

JOSEPH AND IMHOTEP

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Introduction

Historical background of the books of *Genesis* and *Exodus* has aroused questions and debate during the last centuries. The most difficult question seems to be the timing of the period of the Patriarchs to the *Exodus*. Traditional timing of the *Exodus* has been to a period of between 1300 and 1220 BC. The problem is the lack of historical and archaeological evidences about the Israelites in Egypt and about the *Exodus* from that period.

Some archaeological findings from the Negev Desert would fit the timing of the *Exodus* at the end of the Old Kingdom, about 2100 BC. Prof. Anati has presented this kind of dating at the conclusions of his surveys in Mount Karkom (Anati, 1993, pp. 76-80). Some questions in the history of the Old Kingdom of Egypt would be solved with the assumption, that the Israelites would have lived in Egypt during that time, from the 3rd to the 6th Dynasty. Those are questions about marshland scenes in the tombs of that period (Harpur, 1987), existence of private phyle system (a tribe and work organisation) during that time and figures of circumcision in those tombs (Roth, 1991). To mention names of the persons in the time of the *Exodus*, Pepi I would fit for the King at the start of the depression, Pepi II the King at the time Moses, Merenre II the King of the *Exodus*, being the brother of Queen Nitocris (refer to the story of Nitocris at Herodotus (Herodotus).

If we go 400 to 500 years back from the time of *Exodus*, we will be at the 3rd Dynasty. From that time the traces of Joseph and the famine could be found. And actually there is a story about the seven years' famine dated to the time of Djoser (or Zoser), King from the 3rd Dynasty (Budge, 1912). The person, who solved the famine, was Imhotep, "vizier" of Djoser and architect of the Step Pyramid. That connection arouses the question: Could Imhotep be the same person as Joseph? To give some material for that, a comparison of the events and characteristics of Imhotep and Joseph will be presented here.

Imhotep and Joseph

In fig. 101 there is a comparison of backgrounds, deeds and characteristics of Imhotep and Joseph in a condensed form.

Parents

The names of the parents of Imhotep are presented at the late periods of Egyptian history, Persian period and Ptolemaic Dynasty. His father has been architect Kanofer and mother Khereduankh (Hurry, 1926, p. 24, 98), (Hart, 1990, p. 64). Does the name Kanofer reflect the name of Canaan or does its first hieroglyphics, mark of bull, reflect

	Imhotep	Joseph
Elders	Father: Kanofer "beautiful bull" Mother: "mythical mother" (Hart, p. 64). (Hurry, pp. 24-25)	Father: Jacob, came to Egypt (bulls) Mother: Rachel, died before Joseph went to Egypt (<i>Genesis</i>)
Childhood	No information about birthplace neither childhood (Hurry, p. 3)	Was born outside Egypt (<i>Genesis</i>)
Steps to the position	No information about that (Hurry, p. 4)	A slave from prison became a "vizier" (<i>Genesis</i> 39-41)
Solver of the famine	Stele of Aswan (Budge, pp. lx-lxviii, pp. 120-141)	(<i>Genesis</i> 41,29-40)
Meaning of name Imhotep	Meaning "a comer in peace" (Hurry, p. 96) could refer to a person, who has come abroad to Egypt	Joseph came from Palestine to Egypt (<i>Genesis</i>)
Titles	Seal-bearer of the king, first one under the king, administrator... (Hurry, pp. 5-9), (Kemp, p. 106)	"he made him ruler over all... Egypt" "only in throne will i be greater than you..." (<i>Genesis</i> 41,40-44)
He was familiar of both parts of Egypt	Architecture of the Step Pyramid is from both parts of Egypt (Edwards, pp. 64-66)	"Joseph ... went throughout all the land of Egypt" (<i>Genesis</i> 41,46)
Construction of Step Pyramid	Step Pyramid has been made in several phases (Edwards, pp. 55-60)	Labour work in several years of the famine (<i>Genesis</i> 47,18-26)
Wise man, counsellor	"one of the greatest of Egyptian sages" (Hurry, pp. 16-20), (Kemp, p. 106)	"there is none so discreet and wise as you are" (<i>Genesis</i> 41,39)
Wisdom texts	Author of a wisdom book (Kemp, p. 106)	"He made him (Joseph)... to teach his (king's) senators wisdom" (<i>Psalms</i> 105,21-22)
Versatility	Architect, astronomer, constructor, physician, scribe, sculptor, priest, etc. (Hurry) etc.	"hat which he (Joseph) did, the Lord made it to prosper" (<i>Genesis</i> 39,3;23)
Personal sensitivity	"tender heart towards suffering humanity" (Hurry, p. 26)	He reacted as a sensitive man with his brothers (<i>Genesis</i> 43,30; 45,2; 50,17)
No tomb found in Egypt	"although his tomb is not known" (Clayton, p. 36), (Hurry, pp. 27-28)	"Moses took the bones of Joseph with him." (<i>Exodus</i> 13,19)

