

IMHOTEP MASTER OF ANCIENT EGYPTIAN KNOWLEDGE

by

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Summary

Imhotep means literally "he who comes in peace"; he was a defied sage who lived in the reign of King Zoser of the IIIrd dynasty (about 2800 B.C.); a vizier of that king and the originator of the magnificent step pyramid complex at Saqqara. He was one of Zoser's chief advisers. In priestly wisdom, in magic, in the formulation of wise proverbs, in medicine and architecture. He is the oldest medical figure in history, although his books have disappeared. Later scribes used to pour few drops of water before starting to write as an act of respect to his soul. The people sang of his proverbs centuries later, and two thousand five hundred years after his death he had become a god of medicine. He was worshipped in later periods as the God of healing, and his chapel at Saqqara, which was called Asklepion by the Greeks became a sanatorium for the crippled. Buildings were dedicated to him in temples in the Theban region. The Greeks called him Imuthes. Imhotep titles were found on the base of king's Zoser statue; he was the counselor of Lower Egypt king, chief of Upper Egypt king's noble men, director of the great house, noble man and chief of priests of Heliopolis or Anu. He was Upper and Lower Egypt engineer, chief of all the king's affairs for Lower and Upper Egypt. His record reaches from the Pyramid age (C. 2800 B.C.) through the Middle and New kingdom and far into the period of foreign reign of Egypt, almost indeed until the subjugation of the country by the Arabs in A.D. 640.

IN THE CHILDHOOD of the world Egypt was the pioneer country as regards the evolution of medicine. To her belongs the high honour of having raised the healing art to a level far exceeding that hitherto attained. This high reputation is acknowledged by Homer when he says: "In Egypt the men are more skilled in medicine than any of human kind".

Most of the ancient races of the world have found a place in their theology for one or more deities of medicine to whom were attributed miraculous powers in restoring sick and apparently dying persons to health. Such deities were worshipped amongst the Persians, Hindus, Chinese, Babylonians, Azetcs, and Phoenicians; many of them had shrines to which restored suffering men and

women, whether afflicted mentally or physically.

Imhotep first appears on the stage of history as the vizier-physician of King Zoser, a Pharaoh of the IIIrd Dynasty ca. 2900 B.C., and who so impressed his fellow-countrymen with his skill in healing disease that he was eventually raised to the status of full deity of medicine. We shall describe his remarkable progress from being a high official at the court of a Pharaoh to his apotheosis as god of medicine.

Imhotep was born in Ankhtowe a suburb of Memphis ca. 3000 B.C. descended from a distinguished architect named Kanofer and a mother named Kherduonkh. His name signifies "he who cometh in peace". Imhotep devoted his life to various activities which may be considered under the following headings:

- 1-Vizier
- 2-Architect
- 3-Chief Lector Priest of Ritualist
- 4-Sage and Scribe
- 5-Astronomer
- 6-Magician-Physician

In January 1926, a statue of King Zoser was found close to the temenos of the Step Pyramid, which appears to be associated with the vizier Imhotep. On the base of the statue, a series of titles inscribed in Hieroglyphic and translated as follows "The Chancellor of the King of Lower Egypt, Chief under the King of Lower Egypt, Administrator of the Great Mansion, Hereditary Noble, Heliopolitan High Priest, Imhotep."

1-Imhotep as Vizier

The office of vizier to the ruling Pharaoh was one of high dignity and responsibility. The following titles in itself indicates the multitudinous responsibilities of the office:

Chief Judge, Overseer of the King's records, Bearer of the royal seal, Chief of all works of the King, Supervisor of that which Heaven brings, the Earth creates and the Nile brings, Supervisor of everything in this entire land. Amongst some of the departments of his office are enumerated the Judiciary, the Treasury, War (Army and navy), the interior, Agriculture, and the General Executive.

AN INTERESTING incident associated with his vizier ship under King Zoser is recorded in what is known as the "**Legend of the Seven Years Famine**". This Legend describes a period of terrible starvation caused by the failure of the Nile for seven consecutive years to reach its usual flood level and thus to irrigate the land sufficiently to allow of its cultivation. The result was that grain grew very scarce and almost all supplies of food came to an end. The famine was attributed to the King's neglect to pay due respect and worship to Khenum, the god of the first Cataract, and one of the chief deities controlling the sources of the Nile.

