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The Papyri of Heqanakht and the Emergence of a
Middle Class in Middle Kingdom Egypt

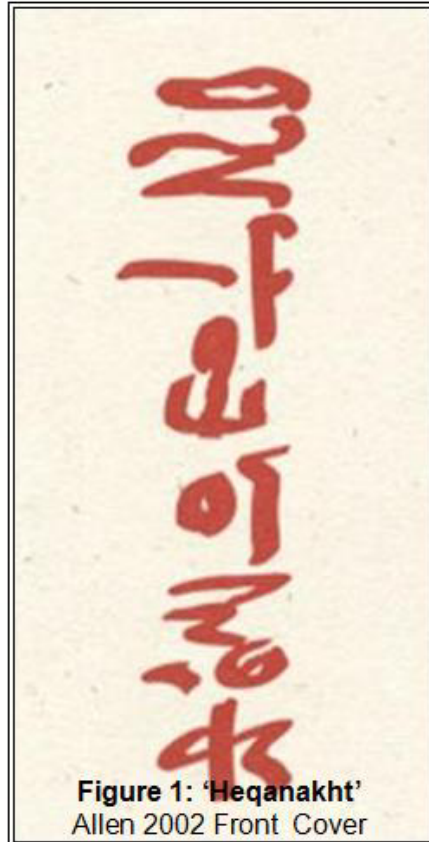


Figure 1: 'Heqanakht'
Allen 2002 Front Cover

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(All dates used in this essay are taken from:
www.digitalegypt.ucl.ac.uk/chronology/)

Introduction: An Individual Life

My aim in this essay is to investigate the life of an Egyptian farmer through an exploration of his letters and accounts. Heqanakht's papyri offer a rare glimpse into the life of a minor official during the early years of the Twelfth Dynasty, ca.1976-1794 BC (Allen, 2002, p.xv; Richards, p.29). Material remains from any historical period often consist of mute objects with no obvious or direct links to those who created them (Renfrew, 1981, pp.259-260). However, Heqanakht's fresh, sometimes cantankerous, and very personal missives present 'unparalleled insight' into a little known section of early Middle Kingdom society (Allen, 2002, p.xv, p.142). When most of Egypt's archaeological record is associated with the monumental and the elite, it is refreshing to consider the local and personal in exploring the lived experiences of a 'fairly ordinary individual from the lower levels of the landed gentry' (Allen, 2002, p.xv; Parkinson, 1991, p.102).

In this investigation into Heqanakht's life in the context of the time in which he lived, I will explore the hypothesis that he may have been part of 'an elusive middle class' (Allen, p.xv; Richards, p.30, p.15-16, pp.178-179). For it is at this Twelfth Dynasty phase when evidence of a so called 'subelite', that is, people 'lying somewhere between the small ruling elite and the rest of the population' begin to emerge from the archaeological record (Parkinson, 2002, pp.64-65; Richards, p.15).

An attempt to understand the socio-economic background of the individuals whose lives are evidenced within material sources remains integral to understanding the culture they represent (Parkinson, 2002, p.3; Richards, 2005, pp.73-74). 'It is rare that archaeologists can identify named individuals; it is rare that they can piece together anything approaching a full account of an individual life. Yet we routinely have evidence of fragments of lives' (Hodder, 2000, p.26). Heqanakht's documents allow us a limited, etc understanding of his world, related as they are to fleeting matters of domestic and financial affairs experienced by a provincial landowner many thousands of years ago (Allen, 2002, p.xv; Gratjetski, 2006, p.142).

While some elements of Heqanakht's life are disputed by scholars, enough agreement exists to extrapolate reasonably detailed information from his correspondence. Drawing on Baer's (1963), Goedicke's (1984), Parkinson's (1991) and Allen's (2002) translations, I will investigate Heqanakht's papyri for insight into an agricultural household during this intriguing period.

The Find

Heqanakht's correspondence has been described as 'unparalleled' in its importance; a 'unique witness' to life at this time (Allen, 2002, p.xv). Discovered at Deir el Bahri by H.E. Winlock during the Metropolitan Museum of Art's 1921-22 season, the bundle of papyri containing five letters and three lists of accounts was found amongst unrelated detritus

sealed within the tomb of a minor official named Meseh (Allen, 2002, p.6; Goedicke,1994, pp.3-4). Meseh's is one of four smaller tombs carved alongside the vizier Ipi's large tomb at the North end of the Deir el Bahri plateau at Thebes (Winlock, 1922, p.16; Goedicke,1984 p.3, p.9). Little is known about either man and any relationship between the two is uncertain (Allen, 2002, p.129; Goedicke, p.12).