Fig. 101. Comparison of the characteristics of Imhotep and Joseph.

that he bred cattle? The names Imhotep and Kanofer were common under the Old Kingdom (after the 3rd Dyn.), but Kheredueankh does appear only at Graeco-Roman period (Hurry, 1926, p. 25). That is why his mother is merely regarded as a "mythical mother" (Hart, 1990, p. 64).

According to the book *Genesis* the father of Joseph was Jacob and he moved to Egypt after his son. The mother Rachel died before Joseph moved to Egypt.

Meaning of the names

The name Imhotep is carved to the base of a statue of King Djoser (Kemp, 1990, p. 106), so it originates from the period he is said to have lived. Meaning of the name Imhotep is "one who comes in peace" or "a comer in peace" (Hurry, 1926, p. 96). Could

that refer to a person, who has immigrated Egypt? Would it be possible that the name such as this has been in use as a child's name in the Old Kingdom before the time of this Imhotep? It does not sound like a usual name for a child.

The Egyptian name of Joseph in *Genesis* is Zaph'nath-pa-an'eah (*Genesis* 41,45), it is interpreted as "Saviour". Maybe he had got two Egyptian names? If Zaph'nath-pa-an'eah would be his "official name", Imhotep could be given for his "birth name"?

Childhood and steps to position of "vizier"

There are no records or stories known about early history of Imhotep: "No glimpse is allowed us of his birthplace or childhood; there is no record of his appearance in the flesh, nor is anything told us of the steps by which he reached the highest post open to an official in Egypt" (Hurry, 1926, pp. 3-4). If Imhotep would have been Joseph, it would be better to forget his non-Egyptian origin and ascent from a slave in prison to that of a high office.

The well known history of early days of Joseph is in the book of *Genesis* (*Genesis* 30, 35, 37, 39-41).

Solver of the famine

In stele of Aswan there is "A Legend of the God Khnemu and of a Seven Years' Famine" (Budge, 1912, pp. lx-lxviii, 120-141). The stele itself is on a rock on the island of Sehel at First Cataract south of Aswan (fig. 102). The forms of the hieroglyphics indicate that the text was from the Ptolemaic period (Budge, 1912, p. lxii). As Budge states, why the famine would have dated to the 3rd Dynasty, if it would not have happened at that time. Hurry explains, that Imhotep did help in solving the reason of the famine (Hurry, 1926 pp. 7-8). In the Egyptian legend the part of Imhotep in the solution is not clear. What did happen in the "days when I (Djoser) had an adviser...Imhotep"? The explanation for the missing of the advice could be that the text is made for the benefit of the temple of Khnum (Khnemu) about 2000 years after the 3rd Dynasty.



Fig. 102. Stele of Aswan: story of the seven years' famine (Clayton, 1994, p. 33).

There is another record about Imhotep and famine. It is in a hymn in the temple of Hathor in Dendera, where Imhotep “attenuates famine” (Wildung, 1997, § 96).

The well known story of Seven Years’ Famine is in *Genesis* (*Genesis* 41-47). Some similarities between these stories can be found from fig. 103.

Titles of Imhotep and Joseph

The titles of Imhotep are indicated on the text of the base of a statue of Djoser (Wildung, 1997, pp. 5-8). In fig. 104 there is a comparison with the titles mentioned in the story of Joseph.

Familiarity with Lower and Upper Egypt

According to the architecture of the Step Pyramid, Imhotep was aware of the structures of buildings in Lower and Upper Egypt (Edwards, 1947, pp. 64-66). About Joseph there is a small note of his going out over all the land of Egypt (*Genesis* 41,46).

