A Bibliography of Heqanakht Papyri Studies 1922-2015

Mattias Karlsson

Nearly a century have passed since the discovery of the Heqanakht Papyri in the Deir el-Bahri necropolis of ancient Thebes by the Metropolitan Museum of Art’s Egyptian Expedition in the excavation season of 1921-22. What could be more suitable then to summarize the research done on these papyri so far? In this bibliography paper, I will firstly give an outline of earlier research (in chronological order), state the methods used in my compilation, and lastly present the bibliography in list form. It is my hope that this bibliography paper will facilitate future studies of the Heqanakht papyri.

The papyri consist of five letters and four to nine accounts, and they were written by and for a man named Heqanakht. He is described as a “ka-priest”, which means that he was a “soul-priest” in charge of a mortuary endowment. The papyri concern the administration of domestic and economic affairs of this man. Letters I and II (the most famous texts) are addressed by Heqankaht (who was away from home at the time of the writing of these letters) to his household who was staying in his home (Allen 2002: 3-21). The personal tone of the mentioned letters, as well as the detailed information on economic issues and agricultural practices in ancient Egypt around 2000 BCE that is given in the letters and accounts, have inspired much research.

Starting from the discovery of the papyri, the leader of the archaeological expedition in question, H. E. Winlock (1922, 1923), early on published a report on the papyri in a scholarly journal and in a popular magazine titled “Hekanakht Writes to His Household”. These works were based on the preliminary translations of B. Gunn. A scholarly edition of the papyri and other similar documents was prepared by Gunn, and a preface and introduction to this planned edition were written by Winlock ([1927?], [1936]). Due to Gunn’s death in 1950, the edition of the papyri was temporarily halted, but was taken up by T. G. H. James (1962) (Allen 2002: xv-xvii). This long-awaited book also contains discussions on society, geography, agriculture, and economy based on the texts of the papyri. A number of reviews of this book followed in the 1960’s, telling of its impact in Egyptology (Spaull 1962, Simpson 1963, de Cénival 1963, Derchain 1963, Helck 1963, Théodoridès 1966, Winter 1967). In a subsequent paper, James (1968) was able to add a papyrus to the text corpus.

Minor studies on specific aspects of the Heqanakht papyri could then be made. A few of these dealt with the language of the papyri (Callender 1975, Depuydt 1988, Allen 1994), others focused on agriculture and economy (Baer 1962, Shore 1990, Golovina 1995), some of them centered on social and society aspects (Menu 1970, Golovina 1976, 1992), others had a literature angle (Kaplon 1969, Goldwasser 1980), and another one dealt with calendrical issues on the basis of the papyri (Spalinger 1996). Especially the article by Baer (1963) on economical aspects and the monograph by Goedicke (1984) on the Heqanakht papyri stand out. Goedicke’s study, which contains discussions on many aspects of the texts, provoked a review by

---

1 Or of eight complete documents and five fragments (MMA 22.3.516-523 and Papyrus Purches). The documents and fragments (including Papyrus Purches) were found in the tomb of Meseh (a man unspoken of in the papyri), a secondary burial in the tomb complex of the vizier Ipi (Allen 2002: 3).
2 A ka-priest took care of the mortuary cult of a deceased in exchange for e.g. land (Golovina 1992).
3 The former character of the papyri has even inspired popular culture, as expressed e.g. in the novel “Death Comes as the End” by Agatha Christie (Glasgow: Fontana Paperbacks, 1989 [1945]).
Quirke (1988). A translation is included in the said study, and new translations are also available in the later text anthologies of Wente (1990) and Parkinson (1991).

Another important stage in the research on the Heqanakht papyri was when J. P. Allen (2002 / 2004) published his edition of these texts. Besides giving a new edition of the papyri, his monograph also includes studies on the language, people, toponyms, and archaeological context of the papyri. This book has then been reviewed a number of times (Silver 2004, Tait 2005, Clayton 2005). After that, various studies on specific aspects of the papyri have kept on coming, mainly focusing on either agricultural economy (Ezzamel 2002, Markiewicz 2006, Nutz 2014) or on societal dimensions (Richards 2005, Grajetzki 2006, O’Neill 2012, Karlsson 2015) but in different ways. The study of Tetley (2014) brings up calendrical and chronological issues. The popular, but still scholarly, text books by Ray (2002), Wilkinson (2007), and Mertz (2009) all focuses especially on Heqanakht, presenting him as a vivid representative of the ancient world. No doubt, the research on these fascinating texts will go on.

As for the including or excluding of texts to the bibliography, I have followed the principle of Allen (2002: 261-70), who marks the works that “are or contain extensive studies or translations of the Heqanakht papyri” by asterisks in his bibliography. The papyri are referred to in many studies, but much often just in passing. Upon meticulously searching through various databases, I have added a few works to Allen’s bibliography (for example Simpson 1963 and Winter 1967 - both reviews of James 1962) and added a number of works published from 2002 onwards. My inclusion of the just described books by Ray, Wilkinson, and Mertz can of course be questioned, but since they all have a special focus on Heqanakht, I think that they should be included. Article entries on Heqanakht and the Heqanakht papyri in reference works (such as the Lexikon der Ägyptologie) have been omitted, due to their brief and summarizing tendencies. The list given below concludes this paper.

Allen, J. P.

Baer, K.

Callender, J. B.

Clayton, P. A.

Depuydt, L.
Derchain, P.

Ezzamel, M.

Goedicke, H.

Goldwasser, O.

Golovina, V.

Grajetzki, W.

Helck, W.

James, T. G. H.

Kaplony, P.

Karlsson, M.

Markiewicz, T.

Menu, B.

Mertz, B.

Nutz, R.

O’Neill, B.
- 2012. The Papyri of Heqanakht and the Emergence of a Middle Class in Middle Kingdom Egypt. In Egyptological Journal 5 (online publisher).
  Parkinson, R.
  Quirke, S.
  Ray, J.
  University Press.
  Richards, J.
- 2005. Society and Death in Ancient Egypt: Mortuary Landscapes of the Middle
  Kingdom. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
  Shore, A. F.
  Archaeology 76.
  Silver, M.
  Economic History Association).
  Simpson, W.
  Spalinger, A. J.
  Ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde 123.
  Spaull, C. H. S.
  Tait, J.
  Théodoridès, A.
  Tetley, M. C.
- 2014. The Reconstructed Chronology of the Egyptian Kings (chapter “Reading
  Wente, E.
- 1990. Letters from Ancient Egypt. Writings from the Ancient World 1. Atlanta:
  Scholars Press, Society of Biblical Literature.
  Wilkinson, T.
- 2007. Lives of the Ancient Egyptians: Pharaohs, Queens, Courtiers, and
  Winlock, H. E.
  of Art 17/2.
  73/3.
  Winter, E.
  Morgenlandes 61.