The circumstances of how Heqanakht's papyri ended up in the burial chamber of Meseh remains a matter of speculation, with no implicit association between the tomb and the papyri (Goedicke, 1984, pp.3-7, p.120; Allen, 2002, pp.3-6, p.133). It is likely that the papyri were lost nearby or left temporarily in the empty tomb (Allen, 2002, p.133). Winlock's (1922) initial dating of the documents to the Eleventh Dynasty has been revised by Parkinson (1991) supported by Allen (2002) who both date the papyri to the beginning of the reign of Senwosret I, ca.1956-1911 BC (Winlock,1922, p.40; Parkinson,1991, p.102; Allen, 2002, p.130). Allen's dating is persuasive, supported by microscopic analysis of the papyri's style, textual content and paleography (Allen, 2002, p.xvi, pp.84-101).

Heqanakht's papyri cover three years of his life and although the texts themselves are not dated, referring only to 'Year 5' and 'Year 8', these terms are understood to relate to the regnal years of Senwosret I (Allen, 2002, p.127; Parkinson 1991, p.102). One of many emic considerations in investigating Heqanakht's papyri is that it was

unnecessary for him to name the king in the context of this correspondence (Ambridge, 2007, p.636).

Heqanakht's 'texts from the living world' are important for several reasons;


- they contain a wealth of information on the society and economy of the early Middle Kingdom;
- they deal with a range of transactions related to household accounts in a pre-currency, barter-based economy;
- they are virtually the only source of information on Egyptian agriculture before the New Kingdom, 'the sole surviving texts to give the cultivator's point of view, rather than that of an administrative landlord' (Richards, 2005, p.25; Ezzamel,2002;p.237 Baer, 1963, p.1; Allen, 2002, p.xvi, p.179).

Economics permeate the documents, offering 'unparalleled insight into the life of a moderately well-to-do Egyptian family at the beginning of the Middle Kingdom' (Allen, 2002, p.142). In order to understand the social reality of the man who produced the letters however, it is necessary to look beyond the immediate evidence of his papyri (Richards, 2005, p.9).

Geographic Considerations

Most scholars place Heqanakht away from his Theban home on business in the North at the time his letters were produced (Winlock, 1922, p.38; Goedicke, 1984, p.5, p.12, p.22; Baer,1963, pp.3-4;

p.17; Parkinson, 1991, p.102; Ezzamel, 2002, p.238). Allen (2002) reverses this geographic dynamic, suggesting that Heqanakht's home was near Memphis, while duties requiring his presence occurred at Thebes (Allen, 2002, p.125). Emic understanding, information shared between Heqanakht and those he addressed in his letters, make certain locational details superfluous to the correspondence, although textual references indicate that Heqanakht was some distance from his home when his letters were composed (Ambridge, 2007, p.636; Goedicke, 1984, p.4, p.121; Allen, 2002, p.113). Such particulars are not crucially significant to the importance of the papyri. More pertinent is the information they provide on the organisation of an agricultural household almost entirely dependent on the annual inundation and the harvest which followed (Allen, 2002, p.179; Ezzamel, 2002, p.237).

Although the exact location of Nesbesyt, the place where Heqanakht's household was located, remains ambiguous, certain toponymical references in the letters indicate that his home may have been situated approximately ten miles to the south-west of Thebes, on the western bank of the Nile, (Winlock, 1922, p.22-23; Goedicke, 1984, p.12). The name 'Nesbesyt' indicates multiple Ziziphus trees which bear edible fruit and provide good shade; an exquisite detail from thousands of years ago which suggests that an early Twelfth Dynasty settlement may have been named after a natural feature of the landscape. Evidence that Nesbesyt is a location and not simply a coppice is confirmed by its determinative, the town sign  (Allen, 2002, p.122). That Nesbesyt was large enough for

economic transactions to take place there is indicated in Heqanakht's instructions that a length of cloth, which he intends to barter for additional land-leases, should be valued there (Allen, 2002, p.122).

