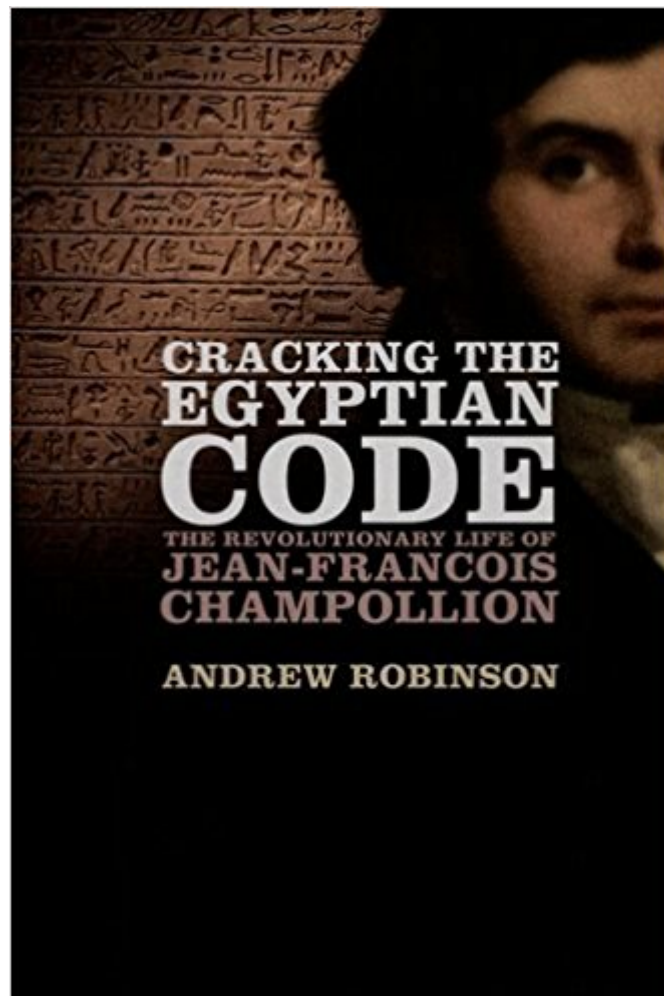




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# Cracking The Egyptian Code: The Revolutionary Life Of Jean-Francois Champollion



## 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

"A remarkable tale, wonderfully told."--Wall Street Journal"Robinson's analysis of Champollion's fanatical pursuit of his linguistic goals, and his rivalry in this with the English polymath Thomas Young, is utterly compelling."--World Archaeology "Robinson's biography is a most welcome and long-overdue study in English of an enigmatic and still controversial genius. His splendidly produced and absorbing book should be in every Egyptologist's library." Egyptian Archaeology"Robinson paints an engrossing portrait of a difficult genius's punishing pursuit of knowledge."--Publishers Weekly "Andrew Robinson, the man who deciphered Michael Ventris and knows all that's worth knowing about Thomas Young, here shines his lamp of Diogenes on the Frenchman who broke the ancient Egyptian hieroglyphic code, illuminating anew Jean-François Champollion's fascinating life as well as his prodigiously fertile work."-- Paul Cartledge, author of Alexander the Great and Ancient Greece: A History in Eleven Cities "An entertaining, highly readable and authoritative biography of the greatest decipherer of all time, the man who almost single-handedly enabled us to read the hitherto mysterious Egyptian hieroglyphs."--Michael D. Coe, author of Breaking the Maya Code "At last, a definitive biography of Champollion in English! Andrew Robinson brings his expertise at ancient languages and his research into the nature of genius to bear on one of Egyptology's most remarkable figures ... A memorable, enjoyable and beautifully written historical detective story."--Brian Fagan, author of The Rape of the Nile and Floods, Famines and Emperors "Andrew Robinson's Champollion is a brash genius, with the power to make loyal friends but also bitter enemies, a man at odds with the Church and much of the Establishment. Above all, how much did he know about the work of his great rival, the English polymath Thomas Young? This is a spirited account of a fascinating subject: the birth of Egyptology." --John Ray, author of The Rosetta Stone and the Rebirth of Ancient Egypt "Robinson has produced the definitive English-language biography of Champollion with this richly illustrated and readily accessible narrative. Highly recommended to Egyptophiles, philologists, historians, and anyone who might be wowed by the drama of a scholar falling unconscious for five days after announcing his long-sought success!"--Library Journal "Robinson masterfully covers the life of the brilliant and controversial French Egyptologist Jean-François Champollion in this well-written, knowledgeable biography."--E.H. Cline, CHOICE

Andrew Robinson is a Visiting Fellow of Wolfson College, Cambridge, Literary Editor of The Times Higher Education Supplement, and author of over 20 books, including Sudden Genius: The Gradual Path to Creative Breakthroughs, The Story of Writing, Writing and Script: A Very Short Introduction,

and The Last Man Who Knew Everything.

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!

This book is a. Great read. I've read it before, but wanted to have my own new copy. I've actually begun to read it again and I'm hooked again. Beautifully bound book, great price.

Great read.

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.

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.

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