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The recording of the second of the two Ramesside Tombs at El-Mashayikh was completed during the 1988/9 season and work on the publication of the material is progressing well. The chapel of the tomb is very unprepossessing in size, but by contrast the subterranean burial chamber is surprisingly large, several times the size of the upper chapel. In fact it is a whole complex of chambers - one large central one with 6 others leading off from it. This suggests that the tomb was a family complex, a conclusion borne out by the inscriptional evidence. The main owner was the Royal Scribe and Archivist Imiseba, but two of his sons have a prominent place in the inscriptions, one called Nebnetjeru, a Chief Steward of Khonsu, Archivist and Army scribe, the other, Penmehit, an army scribe. Other sons mentioned are a scribe of Pharaoh, Amenemope, and a Kaemwenu.

As well as the usual funerary scenes and inscriptions, the chapel also has an interesting, and for the Ramesside period unusual, series of reliefs depicting activities of daily life - ploughing and sowing, catching and drying fish, a fowl-yard scene, and a scene of Imiseba seated on a chair in his office with other scribes sitting on the floor in front of him with their chests of papyrus rolls.

IMHOTEP

(Part II of Jim Walker's article on the Vizier & Architect of Djoser who became Imouthes/Asklepios)

Manetho, a Graeco-Egyptian historian who lived in early Ptolemaic times, encapsulated those attributes of Imhotep for which he was then most renowned; "he (Imhotep) was styled Aesculapius by the Egyptians because of his medical skill. He was also the inventor of building with hewn stone; and in addition he devoted care to the writing of books." Imhotep's credentials as sage and writer of books are well documented but what about the other claims? If the Imhotep on the 3rd Dynasty statue base is the famous one of later times then the title Chief(?) of Stonemasons and Relief-sculptors which appears there would verify his reputation of having been a master mason. This skill is not otherwise alluded to until the 27th Dynasty when he is found to have the title Overseer of Constructions of the King of Upper and Lower Egypt. Despite this gap in the evidence, Imhotep's very close relationship with Ptah, the patron god of stonemasons and metalsmiths, must add weight to the claim that Imhotep was a master mason and that he was responsible for building the greatest stone building of his day, the sublime Step-Pyramid complex of Djoser.

Two Ptolemaic inscriptions throw some more light on this aspect of Imhotep's reputation. Teos, a High-Priest of Ptah at Memphis, addresses Imhotep as one "who calculates everything for the library; who restores what is found destroyed by the holy books; who knows the secrets of the House of Gold (i.e. the metalsmiths' workshop)". The second assertion in this passage implies that it was the sacred books written by Imhotep which guided architects and masons in their construction of a temple or other stone building. This interpretation receives support from an inscription in the temple of Horus at Edfu in which Ptolemy IX states that he had "protected the temple by this wall on four sides, according to the Book of the Order of the Temple which was made by the Chief Lector-Priest Imhotep, Great One, Son of Ptah."

It is rather more difficult to discover how Imhotep gained his reputation of healer, an attribute which rapidly assumed far more importance than that of sage or architect. The earliest evidence of this role dates to the Sebennytic (30th) Dynasty (380 - 343 B.C.). The boom in popularity of Imhotep's cult appears to have occurred in the preceding Mendesian (29th) Dynasty because by the 30th Dynasty, Imhotep's temple at Saqqara was already a great place of pilgrimage for the sick and troubled from all over Egypt. It is suspected that the Sebennytic kings built a new temple for Imhotep in his precinct as they did for other cults in the vicinity. King Nectanebo II took as one of his epithets, Beloved of Imhotep, Son of Ptah. The extraordinary increase in Imhotep's popularity and his acquisition of the mantle of healer appear to be synchronous events and the two are almost certainly causally linked. If healing had been the major facet of his personality in earlier times we might expect to have at least one piece of evidence to prove it. His cult would probably have been more popular and widespread at an earlier date if this were the case but, as far as is known, Imhotep's cult was confined to Memphis and Saqqara until the 30th Dynasty.

