



Poetry and Culture in Middle Kingdom Egypt: A Dark Side to Perfection (Studies in Egyptology and the Ancient Near East)

R. B. Parkinson

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The Middle Kingdom (c.1940-1640 BC) was a golden age of Ancient Egyptian writing. This pioneering book is the first comprehensive study of this literary legacy. The status of literature is controversial in many ancient civilizations, and Middle Kingdom poems have often been regarded as propaganda for the ruling dynasty. This study radically reassesses their cultural role, drawing on recent studies of the individual texts, some by the author, and on general developments in literary criticism, to argue that they were entertainments that voiced potentially dissident views while also being integral to elite culture. The book explores literature's status as a differentiated form of discourse, suggesting what social practices made its role possible and offering an innovative model for the reader's engagement with these subtle and complex ancient works. The book also surveys the social and ideological context of literature and proposes readings of the main tales, discourses, and teachings. The conclusion sets the readings in a broad context, while an appendix surveys the entire range of surviving texts.

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