

## IM-WHO?-TEP

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*Evidence is presented to show that the sage Imhotep, of Egyptian monuments and literature, may be the same person as Joseph of the Bible.*

Aside from familiar Biblical characters, the first figure of nonroyal blood "to stand out from the mists of antiquity" as an individual personality was an Egyptian sage by the name of Imhotep (YMHTP). "The Egyptians ascribed the invention of the art of building with stone to Imhotep, visier and architect of King Zoser, who reigned about fifty years before the building of the Great Pyramid. And in fact there has not been found any important building made only of stone blocks which dates before the reign of Zoser. The Egyptians described Imhotep as a sort of Leonardo da Vinci of Egypt, mathematician, scientist, engineer, and architect."<sup>1</sup>

"During Zoser's reign, as recent discoveries have revealed, the stone column seems to have been employed for the first time in the history of architecture."<sup>2</sup> Imhotep's name signifies 'He who comes in peace'. Imhotep was by far the most celebrated among those ancient sages who were admired by their contemporaries during their lifetime and after their death finally worshipped as equals of the gods.

By the time of the New Kingdom Imhotep was already very famous. he was reputed to have written the 'Book of Temple Foundations', and under the Pharaohs of Sais his popularity increased from year to year. Some time later, during the Persian domination, it was claimed that Imhotep was born not of human parents but of Ptah himself . . . He is represented with shaven head like a priest, without the divine beard, crown or sceptre and dressed simply as a man.

"He was patron of scribes and the protector of all who, like himself, were occupied with the sciences and occult arts. He became the patron of doctors. Then—for ordinary people who celebrated his miraculous cures—he became the god or, more accurately, the demi-god of medicine. He was thus identified by the Greeks with Asclepius. Towards the end of paganism Imhotep seems even to have relegated his father Ptah to second rank, and to have become the most venerated god in Memphis."<sup>3</sup>

He had many titles. "In the ceremonial court of the Step Pyramid stood the pedestal of a statue with has vanished and which bears, after the name of Imhotep, the citation: 'Chancellor of the King of Lower Egypt, First after the King of Upper Egypt, Administrator of the great Palace, Hereditary Nobleman, High Priest of Heliopolis, Builder, Sculptor and Maker of Vases in Chief'.<sup>4</sup>

### Imhotep Was a Real Person

Up to recently there were Egyptologists who insisted that Imhotep was a legendary figure. One argument was that there is no other instance in Egyptian history

of an ordinary person having been deified. It is only in the last few years that it has been definitely accepted that Imhotep was a real person, since it has been possible to gather some specific details of information even about his physical appearance. King Zoser covered him with all sorts of honors, although he was a man of humble origin.

"But, even though it is now granted that the Egyptians were not living in dreams when they idolized the genius of Imhotep, Egyptologists have failed to investigate what were the scientific achievements of Imhotep other than that he was the first one to have designed a pyramid, the step pyramid of Saqqara. This pyramid is just one element in an enormous group of buildings which is know as Zoser's Complex. This group of buildings is not only so extensive but also so elaborate that nothing of the sort was produced again in the long history of Egypt.

"In spite of this, not one Egyptologist has tried to investigate this monument and other constructions directed by Imhotep in terms of what the Egyptians said were his talents. Scholars are willing to grant that a man with the name of Imhotep walked on the land in Egypt, but they are not yet willing to grant that Egypt could have produced a mind like his."<sup>5</sup> "Archaeologists have been searching for his tomb for a long time, but so far in vain."<sup>6</sup>

"An inscription on the island of Siheil is of the Ptolemaic period but describes a seven-year famine that occurred during the reign of Djoser (Zoser) . . . The king complains that 'The Nile has not risen for seven years and that there is a scarcity of corn. There are no vegetables and no food of any kind, every man is stealing from his neighbour. Counsellors have no advice to give and when the granaries are opened nothing but air issues from them.' The king in great distress asks the chief lector-priest Imhotep: 'In what place does the Nile rise? What god dwells there, that I may enlist his help?' . . ." Imhotep replies ". . . that the god of the place is Khnum, who allots the land of Egypt to each god and controls the grain, the birds, the fish and everything on which they live."

"Some days later, King Djoser had a dream in which the great god Khnum appears. The king does everything he can to render the god favourable, but Khnum replies: 'I am Khnum your maker; with my arms I protect you and help you. You should be building temples and restoring my statues and those buildings that have fallen into ruin; I am Nun who has existed form earliest times; I am the Nile flood who runs at will; my sanctuary has two gates from which I let out the water for the flood.' Khnum continues that he will make the flood rise for the king, that want will cease and the granaries be filled."<sup>7</sup>

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### Similarities to Joseph

The Siheil inscription immediately brings to mind the seven-year famine during the time of Joseph (YSF). The associated elements of this account strike an amazing parallel to the Biblical account. The Egyptian inscription was made some 1500 years after the fact, so some garbling of the events and their sequence is to be expected. Nevertheless, in this account the role of Imhotep is clearly seen to be equivalent to that of Joseph—and this one account is not the entire extent of the correlation. For instance:

Imhotep was vizier to Pharaoh—the second over all Egypt, as was Joseph. Gen.41:4.

