

Hyksos, Encyclopedia Britannica

The group of mixed Semitic-Asiatics who settled in northern [Egypt](#) during the 18th century BC. In about 1630 they seized power, and Hyksos kings ruled Egypt as the 15th dynasty (c. 1630-1521 BC). The name Hyksos was used by the Egyptian historian **Manetho** (fl. 300 BC), who, according to the Jewish historian Josephus (fl. 1st century AD), translated the word as “king-shepherds” or “captive shepherds.” Josephus wished to demonstrate the great antiquity of the Jews and thus identified the Hyksos with the Hebrews of the Old Testament. **This view is not now supported by most scholars**, though it is possible that Hebrews came into Egypt during the Hyksos period or that some Hyksos were the ancestors of some Hebrews. “Hyksos” was probably an **Egyptian term for “rulers of foreign lands”** (*heqa-khase*), and it almost certainly **designated the foreign dynasts rather than a whole nation**. Although traditionally they also formed the 16th dynasty, those rulers were probably only vassals of the 15th-dynasty kings. They seem to have been connected with the general migratory movements elsewhere in the Middle East at the time. Although most of the Hyksos names seem to have been Semitic, there may also have been a Hurrian element among them.

The Hyksos introduced the horse and chariot, the compound bow, improved battle axes, and advanced fortification techniques into Egypt {a thing that Hebrew shepherds would not have done—jk}. At [Avaris](#) (modern Tall ad-Dab'a) in the northeastern delta, they built their capital with a fortified camp over the remains of a Middle Kingdom town that they had seized. Excavations since the 1960s have revealed a Canaanite-style temple, Palestinian-type burials, including horse burials, Palestinian types of pottery, and quantities of their superior weapons.

Their chief deity was the Egyptian storm and desert god, [Seth](#), whom they identified with an Asiatic storm god. From Avaris they ruled most of Lower Egypt and Upper Egypt up to Hermopolis directly. South to Cusae, and briefly even beyond, they ruled through Egyptian vassals. When under Seqenenre and Kamose the Thebans began to rebel, the Hyksos pharaoh Auserre Apopi I tried unsuccessfully to make an alliance with the rulers of Cush who had overrun Egyptian Nubia in the later years of the 13th dynasty (c. 1650 BC).

The Theban revolt spread northward under Kamose, and in about 1521 Avaris fell to his successor, [Ahmose](#), founder of the 18th dynasty, thereby ending 108 years of Hyksos rule over Egypt. Although vilified by the Egyptians starting with Hatshepsut, the Hyksos had ruled as pharaohs and were listed as legitimate kings in the Turin Papyrus. At least superficially they were Egyptianized, and they did not interfere with Egyptian culture beyond the political sphere.

*As a lover of wisdom (the Greek meaning of *philosophy*), I am sadden when authorities write of that period that the Hyksos were the Hebrews.*