	Egyptian famine	Famine of Genesis
Advice of the solver to the King	Advice was given years before the famine: “I go back...to the days when I had an adviser, to the time of...Imhotep” (Hurry, p. 8).	Joseph gave advice to the King seven years before the start of the famine (<i>Genesis</i> 41).
Consulting of god	Consulted sacred books on the subject (Hurry, p. 8).	“God shall give Pharaoh an answer” (<i>Genesis</i> 41,16).
Severity of the famine	“misery hath laid hold upon me...Grain is very scarce...Men wish to walk, but are unable to move...Everything is in a state of ruin” (Budge, pp. 121, 123).	“the famine was very sore, so the land of Egypt...fainted by reason of the famine”, “give us seed, that we may live, and not die, that the land be not desolated” (<i>Genesis</i> 47,13; 19).

Fig. 103. Some similarities about the stories of the famines.

Imhotep (Kemp, p. 106)	Joseph (<i>Genesis</i> 41,38-45)
Seal-bearer of the King of Lower Egypt	“Pharaoh ... put it (his ring = seal?) upon Joseph’s hand” (v. 42)
First one under the king (preliminary stage of vizier Title) (Wildung, p. 7)	“only as regards the throne will I be greater than you” (v. 40)
Administrator of the Great Mansion	“You shall be over my house” (v. 40)
Prince (title of deputy king, since 4th Dynasty title of the prince who is a vizier) (Wildung, p. 7)	“gold chain (collar) about his neck”? (v. 42)
Chief of seers (a religious title) (title of the priest of Heliopolis) (Wildung, p. 7)	“a man as this, in whom is the Spirit of God”, “God has shown you all this” (v. 38, 39)
Imhotep the builder, the sculptor, the maker of stone vases (Clayton, p. 33)	“the Lord made all that he did to prosper in his hand” (<i>Genesis</i> 39, 3; 23)

Fig. 104. Comparison of titles of Imhotep and those mentioned about Joseph.

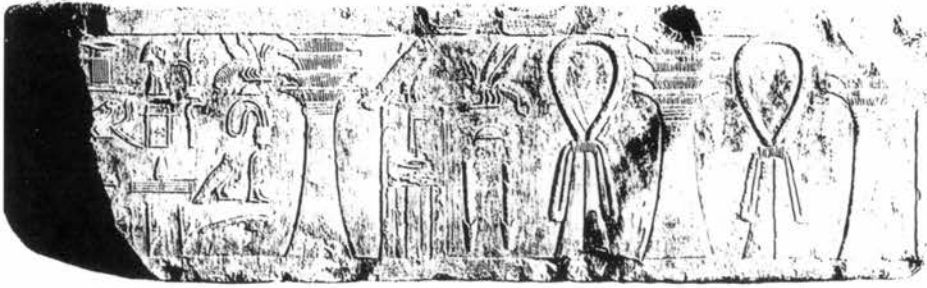


Fig. 105. The text at the base of the statue of Djoser including the titles of Imhotep (Clayton, 1994, p. 33).

Construction phases of the Step Pyramid

Nowadays Imhotep is best known as the architect of the Step Pyramid (Edwards, 1947, p. 53), (Kemp, 1994, p. 106). The Step Pyramid of Saqqara has been constructed in several phases (fig. 107) (Edwards, 1947, pp. 56-58). Explanation for several phases would be availability of the labour work done by the people to get corn from the state at the time of the famine. The change of the design would be an idea of the new organiser, Joseph, who would have got the form of the Step Pyramid from memories of Mesopotamian temples. The list of the phases include comparison with the phases of the famine of the *Genesis* (fig. 106).

Personal characteristics

From Egypt there are found hundreds of statuettes of Imhotep from the 22nd Dynasty to the end of the Late Period (Hurry, 1926, p. 101). Although dated about 2000 years after his time, these figures could give some assumption about the outlook of Imhotep. About the outlook of Joseph the *Genesis* tells: "Now Joseph was handsome and good-looking." (*Genesis* 39,6).

Imhotep has been known as a wise man:

"Imhotep enjoyed the reputation of being 'one of the greatest of Egyptian sages' (ref. Budge, Short History of Egypt); his fame for wisdom made so deep an impression on

Phases of the Step Pyramid (Edwards, 1947, pp. 55-58)	Phases in fig. 104	Phases of the famine (<i>Genesis</i> 47,18-26)
Mastaba and its enlargement	(1), (2), (3)	Before the famine
Entire different design was adopted: Four-stepped Pyramid	(4)	New architect: Joseph? Start of labour work after money and cattle had sold for the corn (3rd or 4th year)
Mortuary Temple	not in fig. 3	Labour work of the 5th year?
Extension of Pyramid towards north and west	extension of (4), (5)	Labour work of the 6th year?
Extension to the final size (6 steps) and the final layer	(5)	Labour work of the 7th year?

