

Offering formula revisited

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1 The offering formula and its translations

The offering formula is a fascinating piece of ancient Egyptian textual history. It was used for about 2500 years of pharaonic history for inscriptions in the tombs of the elite (on tomb walls including pyramid texts, architraves, false doors, tablets, stelae, 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.


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1.1 The first part: a kind of introduction

From the late Old Kingdom onwards, the first part of the offering formula usually consists of two sub-formulas, the king's formula and a god's formula. It is surprising how different the proposed translations of this phrase can be, and how different the views on the sacrificial practice behind it can be. Most scholars assumed that the word for “king” and the name of the god were placed at the beginning of their respective sub-formulas out of respect (the so-called honorific transposition). Often a more or less arbitrary rearrangement of the hieroglyphic sequence was accepted to support a translation (Table 1).

Tab. 1: Selection of previous translations²

Translation ³	Scholars ⁴
A) Hieroglyphic sequence: <i>njswt ḥtp dj (GOD ḥtp dj) or njswt dj ḥtp (GOD dj ḥtp)⁵</i>	
A royal prayer	J. Lauth, ⁶ L. Stern, ⁷
The king's offering	S. Curto, ⁸ H. Brugsch, ⁹ L. Stern ¹⁰
A gift of grace from the king	
The royal gift of an offering table	
The king grants an offering.	H. Brugsch, ¹¹ G. Maspero, ¹² W. Barta ¹³
The king grants an offering table.	
The king grants alimentation.	

² Please note: In Austria, the usual transcription of  is (r)dj, in many other countries (r)ḏj. The hieroglyph was used for dj, rdj, and the imperative jmj ("give!"). GOD stands for any god or goddess that can be addressed in the offering formula (Anubis, Osiris, Wepwawet, Geb, Amen-Re, Ptah, Khnum, Hathor, Bastet, Heket and others). Gods and goddesses have always epithets.

³ The translations of German or French authors were further translated into English by me.

⁴ This list is by no means exhaustive.

⁵ The second hieroglyphic sequence is mainly used if the formula is written 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).

⁶ J. Lauth, "Der Hohepriester und Oberbaumeister Bokenchons, ein Zeitgenosse Mosis, in der königlichen Glyptothek zu München", *ZDMG* 17 (1863), 545.

⁷ L. Stern, "Die bilingue Stele des Châhap im ägyptischen Museum zu Berlin", *ZÄS* 22 (1884), 105.

⁸ S. Curto, "L'espressione ,prj-ḥrw' nell'Antico Regno", *MDAIK* 16 (1958), 60.

⁹ H. Brugsch, *Hieroglyphisch-demotisches Wörterbuch*, Vol. III (Leipzig, 1868), 1007.

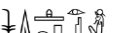
¹⁰ Stern, *ZÄS* 22, 102, 105.

¹¹ H. Brugsch, *Wörterbuch*, III, 1007–1008; H. Brugsch, *Die biblischen sieben Jahre der Hungersnoth nach dem Wortlaut einer altägyptischen Felseninschrift* (Leipzig, 1891), 98.

¹² G. Maspero, *Etudes de mythologie et d'archéologie égyptiennes*, Vol. 6 (BE, Paris, 1912), 366.

¹³ Barta, *Aufbau*, 262.

Translation ³	Scholars ⁴
[As] the king granted offerings to GOD, so may GOD (in his turn) grant offerings [to the deceased].	G. A. Wainwright ¹⁴
Give an offering [to] the king (and an offering [to] GOD)!	W. M. F. Petrie ¹⁵
May the king give an offering/a favor. (May GOD give an offering/a favor.)	E. A. W. Budge, ¹⁶ J. Sainte Fare Garnot, ¹⁷ G. Farina ¹⁸
May the king be gracious and give. (May GOD be gracious and give.) The king is gracious and gives. (GOD is gracious and gives.) ¹⁹	K. Sethe, ²⁰ G. Lefebvre, ²¹ W. Federn, ²² E. Edel, ²³ A. Erman & H. Grapow ²⁴
The <i>hṯp</i> -meal for the (deceased) king (which is to be distributed to NN)	G. Rudnitzky ²⁵
An offering/boon/favor which the king gives	A. H. Gardiner, ²⁶ N. M. Davies & A. H. Gardiner, ²⁷ J. A. Wilson ²⁸
An offering which the king gives (An offering which GOD gives)	G. Lapp, ²⁹ N. M. Davies & A. H. Gardiner ³⁰
An offering given by the king (An offering given <u>to</u> GOD)	W. Federn ³¹
An offering which the king will/should/may give	H. Satzinger ³²

¹⁴ G. A. Wainwright, “The formula  in the light of mythology”, *PSBA* 26 (1904), 103.