Perhaa, where Heqanakht owned and leased out fields, was at least a day's journey away; the distance suggested by Heqanakht's instructions that his brother Nakht should take supplies on his journey to collect debts and to rent additional land there (Allen, 2002, p.123). Khepshyt, or 'Great Wind', was an area of rich land within Perhaa, close to the inundation in flood season (Goedicke, 1984, p.12; Allen, 2002, pp.123-124; Parkinson, 1991, p.103). Heqanakht had a flax processing workshop there, managed by his neighbour, a woman named Satneb-Sekhtu (Allen, 2002, pp.122-124). Flax production was second in importance to grain crops, with flax used for many products from the finest cloth to coarse rope (Caminos, 1997, p.11). Other areas in this agricultural region included 'The Pool of Sobek', and 'The Place of Netting' (Allen, 2002, p.122). Mention in the letters of an obscure Abydene festival '*tp-jnr*' in honour of a local form of the crocodile god Sobek, 'a god of the water' much-favoured in the Twelfth Dynasty, suggests that Khepshyt may have been located in the Thinite nome, between Thebes and Heqanakht's temporary northern location (Allen, 2002, p.125; Lurker, 1974, p.118).

Winlock's (1922) initial interpretation of the correspondence indicated that Heqanakht held the position of kA-servant in the service of the vizier Ipi,

and that this role may have required his presence in the north, where he supervised cult estates at Djedisut, a place mentioned in the letters and believed to have been in the vicinity of Memphis (Winlock, 1922, pp.20-22; Baer, 1963, p.4). This viewpoint has been supported by other, more recent interpretations of the texts, although there is no evidence whose mortuary cult Heqanakht served (Parkinson, 1991, pp.101-103; Goedicke, 1984, p.12, pp.61-62). Allen (2002) supports the view that Heqanakht was in the service of Ipi, contra Goedicke (1984) who sees no reason to connect Heqanakht with this official (Allen, 2002, p.106; Goedicke, 1984, p.12).

That his duties or business may have sent Heqanakht north at this time is a reasonable assumption; the new state capital of Itj-tawy-Amenemhet had been established at Lisht near Memphis in the latter part of the reign of Amenemhet I ca.1976-1947 BC (Gratjetski, 2006, p.28, p.30; Kemp 1983, p.80). While the court's relocation from Thebes could have been a politically strategic decision, increased interest in the rich agriculture land of the Fayum may have been a consideration (Gratjetzki, 2006, pp.29-30).

The kA-servant

Heqanakht describes himself as 'kA-servant', *hm-k3* and in one instance as *b3k n pr dt* or 'worker of the funerary estate' in a formal letter to Heru-nefer, a local official whose help Heqanakht solicits in settling debts at Perhaa (Allen, 2002, p.8, p. 105). These titles and his formal tone appear

to reflect Heqanakht's 'inferior status' as well as his actual duties (Allen, 2002, p.106). As kA-servant Heqanakht may have served in the cult of an official's statue, usually located at the tomb (Allen, 2002, p.105). In the Middle Kingdom this role was often assigned to someone outside the deceased's immediate family (Baer,1963, p.8; Richards, 2005, p.16; Allen, 2002, p.xv, p.105). Land which Heqanakht refers to as 'my land' may have included fields he received as perpetual endowment in return for his duties (Gratjetzki, 2009, p.151; Allen, 2002, p.149, p.178). Receiving a modest stipend for his services, the farmer would have remained dependent on his own land and upon the land he administered for the mortuary cult (Gratjetzki, 2009, p.151;Allen,2002, pp.105-106; Snape, 2010, pp.42-43; Spalinger, 1985, p.8).

Farming and Finance

Heqanakht's papyri contain some of the earliest information on farming and agriculture, comparative information of which is unattested until the Wilbour Papyri in the Ramesside era, six hundred years later (Allen, 2002, p.xv; O'Connor, 1983, p.227; Baer,1963, p.1).

The documents contain the earliest indications that the lunar, rather than the civil calendar, was used by farmers to mark phases of the agricultural year (Allen, 2002, p.135). For the farming community, closeness to nature would no doubt have made the lunar calendar easier to follow, in preference to the somewhat artificial sequence of the civil calendar, (Allen, 2002, p.136).

The civil calendar divided the year into three phases;

- Inundation, *3ht*
- Growth, *pꜣt*
- Harvest, *šmw* (Allen, 2002, p.134).

However, for Heqanakht, significant phases of the year were marked by the following lunar terms, first attested from this correspondence;

- *hnt-hꜣty-pꜣty*: first day of newness
- *šf-bꜣt*: emmer swell
- *rkh-ꜣ3*: big burning (Allen, 2002, p.135).

