

Offering formula revisited

Eva Traunmüller

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Table of contents

1	The offering formula and its translations.....	3
1.1	First part – a kind of introduction.....	3
1.2	Second part – the <i>Gnadenbitten</i> (requests for blessings)	8
2	An alternative translation of the first part.....	10
3	Discussion	13

Tables

Tab. 1:	Selection of previous translations.....	4
Tab. 2:	Own translations.....	11

Figure

Fig. 1:	Stele of Maati.....	10
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List of abbreviations

AnAe	Analecta Aegyptiaca (Copenhagen)
ASAE	Annales du service des antiquités de l'Égypte (Cairo)
BC	Before Christian Era

BdE	Bibliothèque d'Étude (Cairo)
BE	Bibliothèque égyptologique (Paris, Cairo)
GM	Göttinger Miszellen
GOD	Placeholder for a god's name that may appear in the offering formula
JEA	The Journal of Egyptian Archeology
JNES	Journal of Near Eastern Studies
LingAeg	Lingua Aegyptia. Journal of Egyptian Language Studies (Göttingen)
MDAIK	Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts, Abteilung Kairo
MMA	The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York
NN	Placeholder for the name of the deceased
PSBA	Proceedings of the Society of Biblical Archaeology (London)
RT	Recueil de travaux relatifs à la philologie et à l'archéologie égyptiennes et assyriennes
SAK	Studien zur altägyptischen Kultur (Hamburg)
SDAIK	Sonderschrift des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts, Abteilung Kairo
SPHX	Sphinx: revue critique embrassant le domaine entier de l'égyptologie
Urk.	Urkunden (documents) = Kurt Sethe, <i>Urkunden des Ägyptischen Altertums</i> , Vol. I–VIII (Berlin and Leipzig, 1903–1957).
UGAÄ	Untersuchungen zur Geschichte und Altertumskunde Ägyptens
Wb	Wörterbuch (dictionary) = Adolf Erman and Hermann Grapow, <i>Wörterbuch der ägyptischen Sprache</i> , Vol. I–VII, Berlin 1897–1961 (unchanged reprint 1971)
ZÄS	Zeitschrift für Ägyptische Schrift und Altertumskunde
ZDMG	Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft (Leipzig/Wiesbaden)

1 The offering formula and its translations


The offering formula is a fascinating piece of ancient Egyptian textual history. It was used over roughly 2500 years of pharaonic history for inscriptions in the tombs of the elite (on tomb walls including pyramid texts, architraves, false doors, tablets, steles, coffins, and rarely statue bases). The term "formula" is misleading in that the wording can vary greatly. In terms of content, it describes a sacrificial practice in which the king and/or deities play a role, and which ultimately results in a series of blessings and gifts for the deceased. The offering formula can be roughly divided into two parts.

1.1 First part – a kind of introduction

From the late Old Kingdom onwards, the first part of the offering formula usually consists of two subformulas, the king's formula and a god's formula. It is astonishing how varied the translation suggestions for this phrase can be, and thus also the views on the sacrificial practice behind it. Most scholars assumed that the word for "king" and the god's name were placed at the beginning of their respective subformulas out of respect (honorific transposition). Often a more or less arbitrary rearrangement of the hieroglyphic sequence was accepted to support a translation.

Tab. 1: Selection of previous translations¹

	Hieroglyphic sequence	Translation ²	Scholars ³
A	njswt ḥtp dj (GOD ḥtp dj) or njswt dj ḥtp (GOD dj ḥtp) ⁴	A royal prayer	J. Lauth, ⁵ L. Stern, ⁶
		The king's offering/A gift of grace from the king/The royal gift of an offering table	S. Curto, ⁷ H. Brugsch, ⁸ L. Stern ⁹
		The king grants an offering./The king grants an offering table./The king grants alimentation.	H. Brugsch, ¹⁰ G. Maspero, ¹¹ W. Barta ¹²
		(As) the king granted offerings to GOD, so may GOD (in his turn) grant offerings (to the deceased).	G. A. Wainwright ¹³
		Give an offering (to) the king (and an offering [to] GOD)!	W. M. F. Petrie ¹⁴

¹ Please note: In Austria, the common transcription of  is (r)dj, in many other countries (r)dj. The hieroglyph was used for dj, rdj, and the imperative jmj ("give"). GOD stands for any god or goddess that can be mentioned in the offering formula (Anubis, Osiris, Wepwawet, Geb, Amen-Re, Ptah, Khnum, Hathor, Bastet, Heket and others). Gods and goddesses were always mentioned with epithets.

² The translations of German or French authors were further translated by me into English.

³ This list is by no means exhaustive.

⁴ The second hieroglyphic sequence is mainly found in columns. From the late Middle Kingdom onwards it was also preferred in lines (W. Barta, *Aufbau und Bedeutung der altägyptischen Opferformel* [Glueckstadt, 1968], 223).