¹⁵ 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.

¹⁶ E. A. W. Budge, *The liturgy of funeral offerings: The Egyptian texts with English translations* (Books on Egypt and Chaldaea 25; London, 1909), 22.

¹⁷ 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.

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

¹⁹ *hṯp* was considered to be a verb for “to be gracious” (Wb 3, 189.11–12).

²⁰ K. Sethe, *Dramatische Texte zu altaegyptischen Mysterienspielen*, (UGAÄ 10/II, Leipzig, 1928), 209.

²¹ G. Lefebvre, *Grammaire de l'égyptien classique* (BdE 12, Cairo, 1940), 40.

²² W. Federn, “*Hṯp* (*r*)*dj*(*w*) (*n*) *Jnpw*: zum Verständnis der vor-osirianischen Opferformel”, *MDAIK* 16 (1958), 123–124.

²³ E. Edel, *Altägyptische Grammatik* (Rome, 1955/1964), 267 (§ 564).

²⁴ Wb 3, 186.6, 189.18.

²⁵ G. Rudnitzky, *Die Aussage über das Auge des Horus* (AnAe 5, Copenhagen, 1956), 41.

²⁶ A. H. Gardiner, *Egyptian grammar* (Oxford, 1927), 170.

²⁷ N. M. Davies and A. H. Gardiner, *The tomb of Amenemhet (no. 82)* (London, 1915), 81.

²⁸ J. A. Wilson, “A Group of Sixth Dynasty Inscriptions”, *JNES* 13 (1954), 259, 261.

²⁹ G. Lapp, *Eine spezielle Opferformel des Mittleren Reichs* [SAK 14, Hamburg, 1987], 182.

³⁰ Davies and Gardiner, *Tomb of Amenemhet*, 81.

³¹ Federn, *MDAIK* 16 (1958), 121.

³² 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]).

Translation ³	Scholars ⁴
An offering which will be given by the king	W. Barta ³³
An offering/gift of grace which the king has given	S. Curto, ³⁴ H. Satzinger ³⁵
B) Hieroglyphic sequence: <i>njswt ḥtp dj GOD or njswt dj ḥtp GOD</i> ³⁶	
A royal offering/proskynema [to] GOD	M. De Horrak, ³⁷ K. Piehl, ³⁸ A. Baillet ³⁹
A royal offering, namely the offering of GOD	L. Stern ⁴⁰
A royal favor of GOD	H. Goedicke ⁴¹
Grace given to the king and GOD	S. Curto ⁴²
May GOD be royally bountiful and give. May GOD bestow meals royally. May GOD grant grace royally.	C. W. Goodwin, ⁴³ J. Dümichen ⁴⁴
May GOD bestow-the-royal-bounty ⁴⁵ . May GOD give royal grace.	C. W. Goodwin, ⁴⁶ L. Stern ⁴⁷
Give royal boon/grace, GOD!	L. Stern ⁴⁸
The king gives GOD an offering table.	G. Maspero ⁴⁹
The king gave gifts to GOD.	G. A. Wainwright ⁵⁰

³³ Barta, *Aufbau*, 262.

³⁴ Curto, *MDAIK* 16, 60.

³⁵ Curto, *MDAIK* 16, 60; Satzinger, *LingAeg* 5, 179, 181.

³⁶ The second hieroglyphic sequence is mainly used if the formula is written 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).

³⁷ M. De Horrak, "Sur deux stèles de l'Ancien Empire", in F. Chabas, *Mélanges égyptologiques, Troisième Série*, Vol. II (Paris, 1873), 204.