Barley, emmer and flax were Heqanakht's main crops, although other commodities including bread, cloth, wood and cattle are all listed in his accounts (Ezzamel, 2002, pp.243-245; Allen, 2002, p.142; Goedicke, 1984, p.42). Grain and flax had a growth season of three to four months, with the harvest occurring around February for barley and April for emmer and flax (Allen, 2002, p.134). Heqanakht's Year 5 harvest had just been completed at the time of the earliest document (Goedicke, 1984, p.90). Judging by his accounts, this had been a fine harvest in a 'relatively more prosperous period', (Ezzamel, 2002, p.246; Allen, 2002, p.163).

Although the five accounting lists span three years, the letters amongst Heqanakht's papyri were probably written in the space of a few days and deal with his revised arrangements for the agricultural year of Year 8

which was just beginning (Allen, 2002, p.130, p.134 p.187; Goedicke, 1984, p.8). The annual inundation began at Aswan in late May and crested in September, leaving fields ready for planting in October (Allen, 2002, p.134). As Heqanakht writes from the north, accounts from the previous year's crops have been reckoned, indicating a particularly poor yield (Allen, 2002, p.164; Goedicke, 1984, p.22). The inundation of Year 8 has begun and it is clear from his correspondence that Heqanakht is beginning to reorganise his household allowances under the assumption that the next harvest may also be poor and unlikely to support their requirements (Goedicke, 1984, p.13, p.121; Allen 2002, p.135, p.167-168; Ezzamel, 2002, p.239, p.246). Heqanakht's immediate concerns relate to;

- grain distribution in the form of household salaries, which he reduces by 25%;
- similar instructions revising allowances to staff of his flax processing workshop;
- barter of a length of good quality cloth to facilitate the rental of additional land;
- crop rotation, the earliest attested reference to this agricultural practice and;
- debt collection in grain or in kind, including oil, copper or cloth; one measure of oil equalled two of barley or three of emmer in Heqanakht's accounts (Allen, 2002, p.142, p.151, p.153, p.155,

p.159, p.163, p.168; p.175; Ezzamel, 2002, pp.239-240; Goedicke, 1984, p.19, p.36, pp.22-24, pp.42-43).

At this time, most transactions were based on a bartering system in which the rough value of most commodities was known to both seller and purchaser (Vogelsang-Eastwood, 2000, p.293).

As Heqanakht is managing his estate from a distance he is heavily dependent on his estate manager, Merisu, to ensure the best return from newly leased land from which any potential shortfalls might be supplemented (Allen, 2002, p.142; Ezzamel, 2002, p.235; Goedicke, 1984 p.19, p.39, p.68). A sense of foreboding emanates from the letters (Parkinson, 1991, p.103; Allen, 2002, p.135). Economic uncertainty punctuates Heqanakht's words, 'See, you are in the situation of one who can eat'; 'the entire land has perished but you have not hungered', although it is unlikely that there was widespread famine at this time (Goedicke, 1984, p.13; Allen, 2002, p.171). Heqanakht is perhaps using such hyperbole in an effort to justify harsh salary reductions (Goedicke, 1984, pp.21-22; Allen, 2002, p.168, p.171). It is still possible for him to lease new land, an indication that he had both the manpower and resources to sustain his household 'this was not a struggle for survival but the pursuit of economic goals' (Goedicke, 1984, p.13; Allen, 2002, p.171). Heqanakht's words, 'our salary has been made according to the inundation' suggests that there was an annual calibration of allowances (Allen, 2002, p.138).

It appears that Heqanakht owned enough land, not only to meet the requirements of his household, but sufficient to produce a surplus most years enabling the farmer to assist his neighbours (Allen, 2002 p.163, pp.170-171). Interest-free loans of seed or of grain known as *t3bt*, were viewed as an act of 'civic responsibility' repayable after the harvest, although repayment could be waived as an act of benevolence (Allen, 2002, p.163, p.181). It is evident from his accounts that following an abundant harvest in Year 5, Heqanakht made substantial *t3bt* loans of barley and emmer, lending both seeds and grain to his neighbours (Allen, 2002, p.171). Here the letters may reflect an altruistic theme often present in contemporaneous mortuary inscriptions; perhaps a living example of the ubiquitous statement *di.n=i t n hkr* 'I gave bread to the hungry' (Assmann,1996, p.92, p.100-102;Gratjetski, 2006, p.157; Parkinson, 1991, p.11). Khety, a Twelfth Dynasty nomarch and a contemporary of Heqanakht's boasts, "I am one who provides barley for the citizen, the wife, the widow and her son" (Assmann, 1996, p.102).