⁵ J. Lauth, "Der Hohepriester und Oberbaumeister Bokenchons, ein Zeitgenosse Mosis, in der königlichen Glyptothek zu München", *ZDMG* 17 (1863), 545.

⁶ L. Stern, "Die bilingue Stele des Châhap im ägyptischen Museum zu Berlin", *ZÄS* 22 (1884), 105.

⁷ S. Curto, "L'espressione ,prj-ḥrw' nell'Antico Regno", *MDAIK* 16 (1958), 60.


⁸ H. Brugsch, *Hieroglyphisch-demotisches Wörterbuch*, Vol. III (Leipzig, 1868), 1007.

⁹ Stern, *ZÄS* 22, 102, 105.

¹⁰ H. Brugsch, *Wörterbuch*, III, 1007–1008; H. Brugsch, *Die biblischen sieben Jahre der Hungersnoth nach dem Wortlaut einer altägyptischen Felseninschrift* (Leipzig, 1891), 98.

¹¹ G. Maspero, *Etudes de mythologie et d'archéologie égyptiennes*, Vol. 6 (BE, Paris, 1912), 366.

¹² Barta, *Aufbau*, 262.

¹³ G. A. Wainwright, "The formula  in the light of mythology", *PSBA* 26 (1904), 103.

¹⁴ W. M. F. Petrie, *Gizeh and Rifeh* (London, 1907), 9. Petrie's translation is apparently meant as a call to the grave visitors. Petrie later abandoned it.

Hieroglyphic sequence	Translation ²	Scholars ³
	May the king give an offering/a favor. (May GOD give an offering/a favor.)	E. A. W. Budge, ¹⁵ J. Sainte Fare Garnot, ¹⁶ G. Farina ¹⁷
	May the king be gracious and give. (May GOD be gracious and give.) The king is gracious and gives. (GOD is gracious and gives.) ¹⁸	K. Sethe, ¹⁹ G. Lefebvre, ²⁰ W. Federn, ²¹ E. Edel, ²² A. Erman & H. Grapow ²³
	The ḥtp-meal for the (deceased) king (which is to be distributed to NN)	G. Rudnitzky ²⁴
	An offering/boon/favor that the king gives	A. H. Gardiner, ²⁵ N. M. Davies & A. H. Gardiner, ²⁶ J. A. Wilson ²⁷
	An offering that the king gives (An offering that GOD gives)	G. Lapp, ²⁸ N. M. Davies & A. H. Gardiner ²⁹
	An offering given by the king (An offering given <u>to</u> GOD)	W. Federn ³⁰
	An offering that the king will/should/may give	H. Satzinger ³¹
	An offering that will be given by the king	W. Barta ³²

¹⁵ E. A. W. Budge, *The liturgy of funeral offerings: The Egyptian texts with English translations* (Books on Egypt and Chaldaea 25; London, 1909), 22.

¹⁶ J. Sainte Fare Garnot, "Les formules funéraires des stèles égyptiennes" in M. Gorce and R. Mortier (eds), *Histoire générale des religions*, Vol. I (London, 1852), 330.

¹⁷ G. Farina, "Sulla preghiera delle offerte", *SPHX* 18 (1914–1915), 76.

¹⁸ ḥtp was considered as the verb for "to be gracious" (Wb III, 189.11–12).

¹⁹ K. Sethe, *Dramatische Texte zu altaegyptischen Mysterienspielen*, (UGAÄ 10/II, Leipzig, 1928), 209.

²⁰ G. Lefebvre, *Grammaire de l'égyptien classique* (BdE 12, Cairo, 1940), 40.

²¹ W. Federn, "Ḥtp (r)dj(w) (n) Jnpw: zum Verständnis der vor-osirianischen Opferformel", *MDAIK* 16 (1958), 123–124.

²² E. Edel, *Altägyptische Grammatik* (Rome, 1955/1964), 267 (§ 564).

²³ Wb III, 186.6, 189.18.

²⁴ G. Rudnitzky, *Die Aussage über das Auge des Horus* (AnAe 5, Copenhagen, 1956), 41.

²⁵ A. H. Gardiner, *Egyptian grammar* (Oxford, 1927), 170.

²⁶ N. M. Davies and A. H. Gardiner, *The tomb of Amenemhet (no. 82)* (London, 1915), 81.

²⁷ J. A. Wilson, "A Group of Sixth Dynasty Inscriptions", *JNES* 13 (1954), 259, 261.

²⁸ G. Lapp, *Eine spezielle Opferformel des Mittleren Reichs* [SAK 14, Hamburg, 1987], 182.

²⁹ Davies and Gardiner, *Tomb of Amenemhet*, 81.