³⁸ K. Piehl, "Petites notes de critique et de philologie", *RT* 1 (1870), 133.

³⁹ A. Baillet, "Monuments des VIII^e–X^e dynasties", *RT* 12 (1890), 52.

⁴⁰ Stern, *ZÄS* 22, 106.

⁴¹ H. Goedicke, "A neglected wisdom text", *JEA* 48 (1962), 25.

⁴² Curto, *MDAIK* 16, 60.

⁴³ C. W. Goodwin, "Miscellanea", *ZÄS* 14 (1876), 101.

⁴⁴ J. Dümichen, *Der Grabpalast des Patuamenap in der thebanischen Nekropolis*, Vol. 1 (Leipzig, 1884), 6. According to Dümichen, „royally“ means „like a king would do“.

⁴⁵ According to C. W. Goodwin, *dj-ḥtp-njswt* is a compound verb meaning "to bestow the royal bounty".

⁴⁶ C. W. Goodwin, "Miscellanea", *ZÄS* 14 (1876), 101.

⁴⁷ Stern, *ZÄS* 22, 105.



⁴⁸ Stern, *ZÄS* 22, 105.

⁴⁹ Maspero, *Études* 6, 366–367.

⁵⁰ Wainwright, *PSBA* 26, 103–104. Wainwright suggested this translation for a Late Period example with plural strokes after *ḥtp* and the preposition *ꜥꜣ* before GOD. However, he considered it a scribal error

Translation ³	Scholars ⁴
May GOD give a king's offering (to the Ka).	H. R. Hall ⁵¹
May the king give an offering [to] GOD.	J. Sainte Fare Garnot ⁵²
May the king grant <i>hetep</i> and may GOD [grant <i>hetep</i>].	F. L. Griffith ⁵³
May the king be gracious and give, may GOD [be gracious and give].	A. Erman & Grapow, ⁵⁴ H. Junker, ⁵⁵ H. Goedicke, ⁵⁶
May the king and GOD be gracious and give.	
A royal offering is given to GOD.	W. Federn, ⁵⁷ H. R. Hall ⁵⁸
Royal offerings given to GOD	
An offering/a favor which the king gives [to] GOD	A. H. Gardiner, ⁵⁹ W. Federn, ⁶⁰ W. Barta ⁶¹
An offering/boon which the king and GOD give	G. Lapp, ⁶² N. M. Davies & A. H. Gardiner ⁶³
An offering which the king has given, and which GOD [has given]	H. Satzinger ⁶⁴
An offering which the king and GOD have given	

Objections and comments:

- i. Many of the previous translations are sentences without a grammatical predicate. However, it can be seen as a kind of heading followed by an imaginary colon.
- ii. The translation of  or  (*htp*) as “offering” is obvious because of the image of the hieroglyph (offering mat with bread on it), but is only well documented in

(ibid., 104).

⁵¹ H. R. Hall, “The di-hetep-suten formula, a funeral stela of a man from Gebelén, and other notes”, *PSBA* 30 (1908), 6.

⁵² Sainte Fare Garnot, in Gorce and Mortier (eds), *Histoire générale* I, 330.

⁵³ F. L. Griffith, “Stela of Mentuhotep son of Hepy”, *PSBA* 18 (1896), 196. Griffith left *htp* untranslated; he considered three meanings: i) “an offering”, ii) “rest (in the tomb)”, or iii) “grace” (ibid., 197).

⁵⁴ Wb 3, 186.7.

⁵⁵ H. Junker, *Giza II: Die Mastabas der beginnenden V. Dynastie auf dem Westfriedhof* (Vienna and Leipzig, 1934), 170.

⁵⁶ H. Goedicke, „Ein Verehrer des Weisen $\overline{\text{DDFHR}}$ aus dem späten Alten Reich“, *ASAE* 55 (1958), 39.

⁵⁷ Federn, *MDAIK* 16, 124. Federn suggested this translation, if $\overline{\text{rdj}}$ (*rdj*) is written explicitly (stative or passive *sdm=f*).

⁵⁸ Hall, *PSBA* 30, 7. Hall allowed the translation to apply only to cases with the preposition $\overline{\text{w}}$ before GOD.