It seems likely that Heqanakht had over-extended himself in years of plenty by renting out his land and making *t3bt* loans to neighbours, (Baer,1963, p.12; Allen, 2002, p.171). His charitable concerns are no longer evident as he orders Merisu to ensure that all loans are repaid to him promptly, preferably in barley, a grain widely used to barter for other commodities (Allen, 2002, pp.182-184; Murray 2000, p.506, p.512).

Merisu is instructed to send Nakht to collect debts from land leases in Perhaa, with the assistance of the only 'official' to appear in Heqanakht's letters, a minor provincial administrator named Heru-nefer, (Goedicke, 1984, pp.77-78). We are able to gauge something of Heqanakht's apparent 'inferior' status, from information embedded in the particularly formal language he employs in addressing this man, whose services were related to the repayment of loans (Allen, 2002, p.8, p.186). Although there is no evidence that poor inundations were a significant threat at this time, Heqanakht appears determined to reorganise his land and resources in light of an 'unanticipated need' occasioned by another poor harvest (Allen, 2002, p.135, p.159, p.171).

Great emphasis on grain commodities of barley and emmer is evident in Heqanakht's correspondence; grain was the staple of the Egyptian diet, a medium of exchange and also the basis of the Egyptian economy at this time (Allen, 2002, p.145).

- Barley was valued at a rate 1½ times higher than emmer;
- barley was used to produce beer and bread, staples of the Egyptian diet;
- emmer was used primarily for bread;
- Heqanakht's fields produced three times as much barley as emmer;
- barley and other grains were measured by 'khar' or sack, a uniform measure equivalent to 10 hekat, 35 kilograms or 121,824 calories

(Allen, 2002, pp.143-144,p.158;Ezzamel, 2002, p.239; Miller, 1991, pp 259-260).

The Household

Never intended as biographical, and therefore almost entirely free from information regarding family relationships, Heqanakht's letters and accounts function as communication between people who knew each other well; the dynamic of each individual's relationship with Heqanakht was implicitly understood (Baer, 1963, p.1; Goedicke,1984, p.120). There is shared understanding embedded in discrete emic information which required neither elaboration nor explanation. Social structure within Heqanakht's immediate household appears to mimic that of the wider Egyptian society at this time, where social cohesion was characterised by kin-based and non kin-based differentiated economic groups (Baines, Yoffee, 2000, p.14; Gratjetski, 2006, p.145; pp.149-151; Allen, 2002, p.181).

Although he expresses particular concern towards his mother, Ipi, and his son, Snofru, Heqanakht emphasises that everyone in his workforce is important to him, 'See the entire household is the equivalent of my children' (Goedicke,1984, p.18; Allen, 2002, pp.114-115). There are numerous indications through admonitions and reminders that both family and staff should be grateful for Heqanakht's patronage, 'Look, this isn't the year for a man to get rebellious with his master, or his father, or his brother' (Goedicke, 1984, p.14; Parkinson, 1991, p.104). Might this hint at

the concept of 'integrative ethics', a regular theme of Middle Kingdom literature (Assmann, 1996, p.128)?

Each of Heqanakht's household are paid a 'ḥw', a word understood by Allen (2002) as an economic term related to income received in exchange for work (Allen, 2002, pp.145-146). While ḥw can be understood as shared food allowances or provisions, these payments may not have indicated rations on which each person had to survive, but salary which could be bartered or exchanged for other commodities (Allen, 2002, p.146, Goedicke, 1984, p.60). It is likely that Heqanakht's household had access to additional alimentation (Allen, 2002, p.142; Miller, 1991, p.258).

Other scholars interpret Heqanakht's monthly grain allocations (indicated in Table 1 below) as rations on which people had to survive, in most cases on amounts which would have barely supported an individual, much less a family (Baer, 1963, p.14; Ezzamel, 2002, p.240; Goedicke, 1984, p.65). If Heqanakht's allowances were exclusive of other alimentation, most would equate to approximately 5,000 daily calories per family or between 2,100-2,600 for an individual; not an excessive amount for working adults 'even if supplemented with fruit and vegetables' (Baer, 1963, p.14; Ezzamel 2002, p.240; Miller, 1991, p.258).

