

Cracking the Egyptian Code

The Revolutionary Life of Jean-François Champollion

Andrew Robinson

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Andrew Robinson has written the first biography in English of Jean-François Champollion, the genius who revolutionized the world's understanding of ancient Egypt by cracking the hieroglyphic code.

This finely illustrated book is a vivid portrayal of an extraordinary and brilliant Frenchman, who, inspired by Napoleon's invasion of Egypt and the discovery of the Rosetta Stone, decided to focus on the Egyptian language and script in order to understand the civilization as a whole.

Hieroglyphic writing had been abandoned when Egypt went into eclipse following the conquests of the Persians, Greeks and Romans. When Champollion decided to try and decipher the Rosetta Stone in the British Museum, he wrote for an accurate copy. The person who responded was Dr Thomas Young, a great polymath who shared Champollion's fascination with Egypt and its puzzling hieroglyphs.

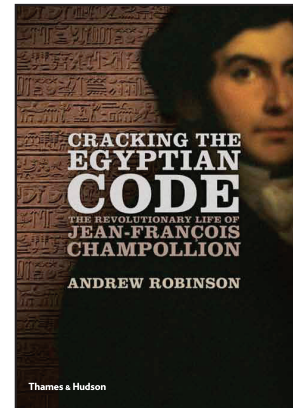
Robinson's account of the rivalry between these two scholars, who were total opposites - intellectually, politically and emotionally - is a gripping tale of a race to unlock the secrets of a great but neglected civilization.

Champollion's life was never short of drama: a precocious teenage professor; a supporter of Napoleon and lifelong Republican, who suffered exile; a protégé of the Bourbon kings; a decipherer who worked in solitude, yet spent eighteen months in Egypt exploring the ancient sites and tombs.

But controversy constantly swirled around Champollion with a legacy that has lasted till today, and his arrogance in refusing to acknowledge the crucial groundwork by Young lessens his greatness as a man. Robinson analyses the different methods of both, and concludes that Egyptian hieroglyphics could only have been deciphered by a combination of the broad-minded versatility of Young with the fanatical tunnel-vision of Champollion, who finally cracked the code in 1822, and later was recognized as the 'father of Egyptology.'

Author

Andrew Robinson is former literary editor of *The Times Higher Education Supplement*, and the author of many books on language and decipherment, including *The Man Who Deciphered Linear B*, also published by Thames & Hudson and available in paperback this spring.



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