



Sir Gardner Wilkinson and His Circle

Jason Thompson

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Following in the footsteps of Napoleon's army, Europeans invaded Egypt in the early nineteenth century to gaze in wonder at the massive, inscrutable remains of its ancient civilizations. One of these travelers was a twenty-four-year-old Englishman, John Gardner Wilkinson. His copious observations of ancient and modern Egyptian places, artifacts, and lifeways, recorded in such widely read publications as *Manners and Customs of the Ancient Egyptians* and *Handbook for Travellers in Egypt*, made him the leading early Victorian authority on ancient Egypt and paved the way for the scientific study of Egyptology.

In this first full-scale biography of Wilkinson (1797-1875), Jason Thompson skillfully portrays both the man and his era. He follows Wilkinson during his initial sojourn in Egypt (1821-1833) as Wilkinson immersed himself in a contemporary Egyptian lifestyle and in study of its ancient past. He shows Wilkinson in his circle of friends—among them Edward William Lane, Robert Hay and Frederick Catherwood. And he traces how Wilkinson continued to use his Egyptian material in the decades following his return to England.

With the rise of professional Egyptology in the middle and later nineteenth century, Sir Gardner Wilkinson came to be viewed as an amateur and his popularity diminished. Drawing upon recently opened sources, Thompson returns Wilkinson to his rightful place within centuries of Egyptian scholarship and assesses both the vision and the limitations of his work. The result is a compelling portrait of a Victorian "gentleman-scholar" and his cultural milieu.

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