King Zoser turned for help to his trusted vizier Imhotep and questioned him about the birthplace of the Nile and the god who held rule there over it. Imhotep requested leave of absence so that he might consult the papyrus rolls in the library of the chief priests. After a brief interval he revealed to the King "the hidden wonders, the way to which had been shown to no King for unimaginable ages. On receiving this report, Zoser at once wrote to the Viceroy of Nubia, begging advice and assistance in abating the disastrous effects of the famine. The King proceeded to inquire what god or goddess presided over the Nile and could replenish his granaries with grain, so that the deity might be visited and propitiated.

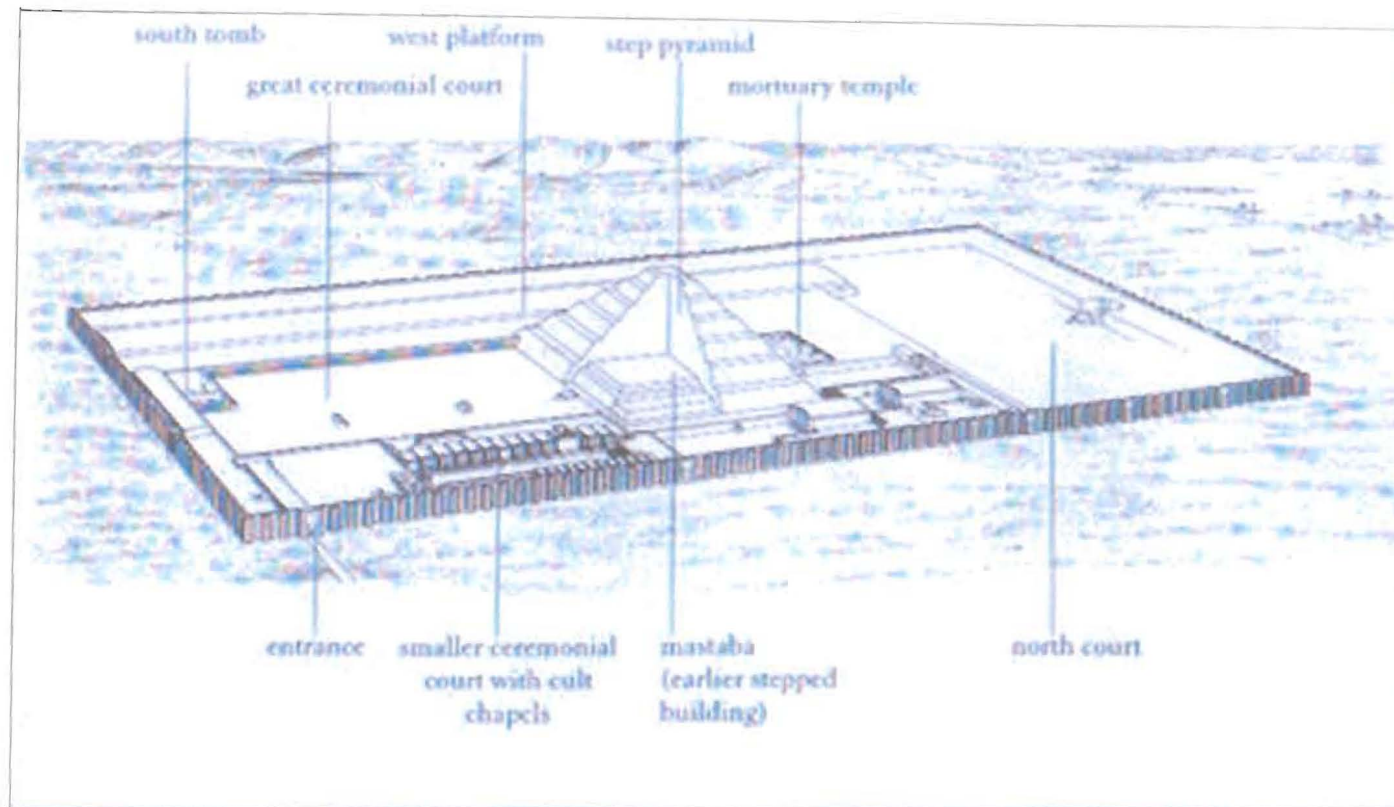
EVENTUALLY the king paid a personal visit to the temple of the god khenum in order to make prayers and supplications before him, and to propitiate him with offerings. In response khenum appeared to the King in a



Imhotep titles inscribed in Hieroglyphic on the pedestal of King Zoser Statue.



Saqqara Step Pyramid, built around 2900 BC.



Saqqara Step Pyramid – The earliest large stone structure known to history and remarkable work of the architect Imhotep.

dream, and promised that the Nile should rise and never fail again.