Table 1: Heqanakht's Household		
Name and position on salary list	Position in Household	Barley rations per month (all information below: Baer,1963, p.7)
1.Ipi	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heqanakht's widowed mother appears at the top of the salary list, probably indicating an honorific position; • her allowance covers a maidservant (Goedicke,1984, pp.14-15; Ezzamel, 2002, p.240). 	8 hekat: probably half her original allowance
2.Hetepet	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hetepet is probably a widowed aunt (Goedicke,1984,p.14,p.73; Allen,2002,p.109; Ezzamel,2002,p.240). 	8 hekat
3.Nakht	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Probably Heqanakht's brother; • his position above that of Merisu may indicate that he is a member of Heqanakht's immediate family; although in terms of employment, Nakht is described as 'subordinate' to Merisu; • he is appointed to deal with legal matters in Heqanakht's absence, including debt collection and land rental (Goedicke,1984,p14,p16,p18,pp.77-78). 	8 hekat: his rations have been lowered from a substantial 13 hekat
4.Merisu	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heqanakht's estate manager; • Merisu ranks below Nakht in the household hierarchy even though he is Nakht's overseer; • Merisu, Sihathor and Sinebniut are described as <i>ḥwtjw.f</i> 'his farmers' a term never used for filial relationships (Goedicke,1984,p.63;Ezzamel,2002, p.246; Allen, 2002, pp.110-111). 	8 hekat for the family
5.Sihathor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Along with farming duties, Sihathor acts as Heqanakht's courier and scribe; • he may have penned the formal letter to Heru-nefer (Allen, 2002, p.113) 	8 hekat
6.Sinebniut	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A young farmer whose allowance suggests he was single (Allen,2002, p.113). 	7 hekat
7.Anupu	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heqanakht's younger brother or son (Allen, 2002, p.114 Goedicke,1984,p.66) 	4 hekat lowered from 5
8.Snofru	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heqanakht's only or youngest son; • Heqanakht is particularly concerned that Snofru's needs are met and that he is kept happy (Allen,2002,p.114; Goedicke, p.18,32,65) 	4 hekat lowered from 8
9.Hetepet-lutenheb	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heqanakht's new bride, probably his second wife; her large allowance suggests she was 'of some importance' yet; • as an outsider newly arrived into the family, her position on the salary list is low; • her allowance covered servants and hairdresser; • her arrival into the household has not been welcomed (Allen, 2002,pp.44-45,pp108-109;Parkinson,1991, p.102). 	5 hekat lowered from 9: the highest individual allowance after Ipi's
10.Nofret	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Probably Heqanakht's daughter from his first wife; • she receives special greetings from Heqanakht, although her salary is meager (Goedicke, 1984, p.15, p.73) 	3½ hekat, lowered from 4½
Senen (absent from salary list).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A maidservant who has been disrespectful to Hetepet-lutenheb • her dismissal is repeatedly and vehemently insisted upon by Heqanakht (Allen,2002, p.110;Goedicke,1984, p.71). 	

Aspects of household hierarchy may be reflected in salaries which appear closely related to individual status, to kinship and to other factors evidently understood by the recipients, although not fully apparent in the letters (Ezzamel, 2002, p.235; Allen, 2002, p.17, p.29, p.107, pp.111-112,pp.115-116). Two women, positioned at the top of the salary list, are identified as Heqanakht's mother and probably an aunt (Ezzamel, 2002, p.240; Allen, 2002, p.109; Goedicke, 1984, p.20). This may reflect social customs, indicating special respect for seniority; otherwise males outrank females in Heqanakht's accounts (Goedicke,1984, p.14; Ezzamel 2002 p.240; Allen, 2002, p.115).

The Hand holding the Pen

Heqanakht was 'undoubtedly educated' with a good probability that he wrote his letters and accounts himself, (Allen, 2002, p.107). The act of putting pen to paper emerges poignantly from Allen's sensitive analysis of the text and of the methodology employed by whoever penned the letters.

Details of how the scribal hand moves from a name on a list to a related figure indicating allowance or debt, without apparent pause, suggests an author fully aware of the implications behind each stroke of his pen (Allen, 2002, pp.27-30). There is little sign of vacillation in the penmanship, suggesting precise understanding of what had to be recorded, '(t)he flow of the ink indicates that text and numbers were written sequentially after each entry rather than separately'

(Allen, 2002, p.40, p.122). This suggests an immediacy between the author's thoughts and their written transcription, a common feature of first-hand accounts (Allen, 2002, p.81). Someone less involved with the individuals and their debts or reduced rations may have written less emphatically, paused more often and made more corrections as he worked; Figure 2 (Allen, 2002, p.60 p.77).