⁵⁹ Gardiner, *Egyptian grammar*, 170. Gardiner’s translation is probably the most widely accepted.




⁶⁰ Federn, *MDAIK* 16, 124.






⁶¹ Barta, *Aufbau*, 265.

⁶² G. Lapp, *Die Opferformel des Alten Reichs unter Berücksichtigung einiger späterer Formen* (SDAIK 21, Mainz, 1986), 9.

⁶³ Davies and Gardiner, *Tomb of Amenemhet*, 81.

⁶⁴ Satzinger, *LingAeg* 5, 181.


compound terms (divine offering, sacrificial food, etc.). Otherwise,  or  (*htp.t*), the plural  (*htp.w*),⁶⁵ or more specific expressions were mostly used.⁶⁶

- iii. The translation variant *do ut des* (Latin for “I give so that you may give”) in the form of “an offering which the king gives to GOD so that he may make a funeral offering” has been suggested with reference to the *Umlaufopfer* (reversion offering⁶⁷).⁶⁸ According to this, the king makes a generous offering to the god⁶⁹ of the necropolis in his sanctuary, so that he in turn makes a funeral offering to the deceased.⁷⁰ However, it is not entirely consistent that this duty of the god is merely possible, desirable or at best future because of 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 [someone]”). However, with a few exceptions, the preposition is missing.⁷¹ If it had read “to GOD”, 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 The second part: *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 architectural element. It contains the requests for gifts and blessings for the deceased. W. Barta collected a total of 314 different requests.⁷² It is striking that there are also wishes for a long life, a careful performance of the burial rituals, a decent tomb in the Western Desert, and a safe passage on the way to the otherworld. This means that the offering formula is spoken retroactively.⁷³

⁶⁵ Farina, *SPHX* 18, 72.



⁶⁶ E.g.,  (*pr.t-hrw* “invocation offering” [literally “the coming forth of the voice”]; it was apparently associated with recitation and/or singing.

⁶⁷ The English term “reversion offering” is unfortunate because the offering is not returned, but passed on.

⁶⁸ Cf. Barta, *Aufbau*, 267–268. Similar in Wainwright, *PSBA* 26, 103.

⁶⁹ Occasionally a goddess.

⁷⁰ Barta, *Aufbau*, 274–275; Satzinger, *LingAeg* 5, 181.

⁷¹ The exceptions mostly concern the Intermediate, Late and Ptolemaic periods. Most scholars have 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).

⁷² Barta, *Aufbau*, 234–246.

⁷³ Barta, *Aufbau*, 277.

In Old Kingdom examples, 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 be given"). From the Middle Kingdom, the whole list of requests was introduced with a single *dj=f* (plural *dj=sn*),⁷⁴ with the god(s) previously mentioned in the first part of the formula being the subject(s) of the verbal form ("may he/they give"; if considered as an unmarked adverbial clause: "so that he/they may give").⁷⁵

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, ..." (followed by 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 extortive warning that praise from the city 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 would never cease.

⁷⁴ Rarely also *jrj=f* "may he perform" (Lapp, *Spezielle Opferformel*, 182).

⁷⁵ 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 being mentioned in the first part, this is considered as an error (Barta, *Aufbau*, 268).





Fig. 1: Funerary stela of Maati

with offering formula (beginning upper right); probably from el-Tarif (West Thebes), limestone, length 59 cm, height 36.3 cm, depth 8 cm, early 11th Dynasty, 2050–2030 BC, MMA 14.2.7. Photo: MMA (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0).⁷⁶

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 god(s) of the necropolis as acting persons, whereby they are given attributes (appositions).⁷⁷
- iii.  or  stands for the verb *hṭp* (“to be content”, “to be pleased”⁷⁸) in the form of a

⁷⁶ <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/544005> (last accessed on May 25, 2024).

⁷⁷ 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]).

⁷⁸ Also “to be gracious”, “to rest” (Wb 3, 189.8–17, 190.7–10).

tense-neutral⁷⁹ active participle: “the one who is pleased”;⁸⁰ substantivized: “the pleased one”.