³⁰ Federn, *MDAIK* 16 (1958), 121.

³¹ H. Satzinger, "Beobachtungen zur Opferformel: Theorie und Praxis", *LingAeg* 5 (1997), 179 (the manuscript is available at <https://homepage.univie.ac.at/helmut.satzinger/Texte/OpferformelMs.pdf>. [last accessed on June 25, 2024].

³² Barta, *Aufbau*, 262.

Hieroglyphic sequence	Translation ²	Scholars ³
	An offering/gift of grace that the king has given	S. Curto, ³³ H. Satzinger ³⁴
B njswt ḥtp dj GOD or njswt dj ḥtp GOD	A royal offering/proskynema [to] GOD	M. De Horrak, ³⁵ K. Piehl, ³⁶ A. Baillet ³⁷
	A royal offering, namely the offering of GOD	L. Stern ³⁸
	A royal favor of GOD	H. Goedicke ³⁹
	Grace given to the king and GOD	S. Curto ⁴⁰
	May GOD be royally bountiful and give./May GOD bestow meals royally. /May GOD grant grace royally.	C. W. Goodwin, ⁴¹ J. Dümichen ⁴²
	May GOD bestow-royal-bounty./May GOD give royal grace.	C. W. Goodwin, ⁴³ L. Stern ⁴⁴
	Give royal boon/grace, GOD!	L. Stern ⁴⁵
	The king gives GOD an offering table.	G. Maspero ⁴⁶
	The king gave gifts to GOD.	G. A. Wainwright ⁴⁷
	May GOD give a king's offering (to the Ka).	H. R. Hall ⁴⁸

³³ Curto, *MDAIK* 16, 60.

³⁴ Curto, *MDAIK* 16, 60; Satzinger, *LingAeg* 5, 179, 181.

³⁵ M. De Horrak, "Sur deux stèles de l'Ancien Empire", in F. Chabas, *Mélanges égyptologiques, Troisième Série*, Vol. II (Paris, 1873), 204.

³⁶ K. Piehl, "Petites notes de critique et de philologie", *RT* 1 (1870), 133.

³⁷ A. Baillet, "Monuments des VIII^e-X^e dynasties", *RT* 12 (1890), 52.

³⁸ Stern, *ZÄS* 22, 106.

³⁹ H. Goedicke, "A neglected wisdom text", *JEA* 48 (1962), 25.

⁴⁰ Curto, *MDAIK* 16, 60.

⁴¹ C. W. Goodwin, "Miscellanea", *ZÄS* 14 (1876), 101.

⁴² J. Dümichen, *Der Grabpalast des Patuamenap in der thebanischen Nekropolis*, Vol. 1 (Leipzig, 1884), 6. According to Dümichen, „royally“ means „like a king does“.

⁴³ C. W. Goodwin, "Miscellanea", *ZÄS* 14 (1876), 101. Goodwin interpreted *dj-ḥtp-njswt* as a compound verb meaning "to bestow the royal bounty".

⁴⁴ Stern, *ZÄS* 22, 105.

⁴⁵ Stern, *ZÄS* 22, 105.



⁴⁶ Maspero, *Études* 6, 366–367.

⁴⁷ Wainwright, *PSBA* 26, 103–104. Wainwright suggested this translation for an example from the late period with plural strokes after *ḥtp* and the preposition *ꜥꜣ* before GOD. However, he considered it as a scribe's error (*ibid.*, 104).

⁴⁸ H. R. Hall, "The di-hetep-suten formula, a funeral stela of a man from Gebelén, and other notes", *PSBA* 30 (1908), 6.

Hieroglyphic sequence	Translation ²	Scholars ³
	May the king give an offering (to) GOD.	J. Sainte Fare Garnot ⁴⁹
	May the king grant <i>hetep</i> and may GOD (grant <i>hetep</i>).	F. L. Griffith ⁵⁰
	May the king be gracious and give, may GOD (be gracious and give)./May the king and GOD be gracious and give.	A. Erman & Grapow, ⁵¹ H. Junker, ⁵² H. Goedicke, ⁵³
	A royal offering is given to GOD./ Royal offerings given to GOD	W. Federn, ⁵⁴ H. R. Hall ⁵⁵
	An offering/a favor that the king gives (to) GOD	A. H. Gardiner, ⁵⁶ W. Federn, ⁵⁷ W. Barta ⁵⁸
	An offering/boon that the king and GOD gives	G. Lapp, ⁵⁹ N. M. Davies & A. H. Gardiner ⁶⁰
	An offering that the king has given, and that GOD (has given)/An offering that the king and GOD have given	H. Satzinger ⁶¹

Objections and comments:

- i. Many of the previous translations are sentences without a grammatical predicate. However, one could see it as a kind of heading followed by an imagined colon.
- ii. The translation of  or  (*ḥtp*) as “offering” is obvious due to the image of the hieroglyph (offering mat with bread on it), but is only well documented in


⁴⁹ Sainte Fare Garnot, in Gorce and Mortier (eds), *Histoire générale* I, 330.