Imhotep was familiar with the occult. Joseph was an interpreter of dreams. Gen.41:15.

Imhotep and Joseph both witnessed seven-year famines. Gen.41:54.

Both were consulted in this regard. Gen.41:38-39.

Zoser and the Pharaoh over Joseph both had supernatural dreams related to the famine. Gen.41:25 and 29-30.

Imhotep was an administrative genius. Joseph was given complete charge of preparing for the coming famine. Gen.41:48-49.

Imhotep was an architect—he designed the first pyramid. Joseph might also be considered an architect, at least to the extent of preparing granaries. But there may be more. Joseph may have started building projects to keep the people occupied when agriculture was useless or impossible. It is commonly believed that much of the work on the great projects in Egypt was done at the times of the year when it was impossible to work at agriculture. Mendelssohn maintains that the construction of pyramids was a way of maintaining the economy.<sup>8</sup> If this is so, subsequent administrators may have received the idea from Joseph.

Imhotep commanded the respect and admiration of his contemporaries, as did Joseph. Gen.41:33 and 37.

Imhotep was not a native Egyptian, according to scholarly opinion. Neither was Joseph.

Imhotep's tomb, or his remains, have never been found. "And Moses took the bones of Joseph with him: for he had straitly sworn the children of Israel, saying, God will surely visit you; and ye shall carry up my bones away hence with you." Exodus 13:19.

### Supposed Discrepancies in Time May Not be Real

The greatest barrier to a tentative identification of Imhotep as Joseph would seem to be the great time span separating them by the accepted chronology, which dates Imhotep c.2800 B.C. whereas Joseph lived some nine or ten centuries later. Courville<sup>9</sup> has identified Joseph as one Mentuhotep, vizier to Sesostri I—presently dated some 700 years after Zoser/Imhotep. I.E.S. Ed-

wards<sup>10</sup> calls this vizier by the same name as the vizier to Zoser; i.e., Imhotep.

Courville makes a clear distinction between Imhotep and Mentuhotep by distinguishing between Zoser and Sesostri I. However, with the exception of a reference to the first pyramid, the description accorded to Mentuhotep by Courville is virtually the same as that quoted in this work for Imhotep.

The existence of two such similarly described noteworthy individuals of antiquity in such similar circumstances in the same cultural setting strains the bounds of coincidence. It appears that one man has been erroneously credited with two lifetimes; this resulting, in part, from the insertion of an apparently nonexistent 700 year time span into Egyptian chronology. Velikovsky<sup>11</sup> has already shown that an error approaching this magnitude exists in later Egyptian chronology, as it is commonly reckoned. Moreover, just as here, the error arises at least partly from cases in which one person or incident is counted twice.

### References

<sup>1</sup>Tompkins, Peter, 1971. *Secrets of the Great Pyramid*, Harper and Row, New York.

<sup>2</sup>1969. *New Larousse encyclopedia of mythology*. The Hamlyn Publishing Group, London.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup>Mendelssohn, Kurt, 1974. *The riddle of the pyramids*. Praeger Publishers, New York.

<sup>5</sup>Tompkins, *op. cit.*

<sup>6</sup>Mendelssohn, *op. cit.*

<sup>7</sup>MacQuitty, William 1976. *Island of Isis*. Charles Scribner's Sons, New York.

<sup>8</sup>Mendelssohn, *op. cit.*

<sup>9</sup>Courville, D.A., 1971. *The Exodus problem and its ramifications*. Challenge Books, Loma Linda, California. In his revised chronology Courville dates the reign of Sesostri I after c. 1700 B.C. as opposed to the commonly stated dates of 1971-1928 B.C. In his chronology Courville takes the duration of the sojourn of Israel in Egypt as 215 years, not 430.

<sup>10</sup>Edwards, I.E.S., 1947. *The pyramids of Egypt*. The Viking Press, New York.

<sup>11</sup>Velikovsky, Immanuel, 1952. *Ages in chaos*, Doubleday, Garden City, New York.

### QUOTABLE QUOTE

"The same powers, therefore, which at present, govern the material universe, and conduct its various motions, are very different from those, which were necessary, to have produced it from nothing, or to have disposed it in the admirable form, in which it now proceeds."

Maclaurin's *Account of Newton's Philosophy*, eighteenth century, third edition, p. 407. Quoted by Paley, William about 1800, *Natural Theology*, p. 303.

Paley's book has been reprinted by St. Thomas' Press, Houston, Texas.