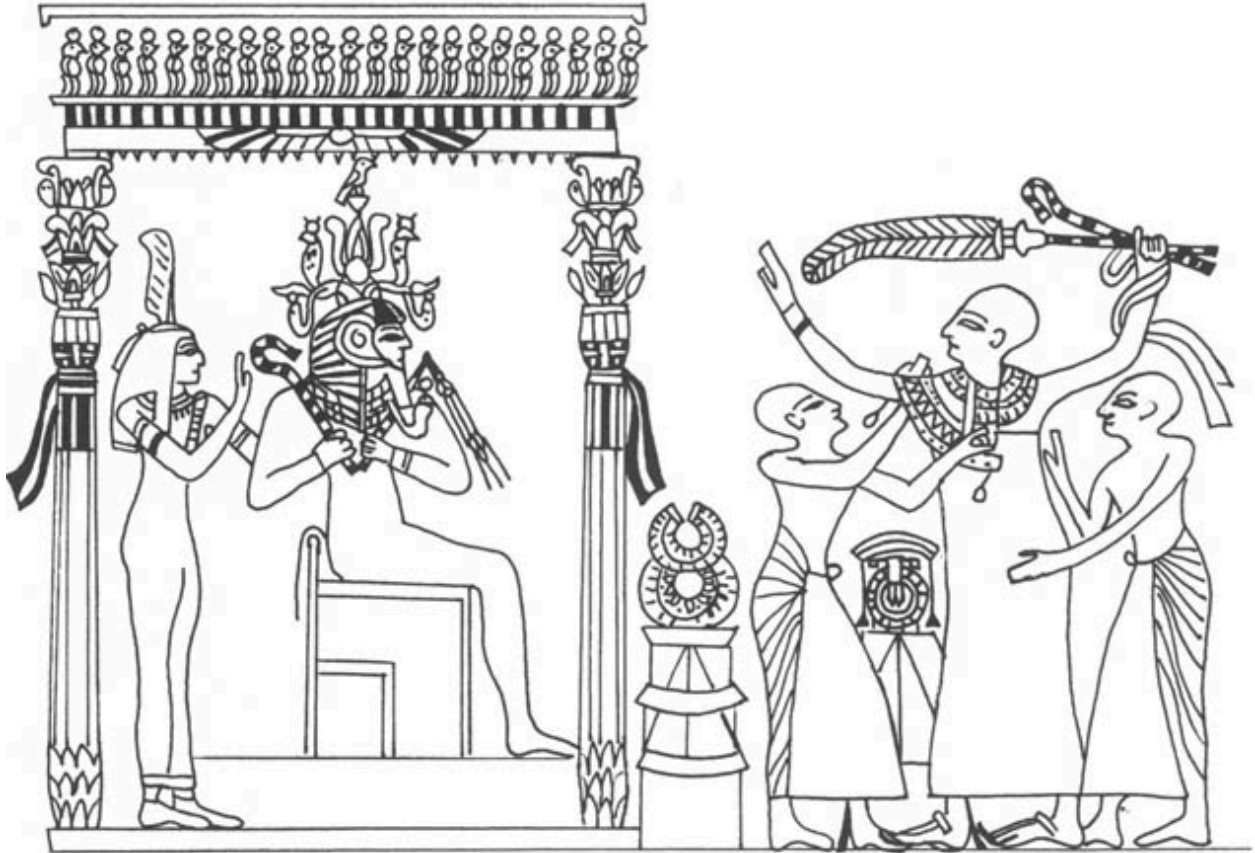


Historical Viceroy



Investiture of Vizier Paser. From tomb 106 in the Theban Necropolis.

In this article we will try to determine a historical time period when Joseph and his family had descended to Egypt. To do this, we will need to investigate many clues found in the Torah and correlate them with the historical and archaeological data.

