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978-1-108-06586-3 - Topography of Thebes, and General View of Egypt: Being a Short Account of the Principal Objects Worthy of Notice in the Valley of the Nile

John Gardner Wilkinson

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### Topography of Thebes, and General View of Egypt

A pioneer of British Egyptology, Sir John Gardner Wilkinson (1797–1875) first travelled to Egypt in 1821, the year before Champollion published his breakthrough work on the Rosetta Stone. As public interest in Egypt grew, Wilkinson studied and sketched the country's major archaeological sites, most notably the tombs of Thebes. When published in 1835, the present work was the first major book in English on the subject and the most substantial since the French *Description de l'Égypte*. The text and plates present a detailed picture of contemporary Egypt in relation to its ancient heritage. Wilkinson remodelled and expanded the work as *Modern Egypt and Thebes* (1843), and his chapter here on daily life in the days of the pharaohs formed the basis of his celebrated *Manners and Customs of the Ancient Egyptians* (1837). Both titles are also reissued in this series.

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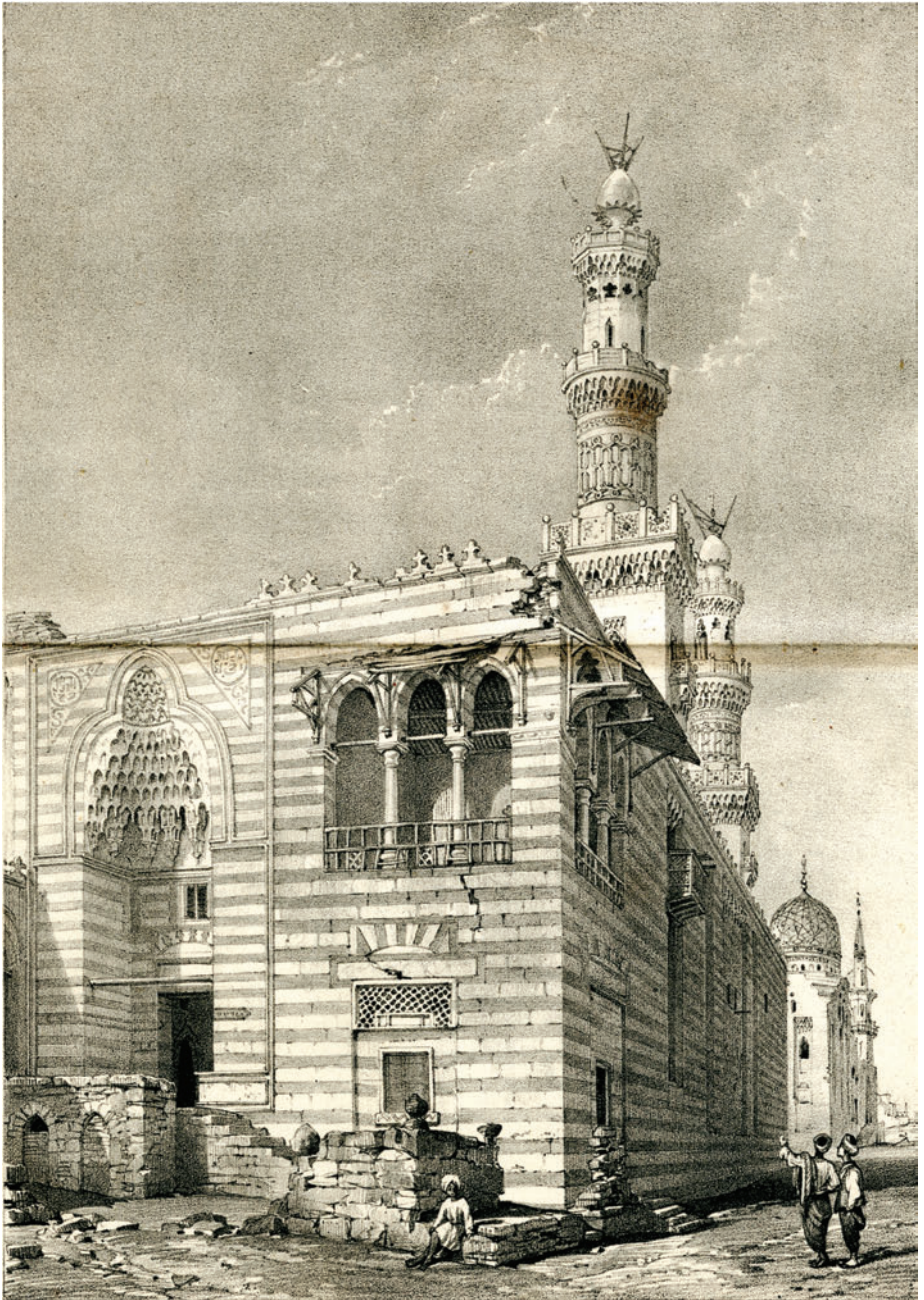
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Drawn by J. G. Wilkinson Esq<sup>r</sup> & on Stone by I. Hagghe.

