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John Gardner Wilkinson

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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. His *Topography of Thebes and General View of Egypt* (1835) and *Modern Egypt and Thebes* (1843) are also reissued in this series. This well-illustrated three-volume work, first published in 1837, remained for over a century a key text on the lives of ancient Egyptians. Writing in a popular genre that was normally focused on contemporary societies, Wilkinson covers areas ranging from daily life to funerary beliefs. His imaginative approach underpinned the book's considerable success. Volume 1 addresses the physical and human geography of ancient Egypt, with a historical narrative up to the point of its conquest by Alexander the Great.

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# Manners and Customs of the Ancient Egyptians

*Including Their Private Life, Government, Laws,  
Art, Manufactures, Religion, and Early History*

VOLUME 1

JOHN GARDNER WILKINSON



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University Printing House, Cambridge, CB2 8BS, United Kingdom

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

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Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9781108066433](http://www.cambridge.org/9781108066433)

© in this compilation Cambridge University Press 2013

This edition first published 1837

This digitally printed version 2013

ISBN 978-1-108-06643-3 Paperback

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London, J. Murray, Albemarle St: 1857.

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MANNERS AND CUSTOMS  
OF  
THE ANCIENT EGYPTIANS,

INCLUDING

THEIR PRIVATE LIFE,  
GOVERNMENT, LAWS, ARTS, MANUFACTURES,  
RELIGION, AND EARLY HISTORY;

DERIVED FROM A COMPARISON OF  
THE PAINTINGS, SCULPTURES, AND MONUMENTS STILL EXISTING,  
WITH THE ACCOUNTS OF ANCIENT AUTHORS.

*Illustrated by Drawings of those Subjects.*

By J. G. WILKINSON, F.R.S. M.R.S.L. &c.

AUTHOR OF "A GENERAL VIEW OF EGYPT, AND  
TOPOGRAPHY OF THEBES," &c.

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IN THREE VOLUMES.

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LONDON:  
JOHN MURRAY, ALBEMARLE STREET.

MDCCCXXXVII.

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LONDON :  
Printed by A. SCOTTISWOODE,  
New-Street-Square.



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TO

HIS GRACE

HUGH DUKE OF NORTHUMBERLAND, K.G.

*&c. &c.*

MY LORD DUKE,

IN dedicating to your Grace the accompanying Work, I am anxious to show how fully I appreciate the encouragement you have always given to science and literature, as well as the interest you take in Egyptian researches; and to offer a testimony of my respect, and of the gratitude I feel for much personal kindness and attention.

I have the honour to subscribe myself

Your Grace's

very obedient humble Servant,

THE AUTHOR.

London,  
September 1. 1836.

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## P R E F A C E.

IN order to form an accurate opinion of the manners of an ancient people, it is of paramount importance to inquire into their origin and history, and to trace the progress of those steps which gradually led to their improvement and civilisation. To judge impartially of their character, we must examine the comparative state of other neighbouring and contemporary nations, and measure it by the standard of the era in which they lived. We should also bear in mind the general habits of that portion of the globe whence they derived their origin, or which they inhabited, and, in contemplating the customs of an Eastern people, avoid as much as possible the invidious comparison of European and Oriental manners. Many of those laws or customs which are wise and beneficial to society in one part of the world, are deemed superfluous, and even injurious, in another; and the same system, which by some is looked upon as indispensable for their welfare and happiness, would

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be rejected by others, as incompatible with the feelings of an independent spirit.

The necessity of discrimination on this point must, therefore, be evident to every one, who considers the subject with a view to truth and impartiality; and, in order to enable the reader to form a just opinion of the character of the Egyptians, I commence the present work with a brief account of the general history and early advancement of that ancient state. But if, as must necessarily be the case, this account is deficient and unsatisfactory, I plead as my excuse the scanty means of information afforded either by the writers of antiquity, or by monumental record; and trust that the reader will indulgently consider the difficulties which present themselves in so intricate a question.