Relevant Chronology

Second Intermediate Period (Dynasties 13-17)	1786-1550 BCE
The Hyksos Period (Dynasties 15-16)	1648-1550 BCE
The New Kingdom (Dynasties 18-20)	1550-1069 BCE
The Eighteenth Dynasty	1550-1295 BCE
The Nineteenth Dynasty	1295-1186 BCE
The Twentieth Dynasty	1186-1069 BCE

Semites in Egypt



During the Second Intermediate (1760-1550 BCE) period, central authority broke down, allowing Semitic-speaking pastorals to infiltrate Egypt. During the second millennium, evidence of Levantine peoples was discovered in the northeastern delta at Tell el-Dab'a (Avaris), and at other northeastern delta sites, including Tell el-Yahudiyeh, Inshas, Tell Farasha and Tell el-Kebir as well as sites in the Wadi Tumilat - Tell el-Maskhuta (Tjeku/Sukkoth), Tell el-Retaba (Pithom) and Tell Kua. These discoveries demonstrate that the delta during 14th-17th Dynasties was dominated by foreigners of Syro-Canaanite ethnicity.

Prior to the New Kingdom (1550-1069 BCE), northern Egypt was ruled by a group of Semites known as the Hyksos, "the rulers of foreign lands", during the Second Intermediate period. Egyptologists agree that excavations in the delta reveal a strong Semitic presence during the Hyksos era (ca. 1650-1550 BCE), continuing into the New Kingdom. The most significant site excavated in the delta is Tell el-Dab'a, ancient Avaris, the Hyksos capital. There is no debate that a significant number of Semites settled in the Nile delta during these time periods.

Eventually, rulers from Thebes (Luxor) in southern Egypt defeated the Hyksos and drove them out of Egypt, uniting Egypt once more. Determined to create a buffer zone in western Asia to keep Hyksos-type invaders away, New Kingdom pharaohs aggressively campaigned in Syria-Palestine, carving out a substantial empire. Pharaohs brought back thousands of prisoners of war and other captives to work on agricultural estates and building projects. Typically, Egyptian texts refer to them with the catchall term "Asiatics" or "Aamu". Overall, this was a time of unprecedented prosperity in Egypt, and Semites continued to live in the delta in large numbers.

Habiru and the Hebrews

The word Habiru (sometimes written as Hapiru or Apiru, meaning "dusty, dirty" in Akkadian) is a term used in 2nd-millennium BCE texts throughout the Fertile Crescent for people variously described as outsiders, nomads, rebels, outlaws, raiders, mercenaries, bowmen, servants, slaves, and laborers. It occurs in hundreds of 2nd millennium BCE documents covering a 600-year period from the 18th to the 12th centuries BCE and found at sites ranging from Egypt, Canaan and Syria, to northern Iraq and Anatolia (Turkey). Not all of the Habiru were the Hebrews, but the biblical Hebrews in Egypt were synonymous with the Habiru.

Joseph in Egypt

From the late 12th Dynasty into the 13th, Egypt absorbed a growing number of people from Canaan, for utilitarian reasons. They served as ancillary staff in temples, as dancers and porters. These "Asiatics" became servants in private households of sufficient wealth to employ them. One owner of 77 such people had 48 "Asiatics" in this group of servants (Papyrus Brooklyn 35.1446), and that was in Thebes, about 300 miles south of the Delta. In the New Kingdom, many foreigners lived and worked in Egypt at all levels, from a simple slave up to the high office at court.

Among the women were a variety of cloth makers, while the men were brewers, cooks, a children's guardian, and also *hery-per*, or domestic servants in the household. To begin with, Joseph served "in the house" of his master (Genesis 39:2), before being promoted (39:4-5) to be overseer of the household. "In the house" he was a *hery-per*, after promotion he became an *imy-re per*, or steward. Over a large estate with subordinates of this title, one might become an *imy-re per wer*, or high steward.

Joseph's appointment to a high office was accompanied by being robbed in fine linen, given a gold collar, and entrusted with a state seal, plus use of the second chariot after the king (Genesis 41:42-43). These procedures are authentically Egyptian. The chariot came in no later than the Hyksos period and became an Egyptian symbol in the New Kingdom. Being second only to the king suggests a vizier. If Joseph was not vizier, then he would have been special delegate for agriculture, a *ro-hery*, in the New Kingdom terminology.