Tomb of Soltán Berquq.

Tomb of Soltán el Ghóree.

# TOMBS OF THE MAMLUK KINGS OF EGYPT.

London, John Murray Albemarle Street.

*By J. Hagghe, Engraver to the King*

The material originally positioned here is too large for reproduction in this reissue. A PDF can be downloaded from the web address given on page iv of this book, by clicking on 'Resources Available'.

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GENERAL VIEW OF EGYPT.  
BEING A SHORT ACCOUNT OF  
THE PRINCIPAL OBJECTS WORTHY OF NOTICE  
IN THE  
VALLEY OF THE NILE,  
TO THE  
SECOND CATARACT AND WADEE SAMNEH, WITH THE  
FYOOM, OASES, AND EASTERN DESERT, FROM  
SOOEZ TO BERENICE;  
WITH REMARKS ON THE  
MANNERS AND CUSTOMS OF THE ANCIENT EGYPTIANS  
AND THE  
PRODUCTIONS OF THE COUNTRY,  
&c. &c.  
BY I. G. WILKINSON, Esq.  
LONDON:  
JOHN MURRAY, ALBEMARLE STREET.  
MDCCCXXXV.

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TO THE  
  
L O R D P R U D H O E,  
  
AS AN ACKNOWLEDGMENT FOR THE VERY KIND ASSISTANCE  
HE HAS AFFORDED HIM IN HIS RESEARCHES,  
BY THE USE OF HIS MANUSCRIPTS  
AND OTHER PAPERS,  
  
AND BY  
MUCH VALUABLE INFORMATION ON EGYPTIAN SUBJECTS,  
  
T H I S W O R K  
  
*IS INSCRIBED,*  
  
BY  
  
T H E A U T H O R.

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## P R E F A C E.

IN order to hasten the publication of this work, it was my original intention to have put the MS. into the hands of a printer at Alexandria; but detained at first by the cholera morbus, and subsequently prevented by his death from having it printed in Egypt, I have been obliged to forward it to England,\* which will necessarily occasion considerable delay. Had I been aware of this at first, I might have extended my historical or chronological account of the Egyptian monarchs; nor should I have confined the fifth, sixth, and seventh chapters to their present limits.

I have avoided entering at any length on the subject of hieroglyphics, as being of little interest to the general reader, and some future opportunity may present itself, when the study of them is better understood.

The work mentioned in Chapter V. has occupied

\* Since writing the above, I have had my Survey of Thebes and the Pyramids engraved. It was intended to accompany this work, but is now published separately; and as the Royal Geographical Society have kindly taken it under their protection, I refer those who wish for copies of it to their rooms in Regent-street.

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much of my leisure time, and contains a more detailed account of the former and present state of Egypt; but whether it will ever be deserving of publication must depend on circumstances—though from the little interest generally felt about that country, it is probable such materials will never be required.

If in the same chapter I have not given all my authorities for the manners and customs therein introduced, it may be concluded that in those cases I have drawn my inferences from the subjects in the tombs, to which constant reference would have been tedious and unnecessary. But if some difference is observed in the statements given in this work from those in my *Materia Hieroglyphica*, in a few points of Egyptian history, and other intricate subjects, I beg the indulgent reader to consider that the study of hieroglyphics is still in its infancy and obscured by the difficulties of a long-lost language. And if I was once led to form other conclusions, I must rely for my excuse on the intricacy of the study; but having availed myself of the first opportunity of correcting them, the acknowledgment of my errors will, I trust, clear me of the suspicion of an attempt to maintain any favorite theory, and prove it to be the result of repeated and more matured investigation.

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PREFACE.

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I ought also to apologize for the mode I have adopted of writing the name of the capital of Egypt; but as I had followed the Arabic nomenclature in all the other towns (except the Greek city of Alexandria), it appeared to me more consistent to use Qaherah than Cairo; though I allow that, since custom has sanctioned it, this last might have been preferable. I have indeed been at a loss respecting some Arabic words, as, for instance, Ali or Alee, and have introduced both as being equally correct; but in all cases I have been guided by the sound rather than the orthography in my mode of writing them.