The mechanisms whereby Imhotep acquired this role are a matter for speculation and his associations with Ptah and Thoth are an obvious place to start such deliberations. In the Ramesside era there was a great increase in personal piety in Egypt and Ptah, who had risen to the status of a major national god by this time, became the main deity to whom individuals of all classes addressed their prayers and petitions in times of sickness or strife. Ptah became the 'One who hears prayers', the 'Hearing ear'. The Egyptians had always believed that a great god was most readily accessible through a human or semi-divine intermediary, particularly through the son or daughter or the god. For example, the King fulfilled this role. It is plausible that by virtue of his very close association with Ptah, Imhotep was called upon more and more to serve as his intermediary until finally he received the appellation Son of Ptah. The Saite and Persian Periods witnessed a decline in the importance of Ptah on the one hand and the full apotheosis of Imhotep on the other and henceforth the latter completely eclipsed his divine father as the object of people's prayers.

Imhotep's fame stemmed mainly from his career as a scribe and thus he became linked in the Egyptian mind with ibis-headed Thoth, the patron deity of scribes. Thoth, as the god who presided over the sacred medical texts and the magical incantations which were used at every step in Egyptian medical practice, was important among the healing profession also. Imhotep, as Chief Lector-Priest, was already identified as a practitioner of the magic of Thoth in magico-religious rituals and so perhaps of the same magic as it was used in medico-religious rituals.

Early in the Ptolemaic Dynasty, Imhotep's cult spilled out from the Memphis region, with new cult places appearing in nearly every town, from Alexandria to distant Nubia. At least four cult places were established in the Theban area alone. Imhotep's assistance was sought by the ruling Ptolemies and his cult was handsomely rewarded in return; Imhotep became a major national deity. In this era the affinity between Thoth and Imhotep became extremely close and although Imhotep always remained Son of Ptah, he gained another epithet, 'the Ibis'. Both he and Thoth were called Sutmis and Mestasutmis which were Ptah's old epithets, the 'One who hears prayers' and the 'Hearing ear'. Imhotep was known as Imouthes and Asklepios to the Greeks and Thoth, of course, was Hermes. At Saqqara and Memphis both gods had major cult places in close proximity to one another and in many centres they were worshipped jointly in the one temple. Several of the ibis mummies found at Saqqara have the name or figure of Imhotep applied on the front. The identification between the two was so complete in Nubia that, in three temples (Philae, Dendur and Dakka), Thoth carries a staff entwined by a serpent, the symbol of Asklepios.

Thoth and Imhotep effected cures by the same method, through dream-oracles and incubation. A petitioner, commonly someone who was sick, childless or in personal trouble, presented a votive offering to the god and communicated their problem or request to his priest. The god's response was then believed to be delivered to the petitioner, or alternatively to the priest, in the form of a dream. The process is illustrated in an inscription of Taimhotep who petitioned Imhotep for a son. "Then, together with the High-Priest (Taimhotep's husband), I implored the majesty of this august god... He heard our prayers. The majesty of this god stepped into the presence of this High-Priest with a

revelation and spoke to him: 'Make a great work at ... I shall recompense you for it with a son...' Then he (the High-Priest) woke up and prostrated himself in front of this august god...". Imhotep's main temple, the Asklepieion at Saqqara, employed professional dream-interpreters for the benefit of the petitioners. This temple complex was described as possessing many cells which may have been the temple storehouses, dwelling quarters for the katochoi (religious recluses) or possibly they were incubation cells where petitioners or priests slept overnight to make themselves more accessible to Imhotep whose very tomb lay beneath them. Christians and Moslems later interpreted these cells to have been prison cells and for over a thousand years the Asklepieion was called The Prison of Joseph. The legend behind this name stated that it was here that the imprisoned Joseph of biblical fame was visited by the archangel Gabriel - in a dream!!