Once Joseph went up in the world, from prison to the king's court, he was given an Egyptian name Zaphenath-Paneah (Genesis 41:45), and married a woman with an Egyptian name (Asenath), whose father has an Egyptian name (Potiphera). Some modern Egyptologists suggest that Joseph's full name in Egypt was "Joseph who is called [Djat-naf] "who recognizes life" [I]pi-ankh". Papyrus Brooklyn 35.1446 lists 28 such names, which show a similar construction: "X (Semitic name) who is called Y (Egyptian name)".

When Joseph died, he is reputed to have attained 110 years (Genesis 50:22), which happens to be the ideal life span in Egyptian aspirations. Regarding the burial, Joseph chose an Egyptian alternative: he had him mummified in full Egyptian fashion (50:2-3), understandable in Egypt at any period - but not normally in Canaan. He was not only embalmed, but he was also "put in a coffin in Egypt" (50:26), with the hope that someday he would be repatriated to Canaan (50:24-25). There was no lack of other burials of Semites in Egypt in his time, many of them in Semitic fashion in the cemeteries around Avaris.

Primary Candidate: the 18th Dynasty of the New Kingdom

Historically, the chariots and horses came to Egypt no later than the Hyksos period (c. 1650–1550 BCE) and became an Egyptian symbol in the New Kingdom (c. 1550-1069 BCE).

The Hyksos, “the rulers of foreign lands”, also known as “the shepherd-kings”, were people of West Semitic, Levantine origin. The Hyksos period marks the first in which Egypt was ruled by foreign rulers. Many details of their rule, such as the true extent of their kingdom and even the names and order of their kings, remain uncertain. The Hyksos practiced many Levantine or Canaanite customs as well as many Egyptian customs. They have been credited with introducing several technological innovations to Egypt, such as the horse and chariot.

It seems very unlikely that Joseph and his brothers arrived in Egypt during the rule of Hyksos:

- Joseph and his brothers were called multiple times by a demeaning term “Habiru” (the Hebrews) in Egypt (Genesis 41:12, 39:14,17).
- The Torah tells us that the Egyptians could not eat food with the Hebrews, because it is an abomination to the Egyptians (Genesis 43:32).
- The brothers did not know that Joseph understood what they say, because the interpreter was between them (Genesis 42:23).
- The royal court procedures, the people's names and the customs practiced in the story of Joseph are authentically Egyptian.
- The land of Goshen in the Nile Delta, where Joseph was stationed and where he requested to settle his brothers, appears as a remote and undesirable location for the pharaoh, “because all shepherds are abhorrent to the Egyptians”; while Avaris, the capital of “the shepherd-kings” Hyksos, was located in the delta itself (Genesis 45:10, 46:34).

However, the most direct evidence that the story of Joseph belongs to the early 18th Dynasty is the book of Exodus, where the Torah tells us that oppression of the Hebrews began when “a new king arose over Egypt, who did not know about Joseph” (Exodus 1:8).

In the wake of the 18th Dynasty’s collapse with the early death of Tutankhamun (King Tut), the power was transferred first to Grand Vizier Ay and then to General of the Armies Horemheb. Since Horemheb had no surviving son, he appointed his Vizier Paramesse to succeed him upon his death. Paramesse employed the name Ramesses I upon assuming power and founded the 19th Dynasty.

It is known that the former Hyksos delta capital Avaris was worked on under Horemheb (1323–1295 BCE). The construction was continued by Seti I, who built a palace in the area. And the work there culminated in vast projects of Ramesses the Great, from 1279 BCE onward, for his new capital of Pi-Ramesses, biblical Ramses. So the oppression proper would have to run from c. 1320 BCE onward.

Thus Exodus before 1270 BCE would have no delta capital to march from: after the expulsion of the Hyksos c. 1540 BCE, the 18th Dynasty kings who ruled from Thebes built a fort and military compound in the delta but no new capital. Avaris and nearby Qantir remained a backwater until “a new king” Horemheb and his Ramesside successors (the future 19th Dynasty) took matters in their hand.