*Thebes*, 1831.

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## INTRODUCTION.

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“O Ægypte, Ægypte . . . . solæ supererunt fabulæ, et æque incredibiles posteris . . . . solaque supererunt verba lapidibus incisa. Et inhabitabit Ægyptum Seythus, aut Indus, aut aliquis talis.”—*Lat. transl. of Mercur. Trismegistus’ Dialogue with Asclepius.*

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It may be generally observed that the first people who arrived at an advanced state in the arts of civilization were early encouragers of agriculture, and possessed countries whose riches consisted in the produce of the soil. And that independent of the general taste for industry which is necessarily matured in a well-cultivated country, the number of its inhabitants speedily increases, and opulence and power succeed in proportion as their condition is improved.

But the state of the hunter and of the shepherd differ widely from the agriculturist. In the former the wants of each member of society depend entirely upon his individual exertions; and since no time can be spared for industrious employment at home, civilization can make little or no progress, and arts remain totally unknown. The shepherd indeed possesses some advantages over the hunter, but still he has neither the means nor the inclination to arise

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from that primitive state which contents itself with merely satisfying the common wants of man ; and if he attempts a predatory warfare against a neighbouring tribe, his conquests are confined to the pillage or desolation of the invaded territory. But when agriculture enables man to produce an abundant supply of the necessaries of life, always keeping pace, in a favorable soil, with the increase of population, property becomes established and defined, emulation succeeds, and arts and civilization are rapidly introduced. The labors of the few, besides satisfying their own wants, are found sufficient to maintain those members of society who are employed in other occupations ; and hence arises that distinction of agricultural and other classes, which were at so early a period introduced into the fertile regions of Egypt and India. Nor are we at a loss to account for the great esteem in which the husbandman was held in the former country ; and their contempt for the shepherd might have originated in the unfavorable opinion they entertained of the indolent Arab, from his unworthy occupations, or from his inutility, as an ignorant and unimproving member of society.

It was agriculture which so speedily rendered Egypt superior to all her neighbours ; and while others were immersed in the barbarism of a pri-



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mitive age, she rose in the midst the patron of arts and acquirements: and with a natural thirst after power, her superior knowledge led to the introduction and improvement of military tactics. Her “wisdom” indeed was the admiration and a proverb of the surrounding nations; and if any wonder was related, or any difficulty to be solved, the name of Egypt was invariably connected with it. Nor did the productions of the country, now so limited, fail to attract the attention of the botanist; and the medicinal properties of her plants have received an unqualified share of encomium, in the works of the most learned naturalists of antiquity.

And why should we be surprised at the superiority of the Egyptians, at a time when nations were but emerging from a state of ignorance and barbarism? So far from seeming incredible that Egypt should have extended her arms beyond the limits of her valley,\* it appears singular that any one, who calmly considers the advantages she

\* The recent conquests of Mohammed Ali, with the feeble resources of modern Egypt, have happened very opportunely to support the opinion I here suggest: nor can we suppose that the power of Egypt was as great in the time of the Ptolemies as under her native princes; yet Ptolemy Euergetes extended his arms considerably to the north-east, having penetrated as far as Bactria, and by a successful invasion of Persia restored to Egypt a great portion of those statues that Cambyzes had carried away from the Egyptian temples.

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enjoyed, should have doubted this fact—the necessary consequence of her superior condition, and her advancement in civilization, which neither sacred nor profane history will allow us to call in question.

For we are assured that in learning she far excelled her cotemporaries. If a philosopher sought knowledge, Egypt was the school,—if a prince required a physician, it was to Egypt he applied,—if any material point perplexed the decision of kings or councils, to Egypt it was referred,—and the arms of a Pharaoh were the hope, and frequently the protection, even at a late period, of a less powerful ally. But it is to an early era that I wish more particularly to allude—before the aggrandizement of Babylon and Persia—epochs comparatively modern in the history of Egypt, and the immediate forerunners of her decay.

That the smallness of a state is no great obstacle to her power is a fact too well known to be deserving of notice, and if Voltaire had impassionately considered the resources of that people, and the state of the neighbouring nations, his notions on the subject would have been more correct, and his remarks less at variance with fact. For though we admit the conquests of Sesostris to have been exaggerated by fiction, it does not follow that either the canals he cut, or the wall he is said to have

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built\* at the edge of the desert, were owing to the fear of hostile aggression; and it is evident that Egypt had no reason to dread a foreign invader while she was superior to her enemies in military power. It was not by the strength or multitude of strongholds that she was defended against her neighbours, for Pelusium could never be a sufficient bulwark against a more potent aggressor; but as long as she was able to attack and invade “the countries of the gentiles,” † her frontier was protected, and the secret of her security was the extent of her foreign possessions. And the force, discipline, and number of her armies, and the weakness of other states, afterwards powerful, but as yet in embryo, were ample guarantees for the safety of her own territory, and facilitated her invasions and successes in the East.