Fig. 106. Comparison of the construction phases of the Step Pyramid and phases of the famine.

his countrymen that it endured as a national tradition for many centuries” (Hurry, 1926, pp. 16-20); and he (Imhotep) achieved fame as a great official, and it was as a great official, with the inevitable attribute of being ‘wise’, that he was remembered.” (Kemp, 1994, p. 106).

Also Joseph was mentioned as a wise man by the King: “there is none so discreet and wise as you are” (*Genesis* 41,39).

Imhotep has been mentioned as an author of a wisdom book (Kemp, 1994, p. 106), although no parts of it has been found. A trace of teaching of Joseph can be found from a Psalm: “He (king of Egypt) made him lord of his house, and ruler of all his substance: To bind his princes at his pleasure; and teach his senators wisdom” (*Psalms* 105,21-22).

Versatility of the talents of Imhotep is wide. His skills in the arts of making different artefacts has been already mentioned in the time of Djoser, see Paragraph “Titles of Imhotep and Joseph”. He is said to be an architect, astronomer, constructor, physician, scribe, sculptor, priest (Hurry, 1926). Joseph had also success in various areas: “that what he (Joseph) did, the Lord made it to prosper” (*Genesis* 39,3; 23).

Personal sensitivity

Imhotep seems to have been a sensitive person: “he was a man of high and unsullied character, with a wide outlook of life, as well as a tender heart towards suffering humanity” (Hurry, 1926, p. 26). Joseph did react as a sensitive man with his brothers (*Genesis* 43,30; 45,2; 50,17). Evidently that is a characteristics of a talented person.

Death of Imhotep

By reconstruction of text of the Royal Canon of Turin, Wildung has found evidences of the death of Imhotep at the time of King Huni (3rd Dynasty) (Wildung, 1977, pp. 30-32). The time from the start of reign of Djoser to the death of Huni, last king of the 3rd Dynasty, is 55 years according to Clayton (Clayton, 1994, p. 30). Manetho gave for the last six kings of the Dynasty a combined total of 157 regnal years. Current dating sets only three kings after Djoser and for them 36 years (Clayton, 1994, p. 38).

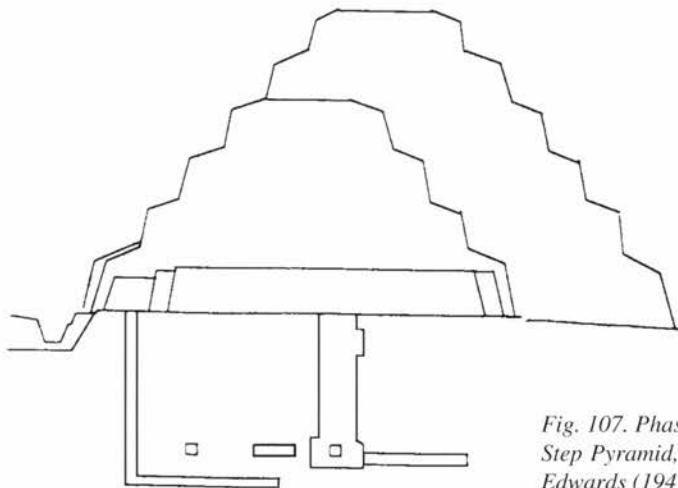


Fig. 107. Phases of the construction of the Step Pyramid, redrawn after the figure of Edwards (1947, fig. 6).



Fig. 108. Statuette of Imhotep from the Late Period. (WARA Archives, Egyptian Museum Turin).

Joseph was 30 years old at the start of his high position (*Genesis* 41,46) and he died at the age of 110 (*Genesis* 50,22-26). The difference is 80 years. Joseph would have been 30 years old at the 4th year of Djoser, if the end of Seven Years' Famine would have been at the 18th year of Djoser (Budge, 1912, p. 121), then. The death of Huni should be more than 80 years after that. Nowadays the period from the 4th year of Djoser to the death of Huni is counted to be about 50 years, which is shorter than in the chronology of Manetho.