If, too, in the date assigned for the accession of Menes, and the era of the 18th dynasty, as well as some other points of chronology, I differ from the learned Professor Rosellini, it should be remembered that many doubts and discrepancies occur both in chronology and the details of events, even in what is considered the *known* history of other nations.

It would doubtless be satisfactory both to the reader and themselves, if all writers on the subject of hieroglyphics, and of ancient Egypt, were agreed, and if all their investigations were attended with the same results; but, since a diversity

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of opinion on a difficult question has a tendency to elicit truth, and finally to establish accurate and impartial evidence, we may cease to regret that it prevails at the commencement of these inquiries. And, indeed, it is highly satisfactory to find that the researches of Dr. Young, Champollion, Rosellini, Major Felix, and my own, have, in most instances, led to similar conclusions.

Professor Rosellini is a man of erudition and a gentleman, and one whose enthusiastic endeavours, stimulated by great perseverance, are tempered by judgment, and that modesty which is the characteristic of real merit. To be engaged in the same pursuits with him must, therefore, be highly satisfactory, from the persuasion that, however we may differ on some questions, our opposite opinions will be maintained with those feelings which ought to actuate men who labour in the same field, and for the same object.

Egyptian history, and the manners of one of the most ancient nations, cannot but be interesting to every one; and so intimately connected are they with the scriptural accounts of the Israelites, and the events of succeeding ages relative to Judæa, that the name of Egypt need only be mentioned to recall the early impressions we have received from the study of the Bible.

Another striking result derived from the examination of Egyptian history, is the conviction, that, at the most remote period into which we have

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been able to penetrate, civilised communities already existed, and society possessed all the features of later ages. We have been enabled, with a sufficient degree of precision, to fix the bondage of the Israelites and the arrival of Joseph ; and though these events took place at an age when nations are generally supposed to have been in their infancy, and in a state of barbarism, yet we perceive that the Egyptians had then arrived at as perfect a degree of civilisation as at any subsequent period of their history. They had the same arts, the same manners and customs, the same style of architecture, and were in the same advanced state of refinement, as in the reign of Remeses II. ; and no very remarkable changes took place, even in ever varying taste, between the accession of the first Osirtasen and the death of that conqueror, who was the last monarch of the 18th dynasty. What high antiquity does this assign to civilisation ! The most remote point, to which we can see, opens with a nation possessing all the arts of civilised life already matured ; and though penetrating so far into the early history of the world, we find that the infancy of the Egyptian state is placed considerably beyond our reach. And, if Egypt presents no other attractions, the certainty of its being the oldest state, of which we have any positive and tangible records, must awaken feelings of interest, to which no contemplative mind can remain indifferent.

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It is to be regretted that the partial details, relating to the reigns of the early Pharaohs, given by Herodotus and Diodorus, do not sufficiently agree with the more authentic information derived from the monuments, so as to be embodied with this last, as a continuous history; but, in order not to omit the accounts of those two writers, I have introduced them separately; which, though in some measure it breaks in upon the thread of the history, does not perplex the reader by the examination of controverted points, and he is enabled to form his own opinion respecting their statements, and the information derived from other sources.

I cannot conclude without expressing the obligations I owe to the valuable assistance afforded me by Lord Prudhoe, Mr. W. Hamilton, and Sir William Gell. But, while it is a pleasure to offer my acknowledgments for their kindness, it is melancholy to be obliged to accompany them with feelings of deep regret at the death of so excellent a friend as Sir W. Gell. In him the literary world has sustained a great loss: but friendship and gratitude combine to increase my sorrow; and I can never forget that, for all the satisfaction I have derived from the prosecution of researches to which he first directed my attention, — however unimportant their results, — I am indebted to his kindness and instruction. To many has he lent his powerful assistance in those studies, whose advancement his

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PREFACE.

“classic” talents so ably promoted : no distinction of nation ever prevented his generous mind from aiding others in investigating subjects of which he possessed such an extensive knowledge, and no deficiency of good feeling and liberality checked his exertions, or damped his zeal, in furthering the object of those who followed the same pursuits.