Assyria was, indeed, a notable exception, with similar and even greater advantages than Egypt; and her means and resources had already been developed under the rule of Ninus and of Semiramis. But the successors of Ninyas neglected the advantages cherished by the founders of that monarchy, and

\* Vide pp. 367, 368.

† A name applied by the Egyptians, as well as the Jews, to all foreign people. Shemmo seems to have been used by them for stranger and captive, as *hostis* by the Romans for stranger and enemy.

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speedily lost the conquests they had made. And while luxury and indolence invaded the court of Assyria, and overwhelmed her princes in Eastern effeminacy, Egypt rose gradually by industry to power, and was enabled at length to punish an enemy who had threatened, and perhaps even invaded her territory. Foreign expeditions were then attempted, and succeeded; and each monarch took a pride in advancing the conquests and terror of the Egyptian arms. Nor could once-mighty Assyria resist the strength, or check the progress of an army disciplined\* with severity, and taught to endure with pleasure the fatigues their royal leader was proud to share with them, and she was doomed to witness the invasion and loss of many of her conquered provinces.

Moreover the stern regulations of Egypt withheld her monarchs from the fatal allurements of effeminate luxury, and though riches and splendor took the place of the early simplicity of the Egyptians, they still continued to reject the enervating habits of the East. And while the voluptuous habits of her monarchs tainted and subverted the early greatness of Assyria, the sage institutions of the Egyptian priesthood, controlling the will of the sovereign,

\* Military tactics were studied at a very early period in the East.

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and awing the mind of the people, watched over their improving condition, and succeeded for ages in preventing their falling into errors so common to oriental nations. For the power of Egypt was not of short duration, having existed from before the accession of the eighteenth dynasty nearly to the invasion of Cambyses ; and we find that, as late as the reign of Neco, the Egyptians possessed the country lying between Gaza and the Euphrates.\* But at this last-mentioned period the strength of Babylon had greatly increased, and that of Egypt was approaching its downfall ; nor could her relative advantages over neighbouring states any longer be compared to those she enjoyed about the era of the great Remeses.

That the fact of her foreign conquests, is proved by the sculptures of her temples will not be doubted by any one who has studied those subjects ; but we must be allowed to smile at the notion that they represent the aggression of the country, and the wars of an invader in the Egyptian Delta. Time will convince the sceptic, and again relate the progress of her arms in the provinces of Asia. And the tributes these last paid to the monarchs of the Nile, and the costly presents of gold and silver they annually sent, will account for the immense riches

\* 2 Kings xxiv. 7.

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of some Egyptian cities, which neither their mines could afford, nor their commerce introduce. For Egypt could export but little grain to other countries, which from their condition needed it not, or were already well supplied, excepting those of the immediate vicinity, Palestine, Arabia, and Libya; and it is probable that the spices and drugs of Arabia were sometimes only bartered for the corn of the Nile. And though the revenue, which might be derived from the exportation of her surplus produce would have been considerable, yet at so early a period it is scarcely probable that commerce was sufficiently advanced, and communication with distant countries sufficiently encouraged, to enable her to profit by a very extensive sale of corn; nor were the wants of men, at such a time, of a nature to require a superabundance of the necessaries of life. For navigation was scarcely in its infancy; and people were then contented with the fruits of the chase, or the productions of their own soil.

But as neighbouring countries improved, they gradually coveted objects of art, and Egypt was then enabled to increase her revenue by the sale of her manufactures, as well as the produce of her lands. Her linen, cotton, and woollen cloths were the admiration of that early epoch, and the fine texture of her linen deserved and obtained the

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highest encomiums of the ancients. Nor were the Egyptians neglectful of their breed of animals; and horses were among the exports of the country. The price of a horse in the reign of Solomon was one hundred and fifty shekels of silver, and a chariot, the manufacture of Egypt, was usually sold to the Jewish monarch for the large sum of six hundred shekels.\* The commerce of Egypt was, however, confined to her intercourse with the main land, nor do her merchants ever appear to have ventured by sea, except perhaps in crossing to Arabia,† or in coasting along the shores of the Gulf.