Tomb of Imhotep

Imhotep was a well known person and name long after his death. This would imply that his tomb could have been found from Egypt. It has been searched at least from Saqqara (Hurry, 1926, pp. 27-28), with the result of not yet being found (Clayton, 1994, p. 36). Joseph was not buried in Egypt. As it is known from the history of *Exodus*, the body of Joseph was brought to the land of Israel (*Exodus* 13,19).

Only few notes of Imhotep from the Middle Kingdom

From the time of the Middle Kingdom there is practically no sources where Imhotep has been mentioned. In Wildung the only source from the Middle Kingdom is papyrus Westcar (Wildung, 1977, pp. 17-18). There is a story from the time of the Old Kingdom and its connection to Imhotep has been made only by conclusion. The silence would be explained with the Joseph theory and the *Exodus*. The Egyptians would not like to remember that unpleasant part of their history.

Since the 18th Dynasty there are texts and statuettes about Imhotep (Wildung, 1977, pp. 19-32). Why did Imhotep regain his reputation during the New Kingdom? Then Imhotep is in the demigod stage and is included in special rites. Egypt has gone through the time of Hyksos and maybe the fame of a wise "Egyptian" from the "good old days" has survived within the texts and history of the priests?

Ptah and Jahveh

Imhotep was “Son of Ptah” (Hurly, 1926), and Ptah was one of the creator gods of Egypt. Ptah creates the world “by means of his heart and his tongue” (Hart, 1990, p. 18). Ptah obtained its characteristics at the 2nd Dynasty. Abraham visited Egypt at the same dynasty. Could Ptah of Memphis and Jahveh of Israel have been comparable gods, in an Egyptian way? Would it be useful to compare the characteristics of Ptah and Jahveh?

Connections between history of Genesis and history of Egypt

There are some other connections between book of *Genesis* and the history of Egypt than the seven years’ famine at the time of Djoser. A table of the events of *Genesis* and *Exodus* has been presented in fig. 109 with a new chronology.

The visit of Abraham to Egypt has been told in *Genesis* (*Genesis* 12,10-20).

Event in Egypt	Year (BC) (Manley)	Year (BC)	Event in <i>Genesis</i> or <i>Exodus</i>
World wide weather disturbance (http://www.stanford.edu/~meehan/donnely/paleo1.html)	3200 (Donnelly)	3205	The Flood
Standardisation of the calendar (year of 365 days, 12 months)	2773 (Clayton)	2773	Visit of Abraham in Egypt (famine in Canaan), Sumerian calendar ?
Worship of sacred goat of Mendes, worship of sacred bull of Mnevis at the time of King Raneb, 2nd Dyn. (Clayton)	c. 2730	2773	Abraham came to Egypt with cattle (<i>Genesis</i> 12)
Djoser, 4th year (3rd Dynasty) The end of the famine: 18th year of King Djoser (Budge)	2626 2612	2572 2558	Joseph to the leader of Egypt The end of the famine (30 y. old)
Marshland people in Delta, “sudden appearance of marsh and agricultural scenes in tombs” (Harpur)	4th to 6th Dynasties	4th to 6th Dyn.	Israelites in the land of Goshen in Eastern Delta, with flocks and herds (sheep and bulls and cows)
Marks of private phyle system in some tombs (cult and work organisation), pictures of circumcision in the same tombs (Roth)	4th to 6th Dynasties	4th to 6th Dyn.	Organisations of Israelites circumcision
Sun cult and “Sun Kings” (from 5th Dyn.)	2465 -		“King who did not knew Joseph”
Pepi I (6th Dyn.), aggressive expansionist, construction works	2289- 2255		King of depression (<i>Exodus</i> 1,9-14)
Pepi II, 15th year (6th Dyn.), construction works in Delta (Bubastis, etc.)	2231	2213	Birth of Moses (<i>Exodus</i> 2)
Death of Pepi II (94 y. reign) Merenre II (6th Dyn.)	2152 2151	2134 2133	“King of Egypt died” (<i>Exodus</i> 2,23) Moses from the desert (<i>Exodus</i>)
End of the Old Kingdom, chaos in Egypt, story of Queen Nitocris (Herodotus)	2151	2133	Start of <i>Exodus</i> (430 after Jacob came to Egypt) (<i>Exodus</i> 12,40)
First Intermediate Period		2093	Destruction of Jericho and Ai

Fig. 109. Connections and chronology of some of the events of *Genesis* and *Exodus*.