Relevant Chronology

Eighteenth Dynasty

Ahmose	1550-1525	Expulsion of the Hyksos
Amenhotep I	1525-1504	
Thutmose I	1504-1492	Campaigns in Levant
Thutmose II	1492-1479	Campaigns in Levant
Queen Hatshepsut	1479-1458 (Regent)	
Thutmose III the Great	1458-1425	Conquest of Levant
Amenhotep II	1427-1400	
Thutmose IV	1400-1390	
Amenhotep III	1390-1352	
Akhenaten	1352-1336	The Amarna Period
Neferneferuaten	1338-1336 (Regent)	
Tutankhamun	1336-1327	Collapse of the dynasty
Ay	1327-1323	
Horemheb	1323-1295	Oppression of the Hebrews

Rise of the 18th Dynasty

Ahmose (c. 1550-1525 BCE) completed the conquest and expulsion of the Hyksos from the Nile Delta, restored Theban rule over the whole of Egypt and successfully reasserted Egyptian power in its formerly subject territories of Nubia and Canaan. He then reorganized the administration of the country, reopened quarries, mines and trade routes and began massive construction projects.

Amenhotep I (c. 1525-1504) inherited the kingdom formed by his father's military conquests and maintained dominance over Nubia and the Nile Delta but probably did not attempt to maintain Egyptian power in the Levant. He continued the rebuilding of temples in Upper Egypt and revolutionized mortuary complex design by separating his tomb from his mortuary temple.

Thutmose I (c. 1504-1492) campaigned deep into the Levant and Nubia, pushing the borders of Egypt farther than ever before in each region. He also built many temples in Egypt, and a tomb for himself in the Valley of the Kings. As many as 20 sites in Canaan suffered destruction at this time. It does not appear that the aim of the Egyptians at this stage was to control the area permanently, because they did not establish any permanent presence in the area.

Thutmose II (c. 1493-1479 BCE) seems to have fought against the Shasu Bedouin in the Sinai. Although this campaign has been called a minor raid, there is a fragment recorded by Kurt Sethe that records a campaign in Upper Retenu, or Syria, which appears to have reached as far as a place called Niy where Thutmose I hunted elephants after returning from crossing the Euphrates. This quite possibly indicates that the raid against the Shasu was only fought en route to Syria.

Queen Hatshepsut (c. 1479-1458 BCE) was wife of Thutmose II and regent to Thutmose III. Her reign is well-known for increased prosperity, large-scale construction projects such as the Karnak Temple Complex, Speos Artemidos, the Mortuary Temple of Hatshepsut and Red Chapel of Hatshepsut (Chapelle Rouge). Hatshepsut and her supporters used traditional religious beliefs to re-enforce her role as pharaoh and king, despite these being considered men's roles.



Thutmose III (c. 1458-1425 BCE) known as **Thutmose the Great**, upon becoming the sole ruling pharaoh of the kingdom after Hatshepsut's death, conducted no fewer than 17 campaigns from Syria to Upper Nubia, expanding Egypt's empire to its largest extent. Widely considered a military genius by historians, he was an active expansionist ruler, sometimes called Egypt's greatest conqueror or "the Napoleon of Egypt".

His first campaign in Canaan in 1457 BCE resulted in the Battle of Megiddo, probably the largest battle of Thutmose's 17 campaigns. By taking Megiddo, Thutmose gained control of all of northern Canaan and the Syrian princes were obligated to send tribute and their own sons as hostages to Egypt. This drastically changed the political situation in the ancient Near East.

The fifth, sixth and seventh campaigns of Thutmose III were directed against the Phoenician cities in Syria and against Kadesh on the Orontes. These campaigns resulted in the conquest of Syria.



He is recorded to have captured 350 cities during his rule and conquered much of the Near East from the Euphrates to Nubia. He was the first pharaoh after Thutmose I to cross the Euphrates, doing so during his campaign against Mitanni.

When Thutmose III died, he was buried in the Valley of the Kings. He is regarded, along with Ramesses II, as one of the two most powerful and celebrated rulers of the New Kingdom Period of Ancient Egypt, itself considered the height of Egyptian power.

Egypt had maintained imperial control of Canaan and Syria from ca. 1500–1200 BCE. For the period 1450–1250 BCE, Egypt exercised hegemony over Canaan and Syria.

