Chapter 4

Hetep and Maat

This chapter explains hetep as an ideological construct and defines hetep as the result of action in accord with maat. As shown in the previous chapter, individuals received hetep through various means, not just the presentation of items of food and drink, so hetep should not be thought of as a physical satiety from being fed. Instead, we learn that hetep-offerings signify an abstract hetep, a type of “contentment, rest, or peace.” We then consider the offering ritual and the offering scene from the perspective of interpersonal relationships and conclude that the presentation of hetep-offerings in art and in practice symbolized the donor’s proper (in Egyptian, maat) action that caused the recipient’s hetep-contentment/rest/peace. The critical components of that maat-action include the donor occupying an appropriate social role in relation to the recipient and the donor recognizing and interacting with the recipient.

1 Hetep So That You are Hetep

The giving and causing of hetep-offerings stood for or was a physical symbol of the giving and causing of an abstract hetep. A living person, often a relative, gave hetep to the dead. The king gave hetep to deities. Deities gave hetep to the king. These hetep were goods, most commonly food and drink, but they could be other things too, such as ointment, incense, or cloth. Because of the food and drink, some have argued that the hetep that the recipient experiences is a feeling of being full or satiation. A feeling of satiation, however, does not correspond with the non-food items that are hetep-offerings. Things like ointment, incense, and cloth would not make one feel full. Nor does a feeling of satiation correspond with, for example, a deity’s reaction to the king building a temple or to the king’s goodness, both examples described in the previous chapter.

1 Vernus (“Idéogramme et phonogramme à l’épreuve de la figurativité,” 217) connects the ideas of being content or satisfied with the sensation of being full (“rassasié”), where the item or food or drink provides a type of satiety for the deity or the deceased. When interpreting the name of the sanctuary at Dendera, referred to as sḥtp it-s R’m mrf or “Making her father Re hetep with that which he loves,” Preys (“Les manifestations d’Hathor”) argues that “that which he loves” is probably nourishment. Quack (“Opfermahl und Feinvernichtung im Altaegyptischen Ritual”) discusses the offering meal as an expression of the loyalty of elite individuals, who in return for their allegiance to the king are supported by goods from the palace.
The purpose of giving hetep-offerings in the offering ritual was to cause abstract hetep for the recipient. Evidence for this idea is found in the Dynasty 18 tomb of Amenemhat, who was first discussed in the previous chapter with regard to a damaged tomb scene that depicted him standing before his parents (Figure 7). Amenemhat's recitation to his parents begins with the standard offering formula, “Hetep that the king gives.” Then the text names the deity through which the royal gift (the hetep) was given. In this instance, the deity is Geb. Finally, the gift itself, the goods, are enumerated. They include good and pure things, offerings, fresh food, libations, wine, and milk. Finally, we learn that the purpose of giving those goods, the hetep or “offerings,” is “so that you are hetep with it and that your ka is hetep with it.” The offering ritual makes the recipient's ka, an element of a person that survives after death, hetep or “content.”

2 An Ideological Construct

Rather than viewing abstract hetep as a sort of demonstrative or affectionate emotion, it is best to understand it as a formal or an ideological construct. Ideology here refers to the use of particular language in a particular context, that is, statements or ideas that are charged in a way that they are distinguished from normal discourse. Some examples of the signals that alert us to charged discourse are the individuals involved in the discourse and the nature or purpose of the discourse. Ideological discourse is often viewed as a political mechanism, and it sometimes carries a negative connotation, which does not necessarily apply in this Egyptian context. An ideological understanding of...

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2 Nina de Garis Davies, *The Tomb of Amenemhēt (no. 82)*, 40, pl. 5. There were other types of goods that were presented to the dead, for instance, the nḏ.t-ḥr or “salutation-gift,” common in Old Kingdom tombs, for which see Altenmüller, "Presenting the nḏ.t-ḥr-offerings to the Tomb Owner." The standard formula that begins with the phrase “Hetep that the king gives” identifies these goods as hetep.

3 ... ḣtp⸗k i҆m ḥtp kꜢ⸗k i҆m Nina de Garis Davies, *The Tomb of Amenemhēt (no. 82)*, 40, pl. 5.

4 Englund (“Offerings,” 283) describes hetep as “gifts ... given in gratitude, received in happiness and grace, and leading to contentment, graciousness, mercy, and peace.”

5 Eagleton (*Ideology*, 193) put it more simply: “The term ‘ideology’ is just a convenient way of categorizing under a single heading a whole lot of different things we do with signs.”

6 Eagleton (*Ideology*, 9) discusses the term in political contexts, seeing ideology as serving the interests of a particular group, and he uses the term ideology in a neutral sense, without commenting on its relative value or success as a social good. On Barthes’ conclusion that the ideologies promoted by a central group in power and by groups opposed to that central power are both composed of “language that is militant,” see Allen, Roland Barthes, 100.