Whatever may have been the date of the foundation of Tyre, it is probable that flourishing city was coeval with an early period of the Egyptian monarchy; nor is it impossible, from the usual good understanding which existed between the Phœnicians and Egyptians, that the former may have purchased the corn of the Nile for their own consumption, and trafficked in it with more distant

\* 1 Kings x. 28, 29. A shekel is about 2*s.* 6*d.* English money.

† Sesostris was said to have fitted out four hundred ships of war; and Neco, according to Herodotus, had *triremes* in the Mediterranean and the Arabian Gulf, and fought by sea with the Tyrians; but it may be doubted whether the Egyptian merchants visited distant countries by sea on commercial speculation; and they even employed Phœnician mariners in a voyage of discovery.

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countries ; but even were this the case, and whether it was bought by the Phœnicians for exportation, or their ships were hired by the Egyptians, the quantity must have been small, and could add but little to the revenues of a Pharaoh.

Judging, therefore, from the limited commerce of Egypt at an early period, and from the numerous gold and silver vases they received in tributes from the conquered tribes of Asia and Ethiopia, represented in the sculptures, I am inclined to believe that the greater part of those riches in precious metals, afterwards found and carried off by Persia, were the product of their previous conquests: and if this be true, how great must have been the military power of the Pharaohs! But that money, which consisted of rings of gold and silver, besides ingots of the same metals, also formed part of these tributes, is evident from the same sculptures; and these entering into the coffers of the state, together with the government share of the produce of the country, of their manufactures and the mines, constituted the revenue of Egypt—from which the army, the priesthood, and other necessary expenses were amply provided.

It is not to the doubtful notion of the world being less peopled at the commencement of the Egyptian monarchy than at a subsequent period



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that I attribute the superiority of that ancient nation;\* and the probability of their conquests having been made in well-peopled countries is supported by the authority of their historical sculptures, and by the universal belief of the early populousness of the East.

If monumental records are to be respected, and they deserve as great a claim to credit as any national history, we may affirm that their victories over foreign and *distant* tribes are as plainly described as *color* and character can enable an artist to represent them; and we only require a knowledge of the language and the geography of that period, to enable us to fix for certain the extent of their victorious march. Nor, if we succeed in these points, ought we to consider their sculptures much inferior to the annals of an historian, except in extent and minuteness of detail; and it is unjust to reject all that additional information which history has neglected to impart. Should it be said Egypt was too limited a state to extend her arms over distant countries, I answer that the relative condition of other nations must be considered, as well as the great resources of an agricultural people,

\* Had the invaded countries been less peopled, the successes of the Egyptians might have been considered less surprising, or more easily accounted for.

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and the severe and regular discipline of her troops; nor can we judge of the former state of Egypt by its degraded condition at the present day.

Had Rome left no annals, no history of her greatness, could we infer, from her present condition, her former power; and would it be thought probable that a small town, founded by a *colony of Goths*, or other wandering people, in immiti solo, as the Romans themselves have termed it, should give laws to nearly all the then known world? Could one town, placed in the midst of enemies, rising, as Livy observes, “from such a limited commencement,” be supposed to resist all their attacks, and succeed in subjugating the states of Italy alone? Should we credit this, were no history present to establish the fact? And had not the ancient Egyptians much greater advantages? Are not their successes and the extent of their foreign conquests even less unaccountable?

But though the fertility of Egypt tended to her aggrandizement, it served in the event as a temptation to the aggressions of warlike invaders from a poorer country; and the Persians, a rising and powerful state, overwhelmed the once victorious Egypt, which had lately been stript of her conquered provinces. And yet the power of Persia, which had prided herself on her military supe-

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riority, and on her possession of a poor country destined to conquer, was of a shorter duration than that of her Egyptian predecessor, and the small army of Alexander made an easy conquest of the lordly Persia. But Persia recovered from the blow under a new race of kings, and Egypt was doomed to be a prey of powerful invaders, whose successive aggressions have been invited by the richness of the soil.

Much, however, will depend on the condition and resources of a country, even when attacked by a formidable enemy; and it is possible that if the power of Egypt had not been diminished by the successes of the Babylonians, and by that decay of force which every nation is destined to experience, the conquest of Cambyses would at least have been attended with greater difficulties in the execution.

After what has been said, the reader will be better prepared to hear of the power of Egypt, and to read of conquests in the remote regions of Asia; though I do not yet pretend to fix the exact range of their expeditions, or the position of the countries they invaded. But as hieroglyphics advance, we may hope to decide these interesting questions, and to restore to that ancient and civilized nation the consequence she merits, by her early advancement in the arts of peace and war.

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