⁵⁰ F. L. Griffith, “Stela of Mentuhotep son of Hepy”, *PSBA* 18 (1896), 196. Griffith left *ḥtp* untranslated; he considered three meanings: i) “an offering”, ii) “rest (in the tomb)”, or iii) “grace” (ibid., 197).

⁵¹ Wb III, 186.7.

⁵² H. Junker, *Giza II: Die Mastabas der beginnenden V. Dynastie auf dem Westfriedhof* (Vienna and Leipzig, 1934), 170.

⁵³ H. Goedicke, „Ein Verehrer des Weisen DDFHR aus dem späten Alten Reich“, *ASAE* 55 (1958), 39.

⁵⁴ Federn, *MDAIK* 16, 124. Federn suggested this translation, if  (*rdj*) is explicitly written (stative or passive *sdm=f*).

⁵⁵ Hall, *PSBA* 30, 7. Hall allowed the translation to apply only to cases with the preposition  before GOD.

⁵⁶ Gardiner, *Egyptian grammar*, 170. Gardiner’s translation is probably that most widely accepted.




⁵⁷ Federn, *MDAIK* 16, 124.






⁵⁸ Barta, *Aufbau*, 265.

⁵⁹ G. Lapp, *Die Opferformel des Alten Reichs unter Berücksichtigung einiger späterer Formen* (SDAIK 21, Mainz, 1986), 9.

⁶⁰ Davies and Gardiner, *Tomb of Amenemhet*, 81.

⁶¹ Satzinger, *LingAeg* 5, 181.


compound terms (divine offering, sacrificial food, etc.). Otherwise, mostly  or  ([h̄tp.t](#)), the plural  ([h̄tp.w](#)),⁶² or more specific expressions were used.⁶³

- iii. The *do ut des* translation variant (“An offering that the king gives to GOD so that he may make a funeral offering”)⁶⁴ was suggested in reference to the *Umlaufopfer* (reversion offering⁶⁵). According to this, the king gives a generous offering to the necropolis god in his sanctuary, so that this god in turn presents the deceased with a funeral offering.⁶⁶ However, it is not entirely consistent that this duty of the god is merely possible, desirable or at best future due to the optative formulation of the expected gifts and blessings.
- iv. An act of giving and receiving usually requires the preposition  (**n**), also written , before the recipient (“to [somebody]”). However, the preposition is missing with a few exceptions.⁶⁷ If “to GOD” was actually meant, it would have been easy to use stacked hieroglyphs to include  in a space-saving way, e.g.  (“to Anubis”) or  (“to Osiris”).

1.2 Second part – the *Gnadenbitten* (requests for blessings)

The second part of the offering formula varies greatly in text and length depending on the era and the space available on the architectonic element. It contains the requests for gifts and blessings for the deceased. W. Barta has compiled a total of 314 different requests.⁶⁸ It is striking that wishes for a long life, a careful execution of the burial rituals, a decent



⁶² Farina, *SPHX* 18, 72.

⁶³ E.g.  ([pr.t-hrw](#) “invocation offering” [literally “emergence of the voice”]; it was apparently associated with recitation and/or singing.

⁶⁴ *Do ut des* (Latin for “I give, so that you may give”). Cf. Barta, *Aufbau*, 267–268. Similar in Wainwright, *PSBA* 26, 103.

⁶⁵ The English term “reversion offering” is unfortunate because the offering is not returned, but passed on.

⁶⁶ Barta, *Aufbau*, 274–275; Satzinger, *LingAeg* 5, 181.

⁶⁷ The exceptions mostly concern the Intermediate, Late and Ptolemaic periods. Most scholars simply accepted the missing  (cf. Barta, *Aufbau*, 265; Federn, *MDAIK* 16, 124; H. Junker, *Giza VII*, 207, note 2; Wilson, *JNES* 13, 259). H. R. Hall wrote: “but in view of the fact that in the ancient inscriptions [i.e. offering formulas, E. T.] the  never appears, we must take its Ptolemaic appearance to be an attempt to make sense of an incomprehensible formula” (Hall, *PSBA* 30, 7).