In the Roman era and beyond, both Imhotep and the Asklepieion continued to flourish. St. Jerome transmitted a story from the beginning of the 4th century A.D. in which a lover from Gaza travelled to Memphis to receive instruction in the magic arts from the priests of Aesculapius so that he might win his love. Later in that century Ammianus Marcellinus characterized Memphis as, "a city famous for the frequent visits of the god Aesculapius." In the 11th century there was still an annual festival of the 'spirit' of The Prison of Joseph when pilgrims would gather there, some staying for 10 days and nights. An alchemist who visited the Prison in the 12th century described the hieroglyphs and numerous pictures of birds (?ibises) which adorned the walls. He also described a large statue which still stood inside the temple at that date; it is a perfect description of Imhotep in his iconographic form. Saladin in the late 12th century raided the great Asklepieion for its stone to construct the citadel at Cairo. Despite its almost total disappearance, the religious respect which the site of Imhotep's shrine still commanded in the 19th century prompted the workers on Mariette's excavations at Saqqara to down tools refusing to excavate the area they believed to be the site of The Prison of Joseph. Unfortunately, Mariette did not record where this site was and the tomb of Imhotep and the Asklepieion/Prison of Joseph remain undiscovered and unexcavated to this very day.

What did the great Asklepieion look like? The ancient and medieval sources state; (a) that the temple precinct was surrounded by a massive mud-brick wall which gave it the appearance of a fortress, (b) that the temple inside this wall was built of hard stone (?sandstone), (c) that the walls were covered with hieroglyphic inscriptions and scenes which indicates that it was in the Egyptian style, not Graeco-Roman, (d) that the temple had a forecourt with several windows of appearances, (e) that it had a vast area paved with innumerable paving blocks (?the forecourt), (f) that there were other cult shrines within the Asklepieion precinct, specifically of Bastet/Sakhmet, Anubis and Osiris, (g) that Imhotep's tomb lay within the temple precinct, (h) that a vault or cavern featured in the cult rituals (?a chamber of Imhotep's tomb).

Now the \$64,000 question... Where was the Asklepieion located? The ancient and medieval sources give the following clues. It lay north of Memphis, north-west of the village of el-Azizayya, near the Lake of Abusir, near 'the shore of crocodiles'. It stood on a high spur of the desert plateau called the Peak and it stood near the edge of the plateau

overlooking the Lake of Abusir. Opposite its entrance, probably in the valley below, stood a grove of thorny acacias. A mosque called the Mosque of Moses stood below the Asklepieion in the cultivated land but near the desert margin. Since the Asklepieion lay within the boundary of the Greater Serapieion it must have been located in or very close to the necropolis of Saqqara North.

To conclude... The story of Imhotep, the man who became Imouthes/Asklepios, the god of healing, is the story of a man whose qualities and skills have been venerated continuously now for nearly 4500 years. Whether he was a great physician or even a physician at all, is a moot point; his great service to mankind in his capacity as a healing deity makes the question almost irrelevant. In our own century there have been concerted but unsuccessful attempts to displace the Greek Asklepios (Roman Aesculapius) from his pedestal as the symbolic patron of the medical profession and to enthrone the Egyptian Imhotep in his stead. Despite the fact that nothing written by Imhotep himself is known to have survived we can be confident that he was a truly remarkable man. The Roman Emperor Claudius shall have the final say about Imhotep the deity;

"O Imhotep in your name 'the wonderful', 'the might', 'of great reputation in the Two Lands', who restores what is destroyed everywhere in the temples, of perfect intelligence, who calculates everything, skilful like Thoth, the great... successful in his activities, who knows the prescriptions and the recipes, which are written upon his heart, who lets be known the movements of the stars... who attenuates famine, skilful in his words, experienced in the divine writings, who gives life to the people and protects the pregnant, who gets the sterile with child, who gives a son to everyone who implores it, who protects the child, who regenerates the age of those who serve god, who soothes illness. Great (One), wonderful appearance which stays on earth; there are no troubles as long as he is to be seen every day."

Suggested further reading:

Hurry, J.B., Imhotep (Oxford, 1926)

Wildung, D., Egyptian Saints: deification in ancient Egypt (New York, 1977)

The name of the author of this article - Jim Walker - was inadvertently omitted from Part I.

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PROGRESSIVE DINNER: SATURDAY 21 OCTOBER 1989

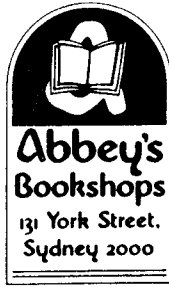
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