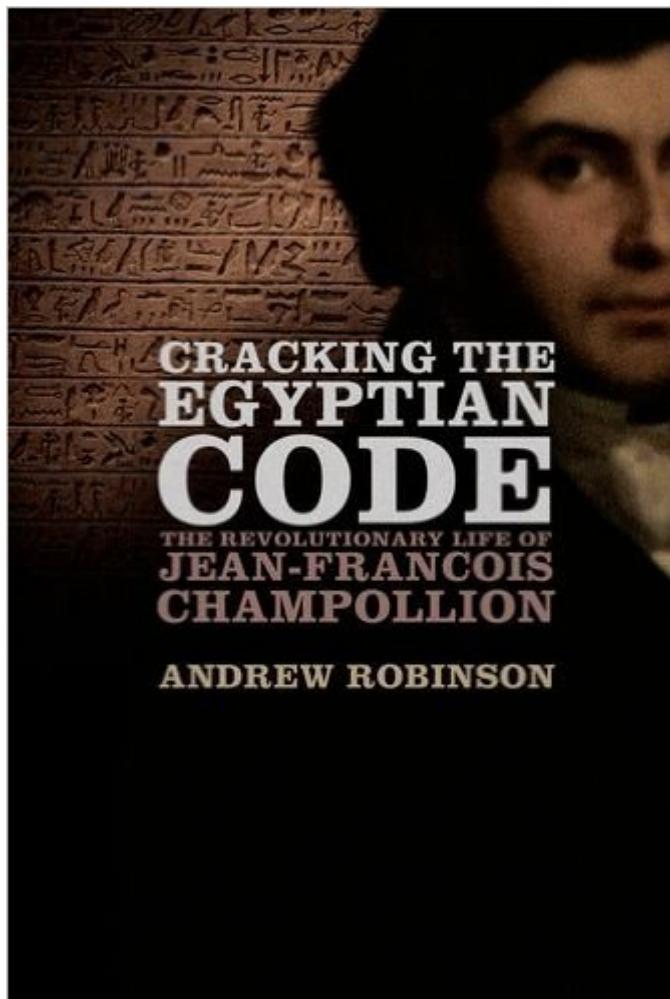


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Cracking The Egyptian Code: The Revolutionary Life Of Jean-Francois Champollion



Synopsis

In 1799 Napoleon's army uncovered an ancient stele in the Nile delta. Its inscription, recorded in three distinct scripts--ancient Greek, Coptic, and hieroglyphic--would provide scholars with the first clues to unlocking the secrets of Egyptian hieroglyphs, a language lost for nearly two millennia. More than twenty years later a remarkably gifted Frenchman named Jean-Francois Champollion successfully deciphered the hieroglyphs on the stele, now commonly known as the Rosetta Stone, sparking a revolution in our knowledge of ancient Egypt. *Cracking the Egyptian Code* is the first biography in English of Champollion, widely regarded as the founder of Egyptology. Andrew Robinson meticulously reconstructs how Champollion cracked the code of the hieroglyphic script, describing how Champollion started with Egyptian obelisks in Rome and papyri in European collections, sailed the Nile for a year, studied the tombs in the Valley of the Kings (a name he first coined), and carefully compared the three scripts on the Rosetta Stone to penetrate the mystery of the hieroglyphic text. Robinson also brings to life the rivalry between Champollion and the English scientist Thomas Young, who claimed credit for launching the decipherment, which Champollion hotly denied. There is much more to Champollion's life than the Rosetta Stone and Robinson gives equal weight to the many roles he played in his tragically brief life, from a teenage professor in Revolutionary France to a supporter of Napoleon (whom he met), an exile, and a curator at the Louvre. Extensively illustrated in color and black-and-white pictures, *Cracking the Egyptian Code* will appeal to a wide readership interested in Egypt, decipherment and code-breaking, and Napoleon and the French Revolution.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Egyptophiles casual and professional need look no further than Andrew Robinson's 2012 work for a critical biography of Jean-Francois Champollion. Indeed, if "Cracking the Egyptian Code" is to be believed, there *is* no other biography of Champollion available in English. Fortunately, Robinson's latest book is well written, intelligent, and scholarly without ponderous pages of academic footnotes. The title is a bit of a misnomer, since Robinson examines Champollion's entire life, from his upbringing in post-Revolution provincial France, through his academic and personal struggles in Grenoble and Paris (Fourier! Napoleon! Various kings!) as well as his sojourn in Egypt, up until Champollion's untimely death at the age of 40. Robinson provides a historical perspective on the "race" between Champollion and the polymath Thomas Young, and he does an admirable job of separating historical fact from interpretation - critical, since Champollion failed to annotate the process by which he determined his hieroglyphic system. "Cracking the Egyptian Code" contains nearly 100 drawing and photographs of people, places, and objects; personally, I would have preferred to see more Egyptian artifacts and fewer paintings of dead French nobles. The book's final chapter, "The Hieroglyphs After Champollion," gives a quick peek into the complexity of the currently accepted hieroglyphic system without taxing the reader's remaining stamina. Overall, Robinson allows his genuine admiration of Champollion's "self-confidence, his fanaticism for a single cause, his courage, his sense of humor, and his *joie de vivre*" to buoy the reader without resorting to mindless hagiography. "Cracking the Egyptian Code" will doubtless become mandatory reading for English-oriented students of Egyptology, particularly for armchair archaeologists.

What an engrossing story--and so interestingly told! The author follows the mystery of hieroglyphics from its beginning in Egypt through its relatively early descent into historical oblivion in Roman times and on into the brave but fruitless attempts of medieval, Renaissance, and Enlightenment scholars to unravel their meaning. Enter Champollion whose brilliant deductions and linking of the symbols to the ancient Coptic script and language finally opened the door through which other scholars rushed to complete the job after his untimely death. For lovers of biography, history and code breaking, this book will hold the reader's attention--no, won't allow him/her to even put it down. The superb illustrations also add to the enjoyment and comprehension of both the story and the puzzle's solution. Get it!

One of the most fantastic books I have ever bought. Admittedly it is a topic on which I am most passionate hence this book feeds into my most loved subject.

*****Very good book...

Interesting subject told through the life of a lesser known person. Beautiful book. If you like history, you will love this.

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