There is a rhythm to Heqanakht's strokes as he methodically ensures that figures delineating household rations for the coming months are accurate and clear (Allen, 2002, p. 60). It is possible to detect when the reed pen was sharpened, when it has been recharged with ink, and when corrections, usually lessening the amount of grain to be allocated, are made (Allen, 2002, p.30, pp.60-62). Individual brush marks can be seen within the text alongside smudges and blots which bled into the papyrus when the scribe paused, usually at the end of a list of figures, to consider his work (Allen, 2002, pp.76-77).

A Middle-Class in the Middle Kingdom?

The Twelfth Dynasty has been described as a dynamic period of cultural and political continuity, with eight kings successfully governing Egypt over two centuries (Richards, 2005, pp.2-4;Gratjetski, 2006, p.1). That the Heqanakht papyri were written during this early phase of the Middle Kingdom 'is of the utmost importance for the social history of ancient Egypt' for this is when the earliest signs of an emergent middle-class become visible in mortuary and non-mortuary sources (Goedicke, 1984, p.122; Richards, 2005, pp.25-29; Allen, 2002, p.164).

Two quite polarised views of the early Middle Kingdom have been formulated by scholars who view this phase as an era of increasing social diversity or, alternatively, as a rigidly hierarchical period with a controlling, prescriptive polity (Gratjetski, 2006, p141;Richards, 2005, p.25;Parkinson 1991, p.11). The mortuary record of the early Twelfth Dynasty indicates another view, one of increasing economic freedom with several groups functioning at least partially outside this governmental rubric (Richards, 2005, p.178). There were 'lower order' cemeteries before this period, but those of the Twelfth Dynasty phase are significantly different, with the growing appearance of 'self-made men' evident in burials at Abydos, Riqqa and Haraga (Richards, 2005, p.8, p.25, pp.174-178; Gratekski, 2006, pp.149-150). The argument that an ancient prescriptive state may not have imposed the same level of control as a modern one, and that the Middle Kingdom was a period of growing social

complexity with indications of a free-market economy at the provincial level, is persuasive (Gratjetzki, 2006, p.84; Richards, 2005, p.25; Allen 2002, p.164; Parkinson,1991, p.11).

The mortuary record for Abydos is particularly significant as it was home to the largest provincial cemetery of the Middle Kingdom (Richards, 2005,p.125). Evidence of distinct societal changes can be seen in the frequency of private, non-elite written commemoration, in sharp contrast to a 'nearly complete absence' in non-elite Old Kingdom and First Intermediate Period burials (Richards, 2005, p.176). A wide range of titled and non-titled people from extended family and 'corporate groups such as craftsmen' erect stelae, deposit votives and are buried within once inaccessible sacred areas at Abydos in the early Twelfth Dynasty phase (Richards, 2005, p.21, p.42, pp.154-157; Ezzamel, 2002, p.257). Explicit identification with an Osirian afterlife appears to have become more available to 'titleless owners of modestly endowed graves', to their families and to the professional networks to which they belonged (Richards, 2005, pp.176-177).

Signs of growing social differentiation within the mortuary record are not confined to Abydos; (Richards, 2005, p.104). Analysis of cemeteries at Haraga and Riqqa in the Fayum area, indicate multiple levels of social and economic differentiation within burials, with increased access to written commemoration at this time (Gratjetzki, 2003, p.52; Richards, 2005, pp.174-176). Although tomb size is not a good indicator of social class or

wealth, this dramatically 'marked shift' in access to burial space and mortuary inscriptions in the early Twelfth Dynasty may reflect greater stratification in the living population (Richards, 2005, p.155, p.172). The development of a 'middle-class' was possibly part of a broader process of social, political and religious changes which saw private industries and economies flourish from the later Old Kingdom and throughout the First Intermediate Period (Richards, 2005, p.173, p.180; Parkinson, 2002, p.64). '(T)he funerary evidence seems to offer a window on the dynamics of culture that has been hardly explored' (Willems, 2010, p.94).

The evolving social landscape of the Middle Kingdom is evident not only in the contemporaneous mortuary record, but in its literature and in the gradual democratisation of the afterlife as evidenced in the previously exclusively elite 'practice of written death' (Parkinson, 2002, pp.64-65; Richards, 2005, p.173). An imprecise perception of societal structure may be gleaned from sources dated to the Middle Kingdom, an era characterised by literary masterpieces presenting an elite view of life 'introducing a set of biases' which might not translate into social reality (Parkinson, 2002, p.3; Richards, 2005, p.25). Although written by, and for, the elite, Middle Kingdom literature may represent 'a schematic vision of a differentiated society indicating the limited existence of a subelite' (Parkinson, 2002, p.65).