Historical Viceroy

Historically, the story of Joseph's arrival to Egypt, his rise to power and his family settlement in the Nile Delta, would be only possible in the beginning of the 18th Dynasty, after the expulsion of Hyksos, but before the Egyptian military campaigns in Canaan. This period is limited to c. 1540-1500 BCE.

- We can observe peaceful coexistence between Egypt and Canaan and the growing trade powers of Egypt, when Joseph was sold to the traders “carrying spices, balm, and lotus, going to take [it] down to Egypt” (Genesis 37:25). This corresponds well to the time when Ahmose reunited Egypt and reopened trade routes.
- Twenty two years later when Joseph met his brothers who came to Egypt to buy provisions, he accused them, residents of Canaan, of being spies, likely a common accusation at that time, because memories of the Semitic Hyksos invasion were still alive. This also indicates that Egypt did not control Canaan yet (see Genesis 42-45).
- Egyptian viceroy Joseph could not independently “verify” that his brothers were telling him the truth and had to rely on coercion to force his brothers to bring their youngest brother Benjamin to Egypt. This also indicates that Egypt did not control Canaan at that time and there was no official way for Joseph to get information about a resident of Canaan.
- We can also imagine that if Canaan would be under Egyptian control at the time of famine, the Egyptian government would make efforts to provide people of Canaan with the provisions directly in Canaan, instead of waiting for them to come to Egypt to buy food.
- Seventeen years later, when Joseph's father Jacob died and Joseph requested permission to bury his father in Canaan, the situation was very different. We can observe that Egypt's military might grew and the Egyptian officials and army had no problem entering and doing whatever they wanted in Canaan:
- “So Joseph went up to bury his father, and all Pharaoh's servants, the elders of his house, and all the elders of the land of Egypt went up with him, and Joseph's entire household and his brothers and his father's household ... And chariots and horsemen also went up with him, and the camp was very numerous.” (Genesis 50:7-9)



From all of the pharaohs of that time period, the only one who could elevate Joseph to a high post was **Amenhotep I (1525-1504 BCE)**. Ahmose, before him, who fought many battles with the Semitic Hyksos, and the “Thutmose” kings, after him, were powerful military commanders who conducted multiple campaigns in Canaan and Syria, do not fit into the biblical story about Joseph's accession, and would have problems appointing a Semite to a high office, as well as inviting his family to settle in Egypt.

Because of many years of peaceful rule during Amenhotep I's reign, his accomplishments included elaborate building work. He also repaired and restored many ancient temples along the Nile. His reign marked the beginning of a period of prosperity for Egypt.