In gratitude for Khenum's timely intervention and aid, King Zoser made a decree and advice of his vizier Imhotep presented the god with a strip of land over seventy miles in length on both sides of the Nile, with all its revenues and taxes. He further endowed the temple of the god with valuable gifts, all gold, ivory, ebony, spices, precious stones and woods so as to supply rich offerings for the temple.

This legend is inscribed on a granite rock on the island of Sehel about two miles south of Aswan, and dates from the Ptolemaic period (323-30 B.C.), although in its earlier form it may be as old as the IIIrd Dynasty. (A similar seven years famine in Egypt is recorded in Genesis XLI. 54).

The story of the great famine throws light on the pleasant relations that evidently existed between the vizier Imhotep and his royal master.

2-Imhotep as Architect

Imhotep, "the chief of all the works of the King of upper and Lower Egypt" was a notable architect, and doubtless owed some of his architectural knowledge to his father Kanofer, a man of some distinction who was known as the "Architect of South and North Egypt".

In all probability Imhotep designed for his royal master the well known **Step Pyramid** of Saqqara near Memphis, and familiar to every tourist who ascends the Nile. Some indirect confirmation of his connection with Zoser's tomb is provided by the occurrence of his name on the pedestal of a statue, which was found outside the tomb when it was excavated. This pyramid, a transition between the mastaba tombs of the earlier kings and the true pyramid from which is met with under the next Dynasty, was constructed

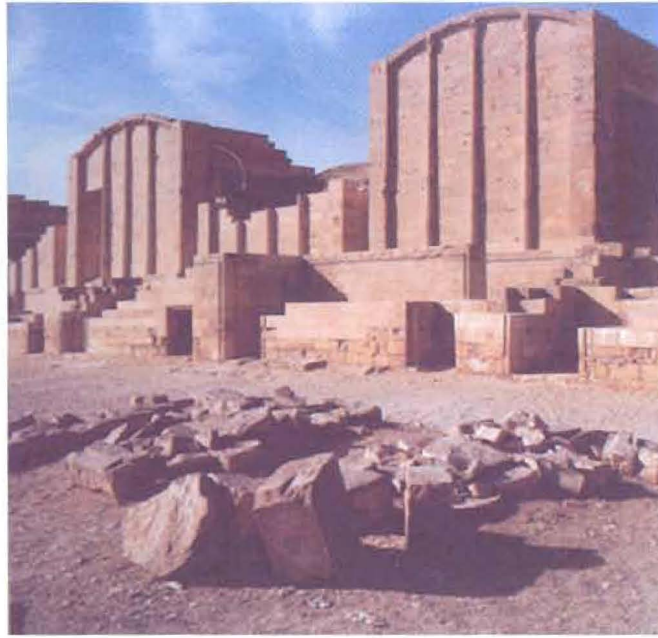
by the superimposition of five successively smaller mastabas on an original large one. It never had the continuous casing of stone, which marks the true pyramid. The site which Imhotep selected, was a stretch of high ground at Saqqara overlooking the city of Memphis. It covered an area measuring approximately 597 yards from north to south and 304 yards from east to west.

ZOSER STEP Pyramid was the central and dominating feature of a large complex of stone buildings and courtyards intended for various ceremonies connected with the after-life of the king. Around the perimeter of the complex was a massive stone enclosure wall. The Step Pyramid was a massive structure rising unequal stages to a height of 204 feet. Its base measurements were approximately 411 feet from east to west and 358 feet from north to south. Tura lime stone was used throughout for the outer facing of the buildings and local stone for their inner cores.

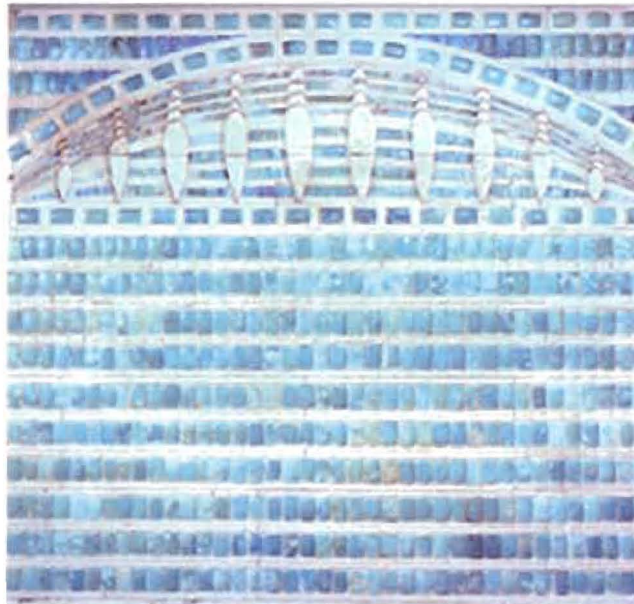
The structure of the Step pyramid consists of a deep shaft giving access to a maze of corridors and rooms forming a hypogeum without parallel among the other pyramids of the Old Kingdom. The halls and corridors were lined with blue and green glazed tiles of inlaid faience, bearing the King's names and titles.

