CHAPTER 2

Economic Implications of the Menkaure Triads

Florence Dunn Friedman
Brown University

Abstract

This article expands on an earlier suggestion that the Menkaure triads served, in part, as economic illustrations of how the king’s Heb-Sed was provisioned. The working hypothesis is that each triad’s stated nome is linked to an (unnamed) economically important town, like Sheikh Said or Giza, which was associated with a real or symbolic Hathor temple whose estates provisioned the King’s Heb-Sed. Two triads are singled out for discussion in this regard: one with the standard for the 15th nome of Upper Egypt, the Hare nome; and the other, its damaged mate, provisionally restored with the White Walls of the 1st nome of Lower Egypt that held Egypt’s capital of Memphis. Hathor in this economic model mediates between the king and state, on the one hand, and the nomes and their resources, on the other. Reality and symbolism come together in this goddess, who, at her son’s valley temple, serves as divine provisioner at the juncture of archaeologically-based reality and symbolic fiction.

1 Introduction

This article builds on several others that dealt with the meaning and function of the Menkaure triads.1 In the course of researching those articles, I developed what has become the core of my working hypothesis, and which is at the base of

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1 Friedman, “Triads I,” “Triads II,” and “The Cultic Relationship of the Menkaure Triads.”
this current paper: that the main theme of the triads is the Heb-Sed, and that the provisioning text on the base of each triad was for provisioning that festival. For the sake of clarity, and to add new data, I repeat and expand on some of that material now, especially the implications of one proposal: that the triads read as names of ḥwt estates from provincial Hathor temples, real or symbolic.

The triads consist of four intact examples plus two large fragments, presented in two format types (Fig. 2.1). Type 1 shows the king striding at center, flanked by Hathor and a nome personification, and Type 2 shows Hathor seated at center, flanked by the standing king and a nome personification. Type 1 cites the Hathor

\[ \text{Figure 2.1 Four intact (a, b, c, e*) and two fragmentary (d*, f*) triads. Figure 2.1f (MFA 12.1514) is hypothetically restored with the LE 1 nome standard, and the Lower Egyptian crown is thus given to the king. “The White Walls” nome standard is grammatically masculine, and thus the male nome is represented. For use of the Lower Egyptian nome standard and crown, see below. Grey areas are reconstruction. (*COURTESY MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, BOSTON)} \]

2 Comparing the meaning of the triads to that of the small step pyramids was especially persuasive to me. See Friedman “The Cultic Relationship of the Menkaure Triads.”

3 For excavation (and other) photos of the four intact and two fragmentary triads, see Reisner, Mycerinus, pls. 36–46, 64 h. These six were found in the king’s valley temple at Giza (Reisner, Mycerinus, 35, 37, 109–10). Corrections to Mycerinus, 35 on orientation of the four intact triads as found in Corridor III, 4, are given by Diane Flores (formerly Research Associate, Giza Archives Project, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston) in personal communication in Friedman, “Triads I,” 26, n. 22. Reconstructions of more triads from fragments at the MFA continue as a work in progress; the earlier reconstruction of Fig. 2.1f with MFA fragments now appears to be wrong. Simpson, “Grammar of Egyptian Statuary,” 113 suggests the four intact triads may be by different hands or even different sculptural schools. Stylistic variation, I would add, obtains for the fragmentary triads as well, esp. MFA 11.347.