- iv. Δ stands for the verb *rdj* (“to give”, “to grant”⁸¹) 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)”.
- v. The requested gifts and blessings are grammatical objects.⁸²
- vi. The recipient is the “dative object”, typically in the phrase *n NN*⁸³ (“to NN”) or *n k3 nj NN* (“to the Ka of NN”).

These views led to the following transcriptions⁸⁴ and translations (Table 2).

Tab. 2: Suggested alternative translations

Variants according to H. Satzinger ⁸⁵	
<i>njswt htp rdj GOD htp rdj</i>	The king, the pleased one, the giver! And GOD, the pleased one, the giver! ⁸⁶
<i>njswt htp rdj GOD • rdj</i>	The king, the pleased one, the giver! And GOD, [the pleased one] the giver!
<i>njswt htp rdj GOD htp •</i>	The king, the pleased one, the giver! And GOD, the pleased one [the giver]!
<i>njswt htp rdj GOD • •</i>	The king, the pleased one, the giver! And GOD [the pleased one, the giver]!
<i>njswt htp rdj • • •</i>	The king, the pleased one, the giver!
<i>njswt • rdj GOD • •</i>	The king, [the pleased one] the giver! And GOD [the pleased one, the giver]!

⁷⁹ A tense-neutral participle can be translated as a general or perfective statement depending on the context (Werning, online, § 95).

⁸⁰ An Egyptian participle is often better translated as a relative form (Allen, *Middle Egyptian*, 327).

⁸¹ Also “to prompt” (Wb 2, 464.6, 465.1–3, 468.12).


⁸² See page 9.

⁸³ 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>

⁸⁴ Weak semivowel endings are written out for clarity, even if they are missing in the original (as usual). Epithets of GOD are omitted due to space limitations.

⁸⁵ Hieroglyphic sequences according to Satzinger, *LingAeg* 5, 178 (table).

⁸⁶ Here follows the second part: „May he give ... (blessings).

<i>njswt • rdj • • •</i>	The king, [the pleased one] the giver!
<i>njswt htp* • GOD htp •</i>	The king, the pleased one [the giver]! And GOD, the pleased one [the giver]!
<i>njswt htp • GOD • •</i>	The king, the pleased one [the giver]! And GOD [the pleased one, the giver]!
<i>njswt htp • • • •</i>	The king, the pleased one [the giver]!
Special cases	
<i>njswt • rdj Jnpw htp •⁸⁷</i>	The king, [the pleased one] the giver! And Anubis, the pleased one [the giver]!
<i>njswt htp rdj GOD₁ • rdj GOD₂ • •⁸⁸</i>	The king, the pleased one, the giver! And GOD ₁ , [the pleased one] the giver! And GOD ₂ [the pleased one, the giver]!
<i>njswt m htp rdj⁸⁹</i>	The king (in the role) as the pleased one and giver!
<i>njswt-htp-rdj n(j) GOD⁹⁰</i>	A ‘ <i>nisut-hetep-redi</i> ’ ⁹¹ of GOD: [...]
<i>njswt-htp-rdj jn GOD⁹²</i>	A ‘ <i>nisut-hetep-redi</i> ’ by GOD: [...]
<i>Jnpw htp.t dj(.w) ⁹³</i>	An offering of Anubis is given [to him?]

* Can also be taken as *htp(.w)* (“The king is pleased!” [stative]).

⁸⁷ However, the hieroglyphic sequence is not always completely clear if 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 the king and the god are pleased givers.

⁸⁸ Coffin of Meru, Meir, Middle Kingdom (Lapp, *Spezielle Opferformel*, 181).

⁸⁹ Graffitto from the Old Kingdom; other scholars read: *m htp-dj-njswt* (“as a ‘*Hetep-di-nisut*’” [compound noun]). Cf. Barta, *Aufbau*, 25.




⁹⁰ Wilson, *JNES* 13, 260 (fig. 5, V, VIII), 261.



⁹¹ The entire ritual of venerating the dead is addressed with a compound noun (explained in more detail on page 12).



⁹² 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.