WITH THE EXCEPTION of the Mortuary Temple and the Serdab, the buildings surrounding the Step Pyramid are without any known precedent or parallel.

Zoser's Mortuary Temple, a large rectangular building attached to the lowest step of the Pyramid, was entered through a doorway in its eastern wall. No door was carved in the stone wall adjoining the northern jamb. Many other buildings in the complex were fitted with similar imitation doors, often carved to fit the exact measurements of the doorway. The engaged columns with various decorations constituted,



The Heb-Sed courtyard is located east of the great courtyard, and its largest sides are delimited by two series of chapels built using three different architectural styles.



This panel consisting of many rectangular elements in the faience was formed within underground chambers of King's Zoser pyramid.

like the imitation doors, one of the most characteristics featuring the architecture of this complex.

In decoration the patterns chosen were copied from wood, reed, or brick elements of earlier buildings.

Although the prototypes of the papyrus and the Lily columns, which decorated the recesses in the eastern facades of the courts of the northern and the southern buildings, are evident at a glance, it is not easy to recognize what sculpture was endeavouring to reproduce in the case of the ribbed and fluted columns.

J.P. Lauer, maintains that these columns are imitations of wooden pillars representing bundles of reeds or palm-ribs which had been used as supports in more primitive constructions. This explanation, he believes, would account for the traces of red paint which remain on the columns, because red was the color used to represent wood, whereas green would be employed to represent the stems of plants.

It is impossible to divine with any certainty the archetype by which Imhotep was guided when designing this Mortuary Temple, but it is tempting to regard it as a stone representation of the royal palace at Memphis.

Doubts have sometimes been entertained whether so high a degree of architecture perfection could have been achieved without having been preceded by a long process of development. There is, however, no evidence that stone had been employed in any earlier building, except the construction of isolated parts. Moreover, the Step Pyramid displays many features which suggest that its builders lacked experience in the use of stone. Small blocks which could be easily handled were used instead of the massive slabs found in later buildings, showing that the technique of

quarrying and manipulating heavy pieces of stone had not been mastered.

Size, architecture design, and decorative elements were not the only respects in which Zoser's Pyramid excelled the tombs of his predecessors. It was also equipped on a scale never attempted before. Recent excavations explored thousands of beautifully shaped vases and dishes made of alabaster, schist, porphyry, breccia, quartz, crystal. Serpentine, and many other stones. Before its destruction the enclosure must have contained a considerable number of Statues. None of Zoser's successors in the IIIrd Dynasty has left a monument comparable in magnificence with his Pyramid enclosure.

IT IS WORTH mentioning that the Step Pyramid is generally said to be the earliest large stone structure known to history, and eventually formed the tomb of king Zoser. Imhotep, the architect was credited by Manetho with having been the inventor of the art of building in hewn stone.

The name Imhotep is also associated with an early temple of Edfu of which no vestige remains, but which was said to have constructed according to a plan dropped down from heaven to earth near the city of Memphis. Possibly there may have been a former temple on the same site erected by Imhotep in the days of Zoser. The present temple was began during the reign of Ptolemy III Euergetes I, 237 B.C., and finished in 57 B.C.

3-Imhotep as chief Lecture Priest or Ritualist

HELIOPOLITAN High Priest was one of Imhotep's titles. The Egyptian priesthood included two main classes of priests, the higher class being designated prophets "hmnw-ntr" or servants of gods, and the lower class ordinary priests "wb". Some priests were permanent officials of a temple, others served in rotation and enjoyed an interval of

three months leave between two periods of service. The chief lector priest or ritualist belongs to the higher class and was a permanent functionary entrusted with important duties. One of these was to attend the daily cult of the temple, where he sprinkled the god with water, fumigated him with incense, clothed and anointed him, applied cosmetics to his eyes and arrayed him with various ornaments. He also had to recite prayers from the holy books during the temple liturgy, and since according to the Egyptian faith these religious texts possessed magical powers, the common people regarded this priest as a magician.