⁶⁸ Barta, *Aufbau*, 234–246.

tomb in the Western Desert, and a safe passage on the way to the otherworld are also included. This means that the offering formula is spoken retroactively, so to say.⁶⁹

In examples from the Old Kingdom, the gifts and blessings are either simply listed, or each item is preceded by an optative verbal form (stative in the 1st or 3rd person or passive *sdm=f* with the particle *tw*) with the recipient being the subject of the form (e.g. "may I/he receive", "may I be given/may he is given"). From the Middle Kingdom, the whole list of requests was introduced with a single *dj=f* (plural *dj=sn*),⁷⁰ with the god(s) previously mentioned in the first part being the subject(s) of the form ("may he/they give"; if considered as an unmarked adverbial clause: "so that he/they may give").⁷¹

Example from the Middle Kingdom:

"May he give a funeral offering (consisting of) a thousand of bread and beer, a thousand of beef and fowl, a thousand of alabaster, aromatic oil and linen, and all the good and pure things that heaven gives, that earth creates, that the Nile brings, by which a god lives; offerings, food and the sweet breath of life for the Ka of NN, ..." (there follow the titles and possibly the lineage of the deceased).

From the 5th dynasty onwards, the entire offering formula may be preceded by an "appeal to the living", in which passers-by are asked to recite the offering formula; sometimes with the somewhat extortionate warning that praise from the town gods and the successful passing on of their offices within the family depended on it; or with the comment that it would be done quickly and effortlessly ("just a breath of the mouth"). In this way, the tomb owner wanted to ensure that the supply of offerings never ceased.

⁶⁹ Barta, *Aufbau*, 277.

⁷⁰ Rarely also *jrj=f* "may he carry out" (Lapp, *Spezielle Opferformel*, 182).

⁷¹ In the New Kingdom, this verbal phrase was rarely formulated in the past tense (*dj.n=f* "as he has given"), or in the 2nd person (*dj=k*, Plural *dj=tn* "may you give"). Cf. Barta, *Aufbau*, 233. If the singular *dj=f* is used despite several gods mentioned in the first part, this is considered as an error (Barta, *Aufbau*, 268).



Fig. 1: Stele of Maati

with offering formula (beginning top right); presumed provenance from el-Tarif (Thebes West), limestone, length 59 cm, height 36.3 cm, depth 8 cm, early 11th dynasty, ca. 2051–2030 BC, MMA 14.2.7.

Photo: MMA (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0).⁷²




2 An alternative translation of the first part

My alternative translation of the first part of the offering formula is based on the following findings and hypotheses:

- i. The offering formula is optimized for use as a design element. Therefore, abbreviated spellings and ideograms are used.
- ii. The first part is a respectful presentation of the king and, if applicable, the necropolis god(s) as acting persons, whereby they receive attributes (appositions):⁷³

⁷² <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/544005> (last accessed on May 25, 2024).

⁷³ The king's hieroglyph is not placed in front out of respect, but grammatically correctly. A substantivized participle that is used as an apposition has the function of a classifier ("Referentenklassifikator" according to D. A. Werning, *Digitale Einführung in die hieroglyphisch-ägyptische Schrift und Sprache* (Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin), §95, <https://wikis.hu-berlin.de/ancientegyptian/%C2%A795> [last accessed on June 25, 2024]).

-  or  stands for the verb *ḥtp* (“to be content”, “to be pleased”⁷⁴) in the form of a tense-neutral⁷⁵ active participle: “the one who is pleased”;⁷⁶ substantivized: “the pleased one”.
 -  stands for the verb *rdj* (“to give”, “to grant”⁷⁷) in the form of a tense-neutral active participle: “the one who gives”, “the one who has given”; substantivized: “the giver [according to previous experience]”.
- iii. The requested gifts and blessings are grammatical objects.⁷⁸
- iv. The recipient is the “dative object”, typically in the phrase *n NN*⁷⁹ (“to NN”) or *n k3 nj NN* (“to the Ka of NN”).

These views led to my following transcriptions⁸⁰ and translations:

Tab. 2: Own translations

Variants according to H. Satzinger ⁸¹	
<i>njswt ḥtp rdj GOD ḥtp rdj</i>	The king, the pleased one, the giver! And GOD, the pleased one, the giver! ⁸²
<i>njswt ḥtp rdj GOD • rdj</i>	The king, the pleased one, the giver! And GOD, the giver!
<i>njswt ḥtp rdj GOD ḥtp •</i>	The king, the pleased one, the giver! And GOD, the pleased one!
<i>njswt ḥtp rdj GOD • •</i>	The king, the pleased one, the giver! And GOD (the pleased one, the giver)!

⁷⁴ Also “to be gracious”, “to rest” (Wb III, 189.8–17, 190.7–10).

⁷⁵ A tense-neutral participle can be translated as a general or perfective statement depending on the context (Werning, online, § 95).

⁷⁶ An Egyptian participle is often better translated as a relative form (Allen, *Middle Egyptian*, 327).

⁷⁷ Also “to prompt” (Wb II, 464.6, 465.1–3, 468.12).

⁷⁸ See page 9.