⁹³ This is the oldest known offering formula from the early 4th Dynasty in the tomb of Prince Rahotep and Neferet at Medum (W. M. F. Petrie, *Medum* [London, 1892], Plate XIII). *htp.t* is clearly a word for “offering” and is used in a direct genitive, with the name of the god placed first out of respect. With an insertion at the destroyed place, the first column could read: *htp.t Jnpw rdj.w [n=f jwj=f] m nb jm³h 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 sacrificed to Anubis before (Osiris did not play a role at this time).

3 Discussion

The first part of the offering formula is a phrase in abbreviated writing,⁹⁴ although phonetic complements may be present if there is enough space or if it is written in columns.⁹⁵ There were also playful spellings in which the king's hieroglyph is placed in the center or in flanking positions: , , .⁹⁶ 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*) before the phrase, and verbal forms in the 2nd person. If the king appears, he is always listed before the god(s), reflecting the order in sacrificial practice (this world → the otherworld). My translation with two verbal forms is similar to that of K. Sethe and other scholars ("The king is gracious and gives").⁹⁷ 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 give him honor.⁹⁸ This is the central message that is to be conveyed to visitors to the tomb. The wall decoration scenes leave no doubt that the gifts and blessings listed in the second part of the offering formula, although politely phrased as requests, were expected. From the 5th Dynasty onwards, officials also liked to emphasize the king's satisfaction in their ideal autobiographical tomb inscriptions.⁹⁹ The fully written expressions  (*htp.y* [masc.]) and  (*htp.yt* [fem.]), usually translated as "the gracious one", are well documented as descriptions of a god and the uraeus serpent, respectively.¹⁰⁰ In the context of the offering formula, I prefer "the pleased one" for the reasons given above.

⁹⁴ Comparable to formal phrases after a king's name, such as  *dj(.w) ḥnh* ("may he be given life") or  (*ḥnh(.w) wdj(.w) snb(.w)* "may he live, be prosperous and healthy").

⁹⁵ Barta, *Aufbau*, passim.

⁹⁶ 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.

⁹⁷ See notes 20–24 in this article.

⁹⁸ Phrases like "the Pleased One" or „May Allah be pleased with him“ are also used in Islam today.

⁹⁹ Examples: "I was honored by the king/by every ruler/by the Great God"; "I pleased 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).

¹⁰⁰ Wb 3, 194.13–14.

The interpretation of Δ (rarely 𓄏 or 𓄏 ¹⁰¹) as the tense-neutral active participle of the verb (*r*)*dj* ("the giver"; "the one who has given") expresses the previous experience of the generosity of the 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 Δ for a participle is also found in other textual settings, albeit passively (*dj.t*) with the meaning "that which is given", "gift", "present".¹⁰² The translation of Δ as "the one who usually gives" would require a reduplicated verb stem (*dd.j*), which is written $\Delta\Delta$ or 𓄏𓄏 .¹⁰³

The preference of the hieroglyphic sequence 𓄏𓄏𓄏 over 𓄏𓄏𓄏 since the late Middle Kingdom has been explained as the result of a change in the offering practice. However, as W. Barta has shown, it was already used in column writing in the Old Kingdom and is therefore rather a calligraphic variant.¹⁰⁴ In any case, it is compatible with my translation, since the appositions are interchangeable in order. The hieroglyphic sequence 𓄏𓄏𓄏 could also be translated as an adverbial stative ("The king who gives when he is content!").

The offering formula was used so frequently that the 𓄏𓄏𓄏 part became a compound noun for the entire act of venerating the dead, comparable to naming a Christian prayer or carol after its first words (e. g., "Our Father", "Hail Mary", "Silent Night").¹⁰⁵ In my translation of 𓄏𓄏𓄏 , the ritual would be called the "King-Pleased-Giver" by analogy. This usage also applies to certain variants of the offering formula; for example, to the hieroglyphic sequence 𓄏𓄏𓄏𓄏𓄏 ¹⁰⁶ (literally "a 'King-Pleased-Giver' of Osiris"), or 𓄏𓄏𓄏𓄏𓄏 ,¹⁰⁷ (literally "a 'King-Pleased-Giver' by Osiris"),¹⁰⁸ which means that the god performs the ritual.

Only with the spellings 𓄏𓄏 or 𓄏𓄏 (*htp.t*) or 𓄏𓄏𓄏𓄏 (*htp.w*) is the translation as "offering"

¹⁰¹ Barta, *Aufbau*, 44, 54, 196.