The chief lector priest also assisted at the ritual of embalment and recital spells while the manipulations were in progress. Further, he officiated at the ceremonies connected with the presentation of offerings in the mortuary cult, which has been called the "Liturgy of Funerary Offerings".

Another series of ceremonies was known as "The opening of the Mouth", the object being to restore to the inert corpse the functions of which it had been deprived by death and emblament. Here also the chief lector priest was responsible for the order of ritual, although he had various assistants, especially the Sem who in many respects played the principal part.

In theory, of course, the King was the only priest and, as the incarnation of Horus, performed the whole funerary ritual for the dead person, conceived as Horus's dead father Osiris. In the eyes of the common people, however, the chief ritualist represented the King and the wielded mysterious powers that raised him far above the level of ordinary humanity.

4-Imhotep As Sage and Scribe

Imhotep enjoyed the reputation of being one of the greatest of Egyptian Sages, his fame

for wisdom made so deep an impression on his countrymen that he endures as a national tradition for many centuries.

As regards his literary activities, he is said to have produced works on medicine and architecture, as well as on more general subjects, and some of his works were extant at the dawn of the Christian era. His proverbs, embodying the philosophy of life which experience had taught, were handed down from generation to generation, and were noted for their grace and poetic diction, their author being described as a master of poetry.

A REMARKABLE song, known as the "Song of the Harper", has survived in which the names of Imhopet and Hardedef (A prince of the IV Dynasty and probably a Son of King Khufu) are linked together. Their philosophy is that of those persons who in all ages of the world have said "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die". This poem was evidently a great favorite since we have several versions differing in date by several centuries. It would of course not be faire to judge of Imhopte's philosophy from so slender a basis as that presented by the "Song of the Harper". As his reputation was so enduring, there were doubtless precepts and proverbs enjoining a higher morality.

Imhotep aslo filled the office of a royal scribe- an important post, since government business was carried on in writing. Doubtless in this office he formed the connecting link between Zoser and his subordinate officials. Centuries after his death, the Egyptian scribes used to pour a libation out of their water bowl to Imhotep.

5-Imhotep as Astronomer

If the references to Imhotep in Hermetic Literature can be trusted, he was also interested in astronomy and astrology, although no special observations are associated with his name.



**Three Papyrus columns decorate the eastern wall of the courtyard.
Papyrus was the symbol of Lower Egypt.**



**Imhotep statue, made of bronze – Late period,
Egyptian Cairo Museum.**

TO THE GOD Thot (Hermes) was attributed a special knowledge of astronomy and of many other sciences, and Imhotep was reputed to have been associated with that deity in astronomical observations. The faith that stars in their courses powerfully affected human destiny was well-nigh universal, and this faith led to a close study of the movements of the heavenly bodies, of eclipses, of occultation of the planets, of the length of the sidereal year, as well as to the identification of the sun, moon and stars with the principal deities in the Egyptian pantheon.

A remarkable degree of accuracy in the observation of the stars must have been required to show the Egyptians that the heliacal rising of the Dog-star Sothis (Sirius) would give them a fixed year provided that a quarter of a day was added for each year. The period when this Sithic year was introduced appears not to be definitely known, but it certainly goes far back in Egyptian history.

Diodorus Siculus writes "There is no country where the position and movements of the stars have been observed with such accuracy as in Egypt.

6-Imhotep as a Magician -Physician

Imhotep probably enjoyed a high reputation both as magician and as physician. Although there is no contemporary evidence of Imhotep having been a physician. The fact, however, that by the time of Mycerinus in the IVth Dynasty he had apparently become a medical demigod and that in the Persian period he was worshipped as the deity of medicine is strong presumptive evidence of his distinction both in magic and in medicine. We have also the evidence of Manetho the Egyptian historian that Imhotep was a physician in the time of Zoser.

In the Westcare papyrus allusion is made to a wonderful feat of magic exhibited by the

chief ritualist of King Zoser, who was probably none than Imhotep. The full details of the magical performance are not given in the papyrus, but the allusion occurs in a speech made to King Khufu (Cheops) by one of his sons who described the magic as having been performed in the days of King Zoser by his chief ritualist.

Although Imhotep was a noted magician, it appears that medicine was the mistress he most zealously wooed; it is his eminence as a healer of the sick that has given him impishable fame, and that led eventually to his deification. For a time he was probably both court physician and vizier to king Zoser; he evidently moved in the highest social circles.