According to *Genesis* it has been happened about 200 years before the famine. It is about 2800 BC, if the famine would have been during the reign of Djoser (about 2600 BC). In the history of Egypt the year 2773 BC is well known, because then the calendar of Egypt got its standard form (Clayton, 1994, p. 13). The length of the year in the new calendar was a constant 365 days. Could there be a connection between the visit of Abraham (a calendar from Sumer?) and the new calendar of Egypt?

There are also introductions of worship of the goat of Mendes (a town in Delta) and worship of the bull of Mneves (at Heliopolis) during the reign of Raneb at the 2nd Dynasty (Clayton, 1994, p. 26). Have these worships been started because of the visit of Abraham, who had cattle with him (*Genesis* 12, 13)?

Fig. 109 starts from the flood, which fits well with the timing of this article. Timing of the events of Egypt have been taken from the book of Manley (Manley, 1996). The events in *Genesis* and *Exodus* are based on the visit of Abraham being situated on the year 2773 BC. These chronologies differ between 20 to 50 years.

Conclusions

Although not much material has survived from the times of the early Old Kingdom, it has been possible to construct some picture about the history and characteristics of the person Imhotep. Several events in the history of Imhotep resemble those of Joseph. There are similar substances in their personal characteristics and skills. These similarities will not yet verify the hypothesis that Imhotep is the same person as Joseph. The question is strongly connected with the timing of the history of the Israelites. If it is possible to date the Israelites being in Egypt during the Old Kingdom, Imhotep would be a good candidate to be Joseph. Then some questions in the history of Imhotep would be solved by the background knowledge of Joseph. And the picture of Joseph would be deeper with what is known about Imhotep. Also a chronology of some of the events in *Genesis* and *Exodus* has been presented based on assumption that Abraham brought the calendar to Egypt in 2773 BC.

Presenting of these thoughts is to encourage questions and conversation. More study and new insights would be needed in several ranges of the study of the Old Kingdom to confirm or to disprove the hypothesis.

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Riassunto

Se cerchiamo un candidato per Giuseppe, figlio di Giacobbe, dai personaggi della storia dell'antico Egitto, una scelta potrebbe ricadere su Imhotep, "vizir" di Djoser, della terza dinastia dell'antico regno. Imhotep era un prominente e glorioso personaggio "mortale" nella storia d'Egitto e architetto della piramide a gradoni. Questa identificazione implica che l'*Esodo* degli Israeliti sia avvenuto alla fine del vecchio regno. Nel testo è stato condotto un confronto tra le caratteristiche e gli eventi riguardanti Imhotep e Joseph. In due punti fondamentali la storia di Imhotep è simile a quella di Joseph: il suo aiuto nella carestia dei sette anni e l'assenza della sua tomba in Egitto.

Summary

If we are looking for candidates for Joseph, son of Jacob, from the history of Ancient Egypt, one possibility could be Imhotep, "vizir" of Djoser from the 3rd Dynasty, of the Old Kingdom. Imhotep was a prominent and glorious "ordinary mortal" character in the history of Egypt and the architect of the Step Pyramid. This identification implies that the Exodus of the Israelites would have happened at the end of the Old Kingdom, therefore presenting a cause for the First Intermediate Period. A comparison of the events and characteristics of Imhotep and Joseph is presented in this paper. Two major points in the history of Imhotep do resemble those of Joseph: his help in the seven years' famine and the absence of his tomb in Egypt.

Résumé

Si nous cherchons un candidat pour Joseph, le fils de Jacob, parmi les personnages de l'histoire de l'Ancien Egypte, un choix pourrait tomber sur Imhotep, "vizir" de Djoser, de la troisième dynastie de l'Ancien Royaume. Imhotep était un important et glorieux personnage "mortel" dans l'histoire d'Egypte et aussi l'architecte de la pyramide à degrés. Cette identification implique que l'*Exode* des Israélites ait eu lieu à la fin de l'Ancien Royaume. Dans ce texte on a mené une comparaison entre les caractéristiques et les événements concernant Imhotep et Joseph. Pour deux faits fondamentaux l'histoire d'Imhotep ressemble à celle de Joseph: son aide durant la famine de sept ans et l'absence de son tombeau en Egypte.