

Hyksos

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Hyksos is the Hellenized version of the Egyptian word, Heqa Khaswt, “Rulers of foreign countries” – a term used originally for foreign chieftains and adopted, according to the Turin King List and monumental evidence, by the rulers of the 15th Dynasty for official use and by contemporary vassal-dynasties on account of their Syro-Palestinian descent. Their capital city was known as Avaris, modern Tell el-Dab’a (see AVARIS/TELL EL-DAB’A). The Turin Papyrus gives the 15th Dynasty a reign of 108 years (ca. 1640–1532 BCE).

ANTIQUITY TRADITION

JOSEPHUS (*Ap.* 1.14.82) mistakenly defined the term Hyksos, among several etymologies that he gives, as Shepherd Kings. Their seizure of power was recounted by Josephus, citing Manetho (see MANETHO, EGYPTIAN HISTORIAN), as follows:

Tutimaïos. In his reign . . . unexpectedly, from the regions of the East, invaders of obscure race marched in confidence of victory against our land. By main force they easily seized it without striking a blow; and having overpowered the rulers of the land, they then burned our cities ruthlessly, razed to the ground the temples of the gods, and treated all the natives with cruel hostility, massacring some and leading into slavery the wives and children of others. Finally they appointed as king one of their number whose name was Salitis. He had his seat in Memphis, levying tribute from Upper and Lower Egypt, and always leaving garrisons behind in the most advantageous positions. Above all he fortified the district to the east, foreseeing that the Assyrians . . . would one day covet and attack his kingdom.

In the Saïte (Sethroite) nome he found a city very favourably situated on the east of the Bubastite branch of the Nile, and called Avaris after an ancient religious tradition. This place he rebuilt

and fortified with massive walls, planting there a garrison of as many as 240,000 heavy-armed men to guard his frontier . . . Their race as a whole was called Hyksos, that is, “king-shepherds.” (*Ap.* 1.14.75–82, trans. Waddell 1956)

This statement has influenced the historiography of the Hyksos for a long time. While preserving the correct location and name of Avaris, this narrative is entirely wrong regarding the notion of a sudden conquest, which may reflect much later actual conquests of Egypt. It also misrepresents the Hyksos as a population group (*ethnos*) as opposed to a dynasty. Egyptology commonly sees the atrocities ascribed to the Hyksos and the Hyksos’ later literary stylization as barbarian oppressors as representing political propaganda by the victorious Egyptian side. The siege lifting and agreement of a free retreat of the Hyksos and their people to Syria (i.e., Palestine) as presented by Josephus does not withstand historical scrutiny, either.

EGYPTIAN TRADITION

The Royal Canon of Turin (col. X, 15–20) lists as Heqa Khaswt (15th Dynasty) six kings and their reign lengths. Only the sum of 108 (if correct, or more) years is preserved, as well as the name of the last ruler (Khamudy). The names of the other kings have to be pieced together from documents, monuments, and seals. Equating the Hyksos names in the different versions of Manetho has traditionally been seen as difficult due to the corrupted name forms, with the exception of Apepy/Apophis. Papyrus Sallier I and the Kamose Stela II confirm Apepy/Apophis as a contemporary of the Theban kings Seqenenre’ and Kamose at the end of the Second Intermediate Period. Both the Rhind Mathematical Papyrus, dated to his thirty-third year, and the Turin Canon, listing in Col. X.19 a reign of more than forty years (if the fragment is correctly positioned) indicate a long reign for Apophis, who seems to have successively held the prenomen