MAGIC AND MEDICINE were closely associated in therapeutics, that method of treatment being selected which was most suited to the malady in question. Magical papyri are leavened with medical prescriptions, while medical papyri, such as the Ebers papyrus, are constantly interspersed with incantations and invocations.

The oldest of the existing medical papyri was written circa 1900 B.C. It is believed that the Berlin Medical Papyri and much of the Ebers and Edwin Smith Medical Papyri are copies of an original work by Imhotep. Herein after some information concerning these Medical papyri:

Edwin Smith surgical Papyrus: written 1600 B.C., published by J.H. Breasted, treats wounds, fractures, luxations; arranged systematically from the head downwards & stops at treatment of an injury to the spine. 48 Cases are described and treated.

Ebers Papyrus: written circa 1550 B.C., It is 20.23 meters long and 30 cms wide, distributed in 108 columns; each of 20-22 lines. It includes different diseases but nothing about fractures and luxations.



King Ptolemy V worshipping Imhotep and other deities.



Imhotep – Deity of Medicine.

Prescriptions are arranged according to diseases, e.g. eye diseases, women's diseases, skin diseases etc. It may be stated that it belongs to the physician, while Ed. Smith pap. Belongs to the surgeon.

Erman's Medical Papyrus: date 1550 B.C. in Berlin, Incantations for child birth & child welfare – 18th. Dynasty. Contains a list of human organs.

The worship of The Demigod

THE WORSHIP of Imhotep doubtless originated at his tomb, which was probably not far removed from the Step Pyramid which had been erected, probably by Imhotep himself, for his royal master Zoser. Imhotep mastaba by degrees became a place of pilgrimage, especially for sick and suffering persons, and apparently, as stated in the *Oxyrhynchus papyrus* already referred to some temples were erected in his honor. All the impressive ritual which stirs the imagination, and acts so powerfully by means of suggestion on the mentality of sick and suffering persons was doubtless restored to, and the fame of Imhotep as the superhuman healer of disease began to spread, although it probably did not extend far from his mastaba. It was also during the demigod period that the custom arose among Egyptian scribes of pouring a libation out of their water-bowl to Imhotep "that most famous of scribes".

A still clearer reference to the subject is given by A. H. Gardiner and occurs on a funeral stela belonging to the reign of Amenophis III (1411-1375 B.C.), where we read : "May the "web" priests stretch forth for thee their hand with water upon the ground like that which is done for Imhotep from the end of the water-bowl". Evidently therefore by the XVIIIth Dynasty Imhotep had become distinguished from other Egyptian celebrities by a special rite practiced in his honor as a demigod.

A similar process of gradual elevation to the rank of demigod and finally to full deity occurred in the case of another noted sage, Viz. Amenophis, the son of Hapu, who was vizier under King Amenophis III.

The demigod stage appears to have lasted from the reign of Mycerinus until the beginning of the Persian period. That period would therefore extend over twenty-three centuries (from c. 2850 B.C. to 525 B.C.), after which the zenith of full apostheosis was reached.

Imhotep as Deity of Medicine

Nearly twenty-five centuries elapsed between the time when Imhotep held office under the pharaoh Zoser and the time when he was raised to the rank of full deity of medicine. His apotheosis appears to have taken place somewhere about 525 B.C., the year in which Egypt was conquered by Cambyses and became a Persian province.

THE PRECEDING period in Egyptian history, lasting from the expulsion of the Assyrians in 654 B.C. to the Persian Conquest in 525 B.C. and corresponding with the XXVIth Dynasty, is known as the Saitic Restoration period and formed one of the most brilliant epochs in Egyptian history. The worship of the early Pharaohs who had ruled at Memphis was restored. As a further indication of the desire to pay honour to those who in the former days had brought glory to the nation, the famous Imhotep who had been raised to the rank of medical demigod was now advanced to the status of full deity of medicine. He has given the title of son of ptah, one of the oldest of all Egyptian deities, and also a god of healing. With this new divine father, in place of his human father, Imhotep becomes a member of the great triad of Memphis which includes Ptah, Sekhmet and Imhotep. It is worth mentioning that all the three members of the triad of Memphis were gods of healing.

The worship of Imhotep:

The cult of Imhotep was probably first associated with his tomb, which, as already mentioned, was situated outside the city of Memphis on the edge of the desert to the west of the town. As time went on his cult spread throughout the land of Egypt and even into Nubia. More and more widely was Imhotep accepted as the deity of medicine, and worshipped as on a level with the full gods of Egypt. The popularity of Imhotep will cause no surprise, since he both healed the sick, protected from accident, gave children to sterile women and bestowed life on all men. In fact during the Hellenistic period the sage Imhotep, now defied, appears to have become the principal god worshipped at Memphis.