“ Multis ille bonis flebilis occidit.”



No. 208. Sort of harp and tambourine from Dendera.



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## INTRODUCTION.

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IT was originally intended that this work should not exceed two volumes; until finding the materials accumulate much beyond my expectations, I was under the necessity of extending it to three; and have, even now, been obliged to omit many subjects, and to defer the mention of them to a future occasion.

This will, I trust, plead my excuse for not describing the religious ceremonies of the Egyptians, the agriculture of the country, and some details, that could not have been comprised within the limits of these volumes, unless treated in an imperfect and brief manner, which their importance would not sanction.

The first chapter contains remarks on the early state of Egypt, with the lists of kings given by Manetho, Herodotus, Diodorus, and other authors; and a conjecture is offered on the origin of the Shepherd Kings. I suppose them to have come from Assyria, and to have invaded and taken possession of Lower Egypt; and suggest, that this event

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happened about the period of Semiramis's reign. Some objection, however, may be offered to this conjecture, especially on the plea of the invaders having been a pastoral people, while the Assyrians were an agricultural nation, with all the institutions and customs of a civilisation, already far advanced, in the time even of Semiramis. We might, therefore, look for them among the wandering hordes of Asia; and rather suppose them to have been a Scythian tribe, who, at that early epoch, already commenced the casual inroads, which they are known to have made in the same direction at subsequent periods.

The decision of this question I leave to the learned reader; all that can be positively asserted on the point is, that they have left no traces of their occupation of the country in the existing monuments, and the notion of their having been the founders of the pyramids is devoid of every shadow of probability.

The second chapter comprises the history of the country from the accession of the first king Menes, to the conquest of Egypt by Alexander; in which, after showing the great obscurity which prevails in the early part of Egyptian history, previous to the reign of Osirtasen I., I have drawn up an account of the monarchs, who ruled the country, from the existing monuments, and the authority of ancient writers; and, at the same time, introduced separately that part of the same period,

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given by Herodotus and Diodorus, which cannot be made to accord with the monuments.

In the third chapter, after some remarks on the nature of the country, its population, and some of its productions, I show that the people were divided into four great classes, with numerous subdivisions, according to the peculiar occupations of each; in which a strong resemblance may be traced to the castes of India.

The king, his duties, the respect paid him by his subjects, their regard for his memory; the priests and their peculiar habits; the military class; the army; the weapons they used in battle; and their mode of warfare are then noticed; and the enemies with whom they fought, their prisoners and slaves, conclude this chapter, and the first volume.

The fourth chapter treats of the husbandmen, with other members of the second caste; the laws and government of Egypt in early times, and under the Romans. In the next, the houses, villas, gardens, vineyards, and the process of making wine and beer are described. The sixth contains an account of the furniture of their rooms, the entertainment of guests, their musical instruments, and dances; and, in the last chapter of the second volume, their vases, the preparation and serving of dinner, their games, exercises, and amusements, in the house and out of doors, are described.

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The eighth chapter contains the chase of wild animals, fowling, and fishing.

The ninth treats of the arts of the Egyptians; the early use of glass, and those manufactures, in which the sculptures and ancient writers show them to have excelled; the mode of engraving and sculpturing hard stones; their fine linen and other stuffs; the papyrus, and manufacture of paper; potteries; boats and ships employed in war, and on the Nile; and the use of tin and other metals.

In chapter the tenth, the style of art at various epochs, the early use of the arch, the mechanical skill of the Egyptians, some inventions of an early period, their dresses, the study of medicine, and numerous customs are introduced; and the Appendix, containing an account of the principal objects of antiquity deserving a visit in the Valley of the Nile, terminate the third volume.

The Appendix is preceded by a wood-cut, giving a topographical survey of the pyramids, and the tombs in their immediate vicinity, constructed by me in 1826; with the names of two Ethiopian kings; one of whom, Ergamenes, is mentioned by Diodorus as a cotemporary of Ptolemy Philadelphus.

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