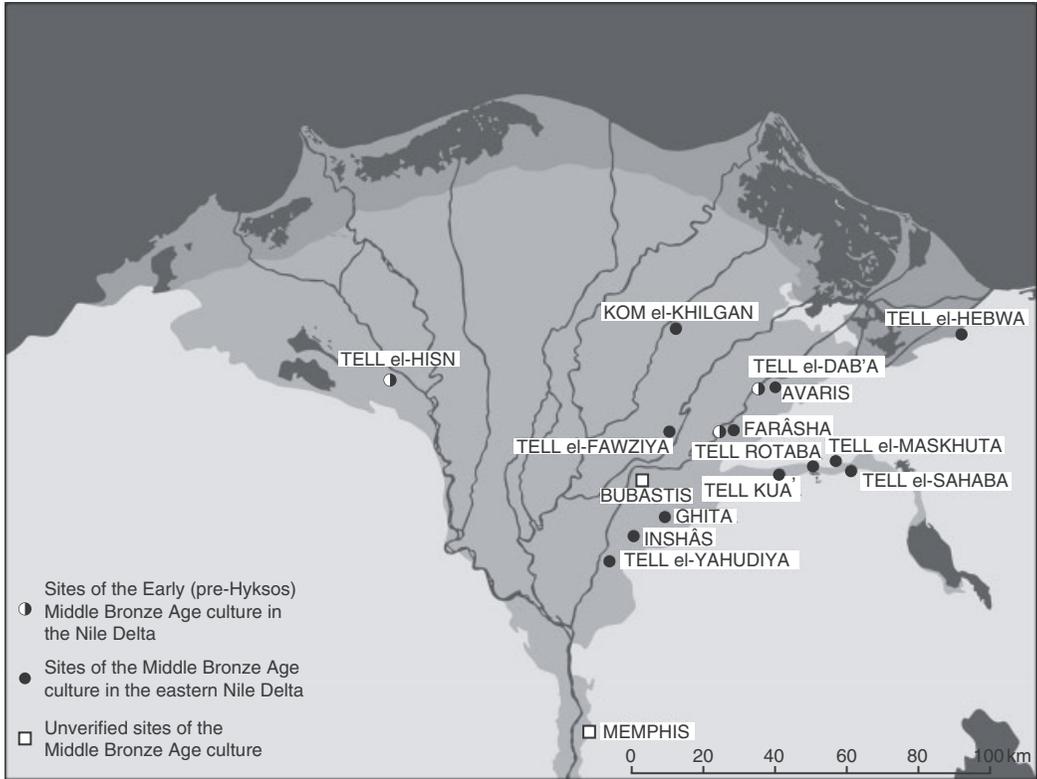


Figure 1 Sites of the Middle Bronze Age culture in the Nile Delta. By Nicola Math, Austrian Academy of Sciences, adapted after M. Bietak, *Lexikon der Ägyptologie* 3 (1980: 97–8). © Manfred Bietak.

‘Aqenenre, Nebkhepshre,’ and ‘Aweserre’. His predecessor was probably the important Hyksos Seweserenre’ Khayan (most likely Apachnan in the Manethonian list), whose objects were found at KNOSSOS, Boghazköy, and Baghdad. There are also several monuments in Egypt, as well as the recent discovery of a palace of his reign in Avaris. A stela of his eldest son Yanassy-id(en) provides a match with the Hyksos Yannas from the Manethonian list. This leaves two positions at the beginning of this dynasty. One could be filled by Sekerher (Schneider 1998: Sikru-Haddu), of whom a monumental doorjamb has been found at Avaris. A likely candidate for the other spot is Merweserre’ Y’aqebher (Y’aqeb-haddu), attested at Avaris by a series of seals. Both names do not match the Manethonian forms “Salitis” and “Bnon,” which could be explained by text corruption. The absence of

a prenomen in the case of Sekerher could indicate a place at the beginning of the dynasty. The title Heqa Khaswt carried by him and Khayan on stone monuments is no longer displayed by Apophis, which may be explained by increased adoption of Egyptian decorum. With some degree of probability, we are able to reconstruct the list of six kings of the 15th Dynasty, which represent perhaps only four generations.

