



Explorers and Artists in the Valley of the Kings

Catharine H. Roehrig

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The west bank of the Nile opposite the modern city of Luxor, often referred to as western Thebes, is probably the richest archaeological site in the world. This area has attracted travelers since ancient times, and many have left their impressions of the monuments in the form of graffiti, historical texts, