the reconstructed stroke pattern in figure 5.⁵⁷

In figure 5, the dotted line shows the main difference between  (A1) and  (A40) in the movements the scribe had to make to create the back arm of the , as it curves forwards where the wig of the  goes straight down. For the remainder of either sign, the movements made by the scribe are the same, even though the points where the lines begin and end vary between the two signs. Thus, if the forward line of the back arm is poorly made, it becomes easier to confuse the two signs.

How then would the overlap between the signs occur, even though there is a clear distinction between the  (A1) and  (A40) in the coffin? Based on the available hieratograms from the coffin, especially with  and , the  (A1) and  (A40) signs cannot be interchanged. I would suggest that the overlap occurred in the process of transmission from the ‘vorlage’ to the coffin. Due to the high number of different mortuary texts available for the decoration of the coffins, there was likely a library which collected all the texts, presumably on papyri. It would be unlikely that the scribe would take these papyrus scrolls from the library to the workshop to copy the text onto the coffin. Instead, I would suggest that a text was written on an intermediate medium like an ostraca before adding the text to

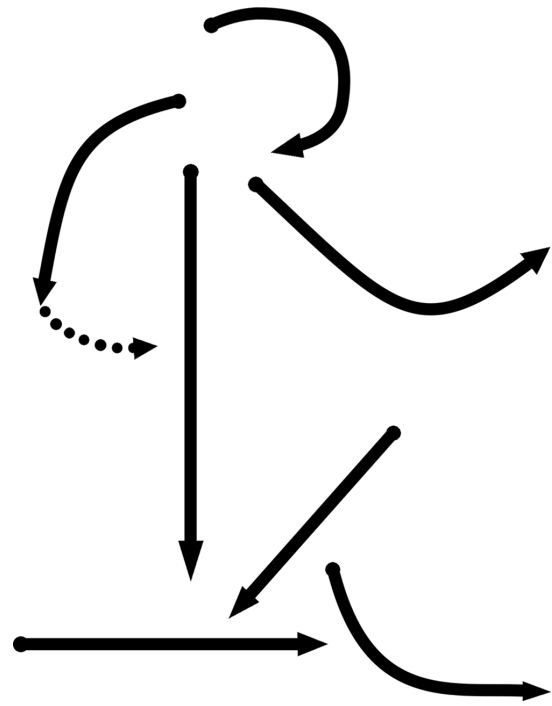








Fig. 5 Shared stroke pattern of  (A1) and  (A40) (drawing: author).

the coffin.⁵⁸ As this would not reflect the final product, it seems likely that the scribe would use a more cursive script than in the final product, for the sake of speed and efficiency. This simplification of the script for an intermediate medium can be seen later in the New Kingdom as well, where ostraca with draft texts for the ‘duties of the vizier’ have been found.⁵⁹ These ostraca use a cursive script for the draft of a text written in hieroglyphs on the wall.

Thus, assuming that such an intermediate medium existed for this coffin, it is possible that the scribe used a quick cursive script. In this quick script, the difference between the back arm and the wig and the front arm and the beard could have been minimal. This would make the interchange between the  (A1) and  (A40) more likely. This interchange could then be responsible for the suggested reconceptualization of the first-person singular from a man to a divinity.

In the case of the coffin of *wh-htp*, it could be argued that there is no ancient reconceptualization based on the idea that the deceased was divine, as an Osiris. The use of the  (A40) instead of the  (A1) in the first-person singular is not structural, especially in CT spell 405. Since it is the only coffin in the corpus of the *Coffin Texts* where the first-person singular is written with the  (A40), the suggestion of a religious reconceptualization of the status of the

⁵⁶ Note that in the  A40 of fig. 4, the head and beard consist of two strokes, rather than a single inversed ‘s’ shaped movement for the head and the beard.

⁵⁷ The images available to me were not sufficient to be certain about the stroke sequence.

⁵⁸ Moreover, as shown in Grotenhuis 2023: 218–220, the transmission of *Coffin Texts* could have an oral stage, which I expect to occur when the scribe copied the ‘vorlage’ papyrus to the intermediate medium, by being read out by someone in the library, if an oral method of transmission was used at all.

⁵⁹ Tallet 2005; Tallet 2010.

deceased would be difficult to support, even before the lack of the structural use of 𓆎 (A40) is addressed. Instead, the route of interchangeability between the 𓆎 (A1) and 𓆎 (A40) in the more simplified cursive script seems more likely. The stroke pattern used by the scribe is remarkably similar between the two, with the variation primarily visible in the arms/wig and beard. If an intermediate medium, written in a quick cursive hand did exist at some point, it might have been the origin of the variation. It cannot be doubted that the 𓆎 (A1) and 𓆎 (A40) on the coffin itself are two distinct signs. Thus, this variation had to have happened during the process of transmission. Even though the final result of this variation seems like an ancient reconceptualization of the text, I would argue that it was not necessarily an intentional variation based on cultural or religious reasons.

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