



# Imagining the Past: Historical Fiction in New Kingdom Egypt

*Colleen Manassa*

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Five hundred years before Homer immortalized the Trojan Horse, the ancient Egyptians had already composed a tale of soldiers hiding Ali Baba-like in baskets to capture a besieged city. Shortly after the rise to power of the warrior pharaoh Ramesses II, Egyptian authors began to write stories about battles and conquest. However, these stories were not set in the present, but in the past: they were the world's first works of historical fiction. These literary recreations of past events, which preserve fascinating mixtures of fact and fiction, provide unparalleled information about topics as diverse as ancient Egyptian historiography, religion, and notions of humor and wit.

*Imagining the Past* is the first volume to provide complete translations and commentary for the historical fiction composed during Egypt's New Kingdom. The four works include *The Quarrel of Apepi and Seqenenre*, *The Capture of Joppa*, *Thutmose III in Asia*, *The Libyan Battle Story*. An introduction explores Egyptian conceptions of the past, the universe of historical and literary texts in New Kingdom Egypt, and the definition of a new genre of Egyptian literature. Extensive commentary and new translations appear within each chapter, and a concluding analysis summarizes the audience and function of historical fiction as well as theology and historiography within the tales. Despite the fragmentary nature of the papyrus copies, the thorough research into the literary, political, and social context of each tale allows a modern reader to explore this forgotten literary subfield and appreciate the stories as works of historical fiction.

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