The picture that emerges from archaeological and textual sources of the early Middle Kingdom is of a highly differentiated social system and it is

not inconceivable that a similar pattern may have existed in 'residence strategies' reflecting what was happening in the 'society of the living' (Richards, 2005, p.175; Kemp, 1983, p.116). Was this an intensely bureaucratic and controlled two-tiered society as some scholars suggest, or is there evidence of increasing social stratification with differentiated access to economic resources producing a middle-class in Middle Egypt (Gratjetzki, 2006, pp.141-142; Richards, 2005, pp.171-172)?

Conclusion: A Small Narrative

Heqanakht has been described as one of the 'efendi class', a man who appears to be independently wealthy, bearing a minor role as a kA-servant without other administrative titles (Goedicke, 1984, p.119). From his own correspondence we learn that this 'well-to-do' farmer was effectively an absentee landlord able to manipulate commodities, travel freely, own land and run businesses in more than one location (Goedicke, 1984, pp.122-123; Richards, 2005, pp.29-30; Gratjetzki, 2006, p.142; Parkinson, 1991, p.102). This may have been unlikely under a 'closed government' with a strictly prescriptive polity (Richards, 2005, p.9; Kemp, 1983, p.81).

The crux of social mobility at this time was related to individual access to surplus accumulation of wealth in various forms, including storable produce, which allowed individuals to rise above subsistence level (Richards, 2005, p.15). Information on sources of private wealth from commercial activity at this period is ambiguous; such enterprises were not

recorded on mortuary inscriptions (Kemp, 1983, p.81). Another significant factor in social mobility was literacy (Richard, 2005, p.15, p.30). The empirical data from Heqanakht's letters and accounts indicate that he regularly produced a significant surplus from his land, alongside analytical evidence which suggests that he was literate and the author of most, if not all, of his correspondence (Richards, 2005, p.15; Allen, 2002, p.107, p.171; Parkinson, 1991, p.102). At a time when literacy levels were estimated to be less than one percent, it is probable that Heqanakht and at least one of the men he employed, were literate (Baines, 2007, pp.67-68; Parkinson, 1991, p.102; Allen; 2002, p.82, p.84; Baer, 1963, p.19).

Using the term 'middle-class' to describe such people distinguishes this group from the high elites who dominated Middle Kingdom society and the modern perception of ancient Egypt (Richards, 2005, p.180; Goedicke, 1984, p.119; Parkinson, 1991, p.11). I would argue that Heqanakht belongs to this discrete section of middle-class society as;

- a minor official and land-owning farmer of independent means;
- able to provide sufficient commodities to support an extended household and;
- a surplus which he is able to trade for other requirements;
- for all intents and purposes, a middle-class man in the Middle Kingdom (Allen, 2002, p.xv; Ezzamel, 2002, p.238; Richards, 2005, p 15).

- Crucially, Heqanakht may have possessed a skill vital to social and economic mobility, literacy (Allen, 2002, pp.83-84, p.107; Parkinson 2002, p.275; Richards, 2005, p.30).

Was Heqanakht an independent member of the land-owning middle class with a relatively minor responsibility as kA priest? We cannot know for certain as his letters were not crafted as a vehicle for great revelations, but are transient and personal, dealing exclusively with family and business affairs (Allen, 2002, p.179). The archaeologist Ian Hodder (2000) has written that 'the grand syntheses of the long term may not be commensurate with small narratives of lived moments, but both are needed in an archaeology which accepts ... intentionality and uncertainty in human behaviour' (Hodder, 2000, p.32). In attempting to access the 'agent', the man behind Heqanakht's correspondence, it is the emic information which, by its very nature, remains elusive to modern investigation (Ambridge, 2007, p.636). There are limitations as to what can be achieved through any investigation into the temporal boundaries of the early Twelfth Dynasty, or indeed into any period of the ancient past. Intersubjectivity is inherent within Heqanakht's letters and accounts, indicating mutual understanding, long inaccessible to modern scholars (Renfrew, 1981, p.275; Goedicke, 1984, p.9).

It is impossible to know how Heqanakht understood his world or to fully comprehend the unknown variables which influenced his decision making.

This should not prevent us from attempting to access the individual behind the letters, or from investigating social developments of his era (Renfrew, 1981, p.275). In any consideration of Heqanakht's papyri and of society in this early Middle Kingdom phase, one is left with an appreciation of how fortunate it was that a fairly ordinary individual sat down one day in the second month of *šmw* four thousand years ago and began to write.

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