⁷⁹ NN is the placeholder for the name of the deceased. My personal interpretation of the Ka and the phrase *n k3 nj NN* is outlined in E. Traunmüller, *The ancient Egyptian Ka: A hypothesis* (2023), pp. 12–18, <https://egyptological-hypotheses.org/archive>

⁸⁰ Weak semivowel endings are written out for clarity, even if they are missing in the original (as usual). Epithets of GOD are omitted for reasons of space.

⁸¹ Hieroglyphic sequences according to Satzinger, *LingAeg* 5, 178 (table).

⁸² Here follows the second part: „May he give ... (blessings).”

njswt ḥtp rdj • • •	The king, the pleased one, the giver!
njswt • rdj GOD • •	The king, the giver! And GOD (the giver)!
njswt • rdj • • •	The king, the giver!
njswt ḥtp* • GOD ḥtp •	The king, the pleased one! And GOD, the pleased one!
njswt ḥtp • GOD • •	The king, the pleased one! And GOD (the pleased one)!
njswt ḥtp • • • •	The king, the pleased one!
Special cases	
njswt • rdj Jnpw ḥtp • ⁸³	The king, the giver! And Anubis, the pleased one!
njswt ḥtp rdj GOD ₁ • rdj GOD ₂ • • ⁸⁴	The king, the pleased one, the giver! And GOD ₁ , (the pleased one,) the giver! And GOD ₂ (the pleased one, the giver)!
njswt m ḥtp rdj ⁸⁵	The king (in the role) as the pleased one and giver!
njswt-ḥtp-rdj n GOD ⁸⁶	A 'nisut-hetep-redi' ⁸⁷ of GOD:
njswt-ḥtp-rdj jn GOD ⁸⁸	A 'nisut-hetep-redi' by GOD:

⁸³ However, the hieroglyphic sequence is not always completely clear when the line height is extended ("intertwined" writing of the king's and the god's formula according to Barta, *Aufbau*, 6–7). I suspect that what is meant is that both king and god are content givers.

⁸⁴ Coffin of Meru, Meir, Middle Kingdom (Lapp, *Spezielle Opferformel*, 181).

⁸⁵ Graffito from the Old Kingdom; Other scholars read: m ḥtp-dj-njswt ("as a 'Hetep-di-nisut'" [compound noun]). Cf. Barta, *Aufbau*, 25.




⁸⁶ Wilson, *JNES* 13, 260 (fig. 5, V, VIII), 261.

⁸⁷ The entire ritual of veneration of the dead is addressed with a compound noun (more thoroughly explained on page 15).

⁸⁸ Wilson, *JNES* 13, 260 (fig. 5, III); C. M. Firth and B. G. Gunn, *Excavations at Saqqara: Teti pyramid cemeteries*, Vol. I (Cairo, 1926), 219–223; W. Federn, *MDAIK* 16, 122; Stern, *ZÄS* 22, 106.

**h*tp (in italics): The reading ḥtp.w (stative) is also possible (“The king is pleased!”).

3 Discussion

The first part of the offering formula is a phrase in shortened writing,⁹⁰ although phonetic complements may be present if there is sufficient space or if written in columns.⁹¹ There were also playful spellings in which the king’s hieroglyph is arranged in the center or in flanking positions: , , .⁹² In my opinion, the phrase is a verbal proskynesis towards the king and/or deities. However, it is not an invocation, because then, one would expect the interjection of invocation (j) preceding the phrase and verbal forms in the 2nd person. If the king appears, he is always listed before the god(s), which reflects the order in the sacrificial practice (this world → the otherworld). My translation with two verbal forms is similar to that of K. Sethe and others (“The king is gracious and gives”).⁹³ As shown in Table 2, certain variants of the offering formula are due to the omission of repetitive appositions (ellipsis).

The description of a king or god as “the pleased one” (combined in meaning with “gracious” and “calm”) expresses what an ancient Egyptian official was extremely proud of: the king and the gods are pleased with his life’s work and are paying him honor.⁹⁴ This

⁸⁹ This is the oldest known offering formula from the early 4th dynasty in the tomb of Prince Rahotep and Neferet in Medum (W. M. F. Petrie, *Medum* [London, 1892], Plate XIII). ḥtp.t is clearly a word for “offering” and is used in a direct genitive, with the god’s name placed in the first position out of respect. With an insertion at the destroyed patch, the first column could read: ḥtp.t Inpw rdj.w [n=f jwj=f] m nb jmḥ r jmntj.t “An offering of Anubis is given to him (= Rahotep). May he go as a provided lord on the way to the western ones” (i.e. to the necropolis). The funeral offering comes from Anubis, without the king having previously sacrificed to Anubis (Osiris did not play a role at this time).

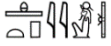

⁹⁰ Comparable to formal phrases after a king’s name, such as ḥtp (dj ḥnh “he who is given life”) or ḥtp (ḥnh(.w) wdj(.w) snb(.w) “may he live, be prosperous and healthy”).