THERE IS AN interesting reference to the god Imhotep in the ritual of Embalment, which gave directions for the anointing and bandaging of the mummy as it was being prepared for sepulture. Every Egyptian died in the firm belief that in the course of his journey through the Underworld or Duat he would be provided with magic spells which would enable him to make his way unhindered and obtain for him ample supplies of nourishment. Imhotep was one of those to whom were attributed such "words of power" which protected the dead from all kinds of enemies. Maspero attributes this signal favour to the qualifications of architect, physician, sage and magician, but attributes the apotheosis mainly to his skill in Magic. It is, he says, in virtue of his powers as a magician that Imhotep was defied.

LONG BEFORE the Greek conquest of Egypt by Alexander, Imhotep had become generally recognized as the deity of medicine. The Greeks who called him Imouthes amalgamated him with their own Asklepios, so that for some centuries the Egyptian deity of medicine may be described as in some measure a fusion of the ancient Imhotep and the much more modern Asklepios. During the Ptolemaic period there

seems to have been some relation between the worship of Imhotep and that of the sacred bull of Ptah named Apis.

Incubation in Imhotep temples:

Incubation is meant the practice of sleeping or at any rate passing the night in some sacred spot, such as the court of a temple, in the hope of receiving a divine message or revelation, usually in favor of a sick devotee.

Incubation in the period of the Demigod:

In the Oxyrynchus papyrus already referred to, the writer named Nechautis, who performed the duties of a priest and who had apparently found the papyrus in Imhotep's temple, tells a remarkable story of a devotee and which throws a vivid light on the practice of incubation. The story relates to the mother of Nechautis who was attacked with quartan ague. This illness induced her friends to seek assistance at the temple of Imhotep, who appeared to the sick woman in dreams and cured her by simple remedies for which both mother and son showed their thanks by sacrifices. Subsequently Nechautis himself fell ill, suffering from pain in his right side, violent fever, loss of breath and coughing, associated with the pain in his side. He too, in his turn, and accompanied by his mother, hastened to the shrine and lapsed into half-conscious sleep. Again Imhotep appeared in a vision to the mother who awaked and found the fever had departed her son leaving him healthy. Again son and mother expressed their gratitude to Imhotep. The text then proceeds to recount the history of Asklepios (Imhotep), son of (Hephaistos- in late period Ptah was called Hephaistos) and the manner in which he told Mycerionus to busy himself with his tomb. It is clear that though Imhotep was not yet recognized as a full deity, he was to some extent worshipped in the same manner as a god.

Incubation in the period of Deity of medicine:

An interesting story written in Demotic on Papyrus on the verso of a document which contains official writings in Greek dated in



Imhotep deity of Medicine seated.



Philae temple – built around 283-221 BC. in Philae island in the Nile of Aswan, southern Egypt.

the 7th year of Claudious Caesar, reserved now in the British Museum. The story relates to a man named Satemi Khamuas, the son of the Pharaoh Usermares, who had no man-child by his wife Mahituaskhit; this troubled him greatly in his heart, and his wife was greatly afflicted with him. One day, when Satemi was more depressed than usual, his wife went to the temple of Imhotep, son of Ptah, and uttered this prayer before him, saying: "Turn thy face towards me, my lord Imhotep, son of ptah; it is thou who dost work miracles, and who art beneficent in all thy deeds; it is thou who givest a son to her who has none. Listen to my lamentation and give me conception of a man-child.

THE SAME NIGHT Mahituaskhit, the wife of Satemi, slept in the temple and dreamed a dream in which one spoke with her, "Art thou not Mahituaskhit the wife of Satemi, who dost sleep in the temple to receive a remedy for thy sterility from the hands of the god. When to-morrow morning comes, go to the bath-room of Satemi thy husband, and thou wilt find a root of colocasia that is growing there. The colocasia that thou meetest with thoushalt gather with its leaves; thou shalt make of it a remedy that thou shalt give to thy husband, then thou shalt lie by his side, and thou shalt concieve by him the same night".

When Mahituaskhit awoke from her dream after seeing the vision, she at once carried out the instructions given to her in her dream; then she lay by the side of Satemi, her husband and conceived by him. When the time came all the signs of pregnancy appeared, Satemi announced the news to the Pharaoh. He bound an amulet on his wife and recited a spell over her. Eventually she gave birth to a remarkable boy named Senosiris, who later became a famous magician.