Reconstruction of the Events

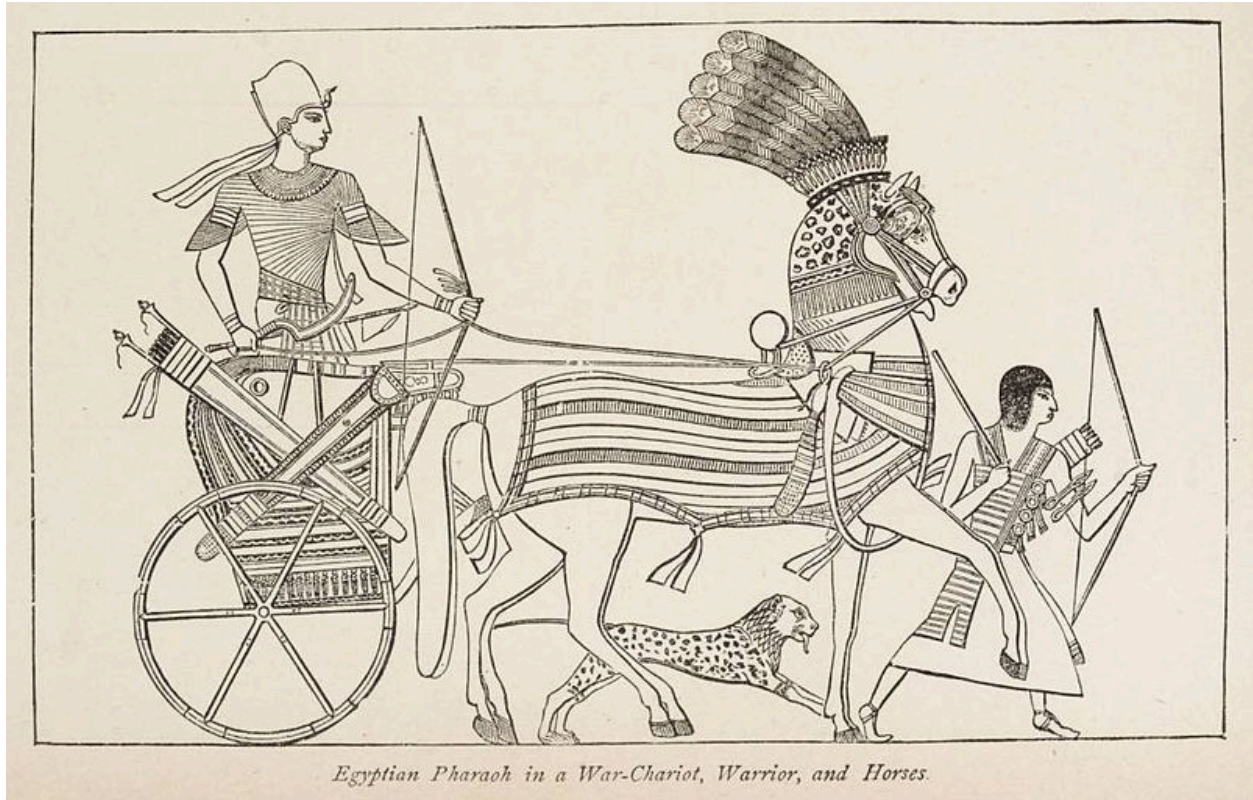
If we would accept this author's preferred date of the Exodus, 1211 BCE (see "Historical Exodus" article), then we can provide the following chronology:

Date of the Event	Description	Pharaoh
1801 BCE	Birth of Abraham	
1641 BCE	Birth of Jacob	
1533 BCE	Joseph is sold in Egypt	Ahmosé
1520 BCE	Joseph is appointed as viceroy	Amenhotep I
1511 BCE	Jacob and his sons arrive to Egypt	Amenhotep I
1494 BCE	Death of Jacob and his burial in Canaan	Thutmose I
1421 BCE	Birth of Yochebed (130 years before Moshe)	
1417 BCE	Death of Levi (137 years old)	
1323–1294 BCE	The oppression of the Hebrews begins	Horemheb, "a new king"
1291 BCE	Moshe was born and saved by Seti I's daughter	Seti I
1279-1213 BCE	Moshe escapes Egypt from the execution	Ramesses the Great
1211 BCE	The Exodus from Egypt. Moshe is 80 years old.	Merneptah

The history we just had learned provides us a possible answer why Jacob and his sons did not return to Canaan after the end of famine. There was a good reason for that. For more than 300 years after that Canaan was a colony of the Egyptian Empire. So, even if they would leave Egypt and move to Canaan, they would still remain under Egyptian rule, but likely under much worse conditions and without the protection afforded by association with Joseph.

If the above chronology is indeed accurate, then we are coming out with the following theory: **the 430 years of the Egyptian exile began with the birth of Jacob and the actual time in Egypt was 300 years:** "And the habitation of the Children of Israel, that they dwelled in Egypt, was four hundred and thirty years" (Exodus 12:40-41). The Torah defines *Children of Israel* as Jacob and his sons: "And these are the names of the Children of Israel who came to Egypt: *with* Jacob, each man and his household came" (Exodus 1:1).

We can also notice that the birth of Abraham dated to 1801 BCE in this chronology is very close to the traditional date, 1811 BCE, which is based on the rabbinic chronology of Seder Olam Rabbah (the 2nd century CE). This date is also well synchronized with Abraham's settlement in Canaan and the reign of Hammurabi of Babylon (see "Historical Amraphel" article). So, despite the large discrepancies between historical and traditional chronologies, they do come very close at the birth of Abraham.



Further Readings

1. Hoffmeier, James K. "Israel in Egypt", 1997
2. Kitchen, K. A, "On the Reliability of the Old Testament", 2003