In the epitome of Manetho, the 16th Dynasty is also labeled as “Shepherd Kings,” a term applied mistakenly in some versions to the 17th Dynasty, due to errors in the text transmission. In any case, both dynasties seem to have been vassals of the 15th Dynasty Hyksos. Numerous names of vassal kings are attested on scarabs, either carrying the title Hyksos (such as ‘Anat her, ‘Aper’anat, Weser’anat, Semqen) or lacking the title (e.g., ‘Amu,

Table 1

| <i>Manetho</i> | <i>Canon of Turin</i> | <i>Memphitic list of priests</i> | <i>Monuments</i> |
|--------------------------------|------------------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. Salitis 19 years | X 15 . . . | Schalek | ? Sekerher ? |
| 2. Bnon 44 years | X 16 . . . 3 years | | ? Merweserre' Y'aqebher? |
| 3. (A)pachnan 36 (61) years | X 17 . . . 8 years 3 months | | Seweserenre Khayan |
| 4. Iannas (Staan) 50 years | X 18 . . . 10 (20, 30) years | | Yansas-idn |
| 5. Apophis 61 (14) years | X 19 . . . 40 + x years | Apepy | 'Aweserre' Apepy 33 + years |
| 6. Assis (Aseth) 49 (30) years | X 20 Khamudy | | 11 years |
| | | Ahmose | Ahmose |
| Sum 259 years | 108 years | | |

Semitic name of Har is attested as the top state administrator. Scarabs with his name can be found from Kerma to Palestine. The Hyksos distributed gifts to courts in the Near East and to Crete and engaged, as evidenced by a newly found cuneiform letter and seals, in long-distance diplomacy. In the south, the Nubian kingdom of KERMA was in alliance with the Hyksos, and it complied with requests that it attack the Hyksos' unruly vassal in Thebes; an account from the tomb of Sebeknakht at EL-KAB describes a devastating raid by hordes from the Kingdom of Kush into Upper Egypt. Kush seems to have also provided mercenaries to the Hyksos. Both the military conflict and the looting of the country – nearly a third of the royal statues from the Middle Kingdom were transferred to Avaris (later to Tanis (*see* TANIS, SAN EL-HAGAR)) – led to a deep hatred of the Hyksos. While there is some evidence that the Hyksos respected Egyptian cults, HATSHEPSUT refers to their rule in the Speos Artemidos inscription as a period of neglect of Egyptian cult installations, with “roving hordes among them overthrowing what had been made; they ruled without Re” (Gardiner 1916). In the same vein, the Ramesside story of Apophis and Seqenenre' portrays the Hyksos as serving only SETH (Ba'al).

ORIGINS AND RISE TO POWER

From the Old throughout the Middle Kingdom, Egypt depended on Levantine raw materials,

workforce, and professional expertise in the areas of seafaring, trade, and crafts. Coastal Syria provided raw materials for ships – the Lebanese cedar and pitch – and trained specialists (cf. depictions of Asiatic sailors and possible ship builders in Egyptian service on reliefs of King Sahure' of the 5th Dynasty; employment of Asiatic sailors in the Egyptian sea-going navy under UNAS). Ample evidence for Asiatics imported or immigrating to Egypt to serve in various capacities – as soldiers, as serfs working in private households or the temple, etc. – comes from the 12th Dynasty. The settlement of western Asiatics at Tell el-Dab'a from the late 12th Dynasty onward should be seen primarily in connection with its function as a harbor and center of international trade on behalf of the Egyptian crown. It seems that the highest local dignitary in Avaris had princely status and held the title of “Prince of Retjenu.” As a consequence of the decreasing authority of the 13th Dynasty and its ultimate demise, the inhabitants of Avaris, with their dependencies, established a small local kingdom whose means of power were the army, the harbor, and foreign trade revenues. In Manetho, this line of rulers is remembered as the 14th Dynasty, falsely assigned to the central Delta city of Xoïs when the original title (*see* above) was misinterpreted as a toponym (Redford 1992) – indeed most of the kings' names are north-west Semitic. The monuments of the dynasty's best-documented king, Nehesi, are spread beyond Avaris from Bubastis to Tell Hebwa. He is the first king known to have borne the

epithet “beloved of Seth of Avaris” (probably the Syrian storm god Ba‘al-Hadad). Soon, marauding hordes of mercenaries (cf. the stela of Neferhotep III) destabilized Upper Egypt. This is likely to have culminated in a new (15th) Dynasty ruling probably most of Egypt in a loose vassal system.