THERE IS ALSO evidence of a similar story of another case of sterility being cured by Imhotep relates to the wife of a priest of Ptah temple at Memphis contemporary of the

reign of Ptolemy XIII (c. 71 B.C.). The details are given in a famous stela of the Ptolemaic period now reserved in the British museum, Egyptian sculpture Gallery, Bay 29, Reg. No. 147.

Incubation sleep in temples was restored to for many forms of sickness, oracular intimations being given by the deity during natural or drug produced mantic dreams and interpreted by the priests.

The Temples of Imhotep:

Several temples were built in the honour of Imhotep after his apotheosis. The principal one was at Memphis and became a famous hospital and school of Magic and Medicine. The temple who unhappily no traces have survived was situated near to the spot where Imhotep was laid to rest and was called by the Greeks the Asklepieion. Close to the Asklepieion was the vast Serapieion, consisting of a group of temples in which Serapis and various other deities were honoured. The worship of Imhotep was to some extent connected with that of Serapis, so much so that stone altars sacred to Imhotep were actually set up in the Serapieion, on which daily libations were offered.

Another temple of Imhotep built by Ptolemy II, 283-245 B.C., also called the Asklepieion, existed at Philae (called sometimes the Holy island) and of this, an interesting specimen of Egyptian architecture has survived to this day. Imhotep was also worshipped in various other temples. One of these temples was of Ptah at Thebes, built by Thutmosis III and restored by several of Ptolemies. Another important temple was the superb building built (c. 1545-1350 B.C.) by Queen Hatshepsowet in Western Thebes, know by Al Deir Al Bahari. A later addition, known as the Ptolemaic chamber, was erected by Ptolemy IX, and this was dedicated to Imhotep and Amenophis son of Hapu. Several graffeti found on the walls of visitors

offering their gratitude to the god Asklepios. Another graffeti of a Christian, grieved to

find so many deities evoked, added his correction above the errors of previous centuries "It is the One God who helps you".

Not far from Deir el-Bahari are several other temples in which Imhotep appears in mural reliefs.

Amongst then is the Ptolemaic temple known at the present day as the Kasr el-Agouz, which was erected by Euregetes II to the god Thot. Here maybe seen the King sacrificing to Thot, Imhotep and the defied sage Amenophis the son of Hapu. Imhotep and Amenophis were also jointly worshipped in the temple of Medinet Habu.

THE SAME APPLIES to the temple of Deir el Medineh. The magnificent temple of Edfu must probably added to those in which Imhotep was honoured. There were also several temples in Nubia where he was held in high honour and perhaps even worshipped such as temples of Debot, Dakka and Kalabsha.

Apart from these public temples there appear to have been in Ptolemaic times many small shrines or altars which individuals erected in their honour of their deity Imhotep in hope of securing his protection against all sorts of misfortunes. Such shrines were dedicated both to Isis and Imhotep (Askelpios), the however being the principal god of healing.

Festivals in Honour of Imhotep

RELIGIOUS FESTIVALS played a prominent role in the life of the Egyptians. Great processions were organized in which took part the priests with shaven heads, clad in linen of spotless white, as well as throngs of devotees, all eager to do honour to their deities. Music, singing, dancing, floral decorations, banquets all added to the gaiety of the ceremonies, while at night numerous

torches illuminated the streets with flickering lights and prolonged the feasting far into the night. Important festivals might extend over several days or even weeks.

The accompanying inscription discovered on the carved pedestal of a lost statue reserved now in the British Museum tells us that under the Ptolemies regular festivals were celebrated at Memphis in honour of the god Imhotep.. There were six festivals in all during the year. Celebrated according to Gauthier on the following:

16th day- 3rd month of the summer. (31st May)
11th day- 2nd month of winter. (27th Dec.)
9th day- 4th month of summer. (23rd June)
17th day- 4th month of summer. (1st July)
23rd day- 4th month of summer. (7th July)
4th day- 2nd month of summer. (19th April)

Still there is more to say about Imhotep and his role in the life of Egypt. His life was so varied in its pursuits, so notable in its achievements, so trusted by suffering humanity, so glorified in its final apotheosis, should fill us with admiration. His record reaches from the Pyramid age, 2900 B.C. through the Middle and New Kingdoms and far into the period of Egyptian servitude, almost indeed until the Arab conquest in A.D. 640. Indeed it would be difficult to find a historical parallel for a similar concatenation of incidents during an earthy life and after death during a period of more than 3500 years like Imhotep.

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