¹⁰² Wb 5, 419.7–8.

¹⁰³ Wb 2, 464.3. There are isolated cases of offering formulas with *dd.j* in their first parts (Barta, *Aufbau*, 74, 82, 266).



¹⁰⁴ Barta, *Aufbau*, 4–5, 12–13, 223, 261.

¹⁰⁵ Cf. Barta, *Aufbau*, 19; Hall, *PSBA* 30, 6.

¹⁰⁶ Tomb of princess Intj, pyramid cemetery of Teti; Wilson, *JNES* 13, 260 (fig. 5, VIII), 261. Wilson interpreted the 𓄏𓄏𓄏 as the verb ending of a relative form in the perfect tense (Wilson, *JNES* 13, 262). This would mean that something as closely connected as the verb and the subject of the verbal form is completely severed. For W. Barta, the 𓄏𓄏𓄏 is the preposition of the dative (Barta, *GM* 96, 8).

¹⁰⁷ 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.

¹⁰⁸ 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).

justified.¹⁰⁹ For example, the hieroglyphic sequence  can be considered as a direct genitive (reading: *hṭp.t-njswt rdj.w* "A royal offering is given"¹¹⁰). The sequence  can be considered as a *sḏm=f* with respectful precedence of the subject of the form (reading: *(r)dj njswt hṭp.w* "The king gives/gave/may give sacrificial food"),¹¹¹ or as a stative (reading: *njswt rdj.w hṭp.w* "The [deceased] king is given sacrificial food"¹¹²). Certain obscure variants of the offering formula could be due to arcane abbreviations or to an error on the part of the scribe.¹¹³


To my knowledge, there was no other situation in which the king was called "the giver". But there was little reason for this in the daily life of the ancient Egyptians. The king was not a giver but a beneficiary of the ancient Egyptian economy. At most, he gave land, building materials, or honorary gold to family members and closest confidants.¹¹⁴ All others could hope for the intercession of the king, the mediator between the divine and the earthly spheres, only after their earthly deaths. Thus, the designation "the giver" reflects a general expectation. In contrast, the designation "the pleased one" is not a general characterization, but describes an attitude that the king and the god have toward the deceased and his individual accomplishments in life. Therefore, it would be better not to speak of "the king, the gracious one" (even though the range of meanings of *hṭp* allows it), since this implies undeserved benevolence. After this pithy eulogy, the formula can easily continue with the requests, whether or not they are grammatically linked to the first part. Thus, the canonical offering formula has a logical sequence – an introduction with a reverent presentation of the content donors, followed by the uncompromisingly forthright expectations and the name of the recipient.

¹⁰⁹ Barta, *Aufbau*, 4–6, 12, 139, 140, 210, 211, etc.

¹¹⁰ *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").

¹¹¹ *dj njswt*: emphatic imperfect, "old perfective", or subjunctive.

¹¹² For a possible reference to the cult of the king in the offering formula, see Barta, *Aufbau*, 272–277 and Rudnitzky, *Auge des Horus*, 41.

¹¹³ Cf. Griffith, *PSBA* 18, 196–197, Wainwright, *PSBA* 26, 104, and Hall, *PSBA* 30, 7. An example is the hotly debated hieroglyphic sequence  (+ epithets) (Mastaba of Mehu, Saqqara, late 5th dynasty; Wilson, *JNES* 13, plate XVIII).

¹¹⁴ But of course he was officially responsible for ensuring that everything ran smoothly in the country. 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).

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.: Kurt Sethe, *Urkunden des Ägyptischen Altertums*, Vol. I–VIII (Berlin and Leipzig, 1903–1957); UGAÄ: *Untersuchungen zur Geschichte und Altertumskunde Ägyptens*; Wb: Adolf Erman and Hermann Grapow, *Wörterbuch der ägyptischen Sprache*, Vol. 1–7, Berlin 1897–1961 (unchanged reprint 1971); ZÄS: *Zeitschrift für Ägyptische Schrift und Altertumskunde*; ZDMG *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* (Leipzig/Wiesbaden).