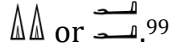

⁹¹ Barta, *Aufbau*, passim.



⁹² Barta, *Aufbau*, 53, 54 (note 1), 55, 108, 140, quoted from H. O. Lange and H. Schäfer, *Grab- und Denksteine des Mittleren Reiches im Museum von Kairo*, Vol. II (Berlin, 1908), 382 (no. 20748); K. A. Kitchen, “Four Stelae in Leicester City Museum”, *Orientalia* 29 (1960), 92; A. Vignieu and A. Ozenfant, *Encyclopédie photographique de l’art: Le Musée du Louvre*, Vol. I (Paris, 1936), plate 68.

⁹³ See notes 19–23 in this article.

⁹⁴ Phrases like “the Pleased One” or „may Allah be pleased with him“ are also used in Islam today.

is the central message that is to be conveyed to the tomb visitors. The wall decoration scenes leave no doubt that the gifts and blessings listed in the second part of the offering formula, though politely formulated as requests, were expected. From the 5th dynasty onwards, officials also liked to emphasize the king's satisfaction in their ideal autobiographical tomb inscriptions.⁹⁵ The fully written expressions  (hṭp.y [masc.]) and  (hṭp.yt [fem.]), usually translated as "the gracious one", are well documented as descriptions for a god and the uraeus serpent, respectively.⁹⁶ In the context of the offering formula, I prefer "the pleased one" for the reasons stated above.

The interpretation of  (rarely  or )⁹⁷ as a tense-neutral active participle of the verb (r)dj ("the giver"; "the one who has given") expresses the previous experience with the generosity of king and gods towards deceased officials. This is the basis for the confidence that the present deceased will also receive his deserved rewards. The abbreviation  for a participle is also found in other text environments, albeit passively (dj.t) with the meaning "that which is given", "gift", "present".⁹⁸ A translation of  as "the one who commonly gives" would require a reduplicated verb stem (dd.j), which is usually written  or .

The preference for the hieroglyphic sequence  over  from the late Middle Kingdom onwards was explained as the result of a change in the offering practice. However, as shown by W. Barta, it was already used in column writing during the Old Kingdom and is therefore more of a calligraphic variation.¹⁰⁰ In any case, it is compatible with my translation, since the appositions are interchangeable in the order. The

⁹⁵ Examples: "I was honored by the king/by every ruler/by the Great God"; "I contented the god with what he loves"; "I was respected by His Majesty"; "His Majesty praised me", and many more. An overview is given by N. Kloth, *Die (auto)biographischen Inschriften des ägyptischen Alten Reiches: Untersuchungen zur Phraseologie und Entwicklung* (SAK 8, Hamburg, 2002).

⁹⁶ Wb III, 194.13–14.

⁹⁷ Barta, *Aufbau*, 44, 54, 196.

⁹⁸ Wb V, 419.7–8.

⁹⁹ Wb II, 464.3. There are isolated cases of offering formulas with dd.j in the first part (Barta, *Aufbau*, 74, 82, 266).

¹⁰⁰ Barta, *Aufbau*, 4–5, 12–13, 223, 261.

hieroglyphic sequence $\text{𓏏} \text{𓏏} \text{𓏏}$ could likewise be translated as an adverbial stative (“The king who gives when he is content!”).

The offering formula was used so frequently that the $\text{𓏏} \text{𓏏} \text{𓏏}$ part became a compound noun for the entire act of veneration of the dead, comparable to when one names a Christian prayer or carol after its first words (e. g. “Our Father”, “Hail Mary”, “Silent Night”).¹⁰¹ With my translation of $\text{𓏏} \text{𓏏} \text{𓏏}$, the ritual would analogously be called the “King-Pleased-Giver”. This usage is also applicable to certain variants of the offering formula; for instance, to the hieroglyphic sequence $\text{𓏏} \text{𓏏} \text{𓏏} \text{𓏏} \text{𓏏}$ ¹⁰² (literally “a ‘King-Pleased-Giver’ of Osiris”), or $\text{𓏏} \text{𓏏} \text{𓏏} \text{𓏏} \text{𓏏}$,¹⁰³ (literally “a ‘King-Pleased-Giver’ by Osiris”).¹⁰⁴ The god performs the ritual.

Only with the spellings 𓏏 or $\text{𓏏} \text{𓏏}$ ($\text{h} \text{t} \text{p} \text{.t}$) or $\text{𓏏} \text{𓏏} \text{𓏏}$ ($\text{h} \text{t} \text{p} \text{.w}$) the word “offering” is warranted.¹⁰⁵ For example, the hieroglyphic sequence $\text{𓏏} \text{𓏏} \text{𓏏}$ may be considered as a direct genitive (reading: $\text{h} \text{t} \text{p} \text{.t-njswt} \text{ rdj.w}$ “A royal offering is given”¹⁰⁶). The sequence $\text{𓏏} \text{𓏏} \text{𓏏} \text{𓏏}$ may be considered as a $\text{s} \text{d} \text{m} = \text{f}$ with respectful precedence of the subject of the form (reading: $(\text{r}) \text{dj} \text{ njswt} \text{ h} \text{t} \text{p} \text{.w}$ “The king gives/gave/may give sacrificial food”),¹⁰⁷ or stative (reading: $\text{njswt} \text{ rdj.w} \text{ h} \text{t} \text{p} \text{.w}$ “The [deceased] king is given sacrificial food”¹⁰⁸).

¹⁰¹ Cf. Barta, *Aufbau*, 19; Hall, *PSBA* 30, 6.

¹⁰² Tomb of princess Intj, Teti pyramid cemetery; Wilson, *JNES* 13, 260 (fig. 5, VIII), 261. Wilson interpreted the 𓏏 as the verb ending of a perfect relative form (Wilson, *JNES* 13, 262); this would mean that something as closely connected as the verb and the subject of the form is completely severed. For W. Barta, the 𓏏 is the preposition of dative (Barta, *GM* 96, 8).

¹⁰³ Firth and Gunn, *Teti pyramid cemeteries*, I, 219–223; Wilson, *JNES* 13, 260 (fig. 5, III); W. Federn, *MDAIK* 16, 122; Stern, *ZÄS* 22, 106.

¹⁰⁴ In such a construction, GOD can have the appositions as „the pleased one“ and „the giver“ in addition to his other epithets (cf. Wilson, *JNES* 13, 260, fig. 5, VIII, lines 1, 2).

¹⁰⁵ Barta, *Aufbau*, 4–6, 12, 139, 140, 210, 211, etc.

¹⁰⁶ rdj as a stative, to be translated passively with a transitive verb. Cf. Federn, *MDAIK* 16, 124; Petrie, *Medum*, Plate XIII (“an offering of Anubis is given”).

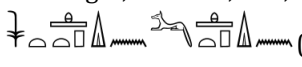
¹⁰⁷ $\text{dj} \text{ njswt}$: emphatic imperfect, “old perfective”, or subjunctive.

¹⁰⁸ For a possible reference to the king’s cult in the offering formula, see Barta, *Aufbau*, 272–277 and Rudnitzky, *Auge des Horus*, 41.

Certain obscure variants of the offering formula could be due to inscrutable abbreviations or to an error on the part of the scribe.¹⁰⁹

To my knowledge, there was no other situation in which the king was referred to as "the giver". But there was hardly any reason for this in the everyday life of the ancient Egyptians. The people produced all goods, and the officials managed and distributed them as they saw fit. In this system, the king was not a giver, but a beneficiary who at most gave rewards to family members and closest confidants.¹¹⁰ All others could hope for intercession from the king, the mediator between the divine and the worldly spheres, only after their earthly death. Thus, the designation "the giver" reflects a general expectation that applies to the afterlife. In contrast, the designation "the pleased one" is not a general characterization, but describes an attitude that king and god take towards the deceased and his individual achievements in life. It would therefore be better not to speak of "the king, the gracious one" (even if the range of meanings of *ḥtp* complies with it), since this implies undeserved benevolence.

After this pithy eulogy, the formula can easily continue with the requests, whether or not grammatically linked to the first part. Thus, the canonical offering formula has a logical sequence – an introduction with awe-inspiring presentation of the content donors, followed by the uncompromisingly forthright expectations and the name of the recipient.

¹⁰⁹ Cf. Griffith, *PSBA* 18, 196–197, Wainwright, *PSBA* 26, 104, and Hall, *PSBA* 30, 7. One example is the hotly debated hieroglyphic sequence  (+ epithets) (Mastaba of Mehu, Saqqara, late 5th dynasty; Wilson, *JNES* 13, plate XVIII).

¹¹⁰ But of course, the king was ultimately responsible "on paper" for ensuring that this economic system ran smoothly. As a rule, the tomb owner himself and his family (primarily the eldest son) had to finance the tomb (P. Janosi, *Giza in der 4. Dynastie: Die Baugeschichte und Belegung einer Nekropole des Alten Reiches*, Vol. 1 [Vienna, 2005], 391; J. Assmann, "Schrift, Tod und Identität: Das Grab als Vorschule der Literatur im alten Ägypten", in J. Assmann, A. Assmann, and C. Hardmeier [eds], *Schrift und Gedächtnis: Archäologie der literarischen Kommunikation* [Munich, 1983], 79; K. Sethe, *Urk. I*, 267.8–13).