With the onset of the Hyksos rule, the size of Avaris doubled. Beyond Avaris, a series of other, much smaller, settlements and cemeteries bearing the marks of this specific Middle Bronze Age culture form a particular cultural province, the new homeland of the western Asiatic population from which the Hyksos emerged. A settlement concentration in the WADI TUMILAT shows that the route to the Sinai and the Gulf of Suez was deemed important. It can be assumed that they established strongholds at Memphis, in Illahun, in Middle Egypt, and probably also at the high cliff of GEBELEIN, where two stone blocks with the names of Khayan and Apophis have been found. Recently a number of seal impressions of Khayan appeared at excavations on Tell Edfu (N. Moeller). They show that southern Upper Egypt at least during the reign of this king had administrative ties to Avaris.

THE DOWNFALL OF THE HYKSOS RULE

The pattern of trade seems to indicate a mutual trade boycott in place between the Delta and Upper Egypt: Avaris traded, probably via the oases, with Kerma, but hardly any products from the north or imports reached Upper Egypt. Similarly, Upper Egyptian pottery ceased to appear in Avaris as early as the beginning of the Hyksos Period. The more this barrier became entrenched, the more it reduced the export possibilities of the Hyksos into the Levant. Although imports from Cyprus rose in the Northern Kingdom – probably due to the rising demand for copper – imported pottery from the Levant to Avaris sank from 28.7 percent to 5.8 percent toward the end of the Hyksos Period. This is a sign of the empire’s weakening economic power.

It was the Theban king Seqenenre’, of the 17th Dynasty, who revolted against the Hyksos overlordship, a fact possibly reflected in an inscription in the Wadi el Hôl (Darnell), and more certainly in the much later Papyrus Sallier I. Campaigning from a newly built residence at Deir el-Ballas, he was killed on the battlefield. His mummy shows deadly wounds caused by Asiatic battle-axes. A second attack was launched three years later, according to an inscription (preserved on three stelae and the Carnarvon Tablet) by his successor KAMOSE. After defeating the Hyksos vassal Teti near Hermopolis, north of the common border, Kamose failed to take Avaris in a surprise attack, but claimed to have destroyed hundreds of ships and amassed great spoils. In perhaps as late as his eighteenth year, his successor AHMOSE I, who gained the throne in childhood, succeeded in conquering the Hyksos kingdom, the border fort of Sile, and, after a siege of three years, the last Hyksos stronghold of Sharuhén in Palestine (cf. reliefs of Ahmose at Abydos; inscription of naval officer Ahmose, son of Ibana, at El-Kab).

AFTERMATH

In contrast to Josephus’ account, the highly Egyptianized western Asiatic population of the Hyksos kingdom was not expelled but may have remained largely at Avaris, apart from the usual allocation of prisoners of war to worthy officers and to state labor. The continued existence of this population well into the New Kingdom has been proved by the uninterrupted production of pottery and scarabs with the typical “Hyksos” blend of Middle Bronze Age and Egyptian features. The use of specific weapons, such as the short sword, the composite bow, and the pair of javelins used in chariotry, may indicate that part of the male population was employed as craftsmen in the army. Chariotry was also acquired from the Hyksos. Their expertise in raising and training horses was certainly an asset for the new pharaohs. The same applies to some changes in viticulture, where the Canaanite amphora and the dipper-juglet were adopted. The facilities of

the harbor at Avaris also allowed the Theban inland power to acquire experts in shipbuilding and navigation. The continued presence of the population also explains the continuity of Canaanite cults in Avaris from the Hyksos Period until Ramesside times. Phenomena of that kind will also have occurred in other former Hyksos strongholds, most likely at Memphis.

SEE ALSO: Avaris/Tell el-Dab'a; Chariotry, ancient Near East and Egypt; Peru-nefer; Middle Kingdom, Egypt; Second Intermediate Period, Egypt.

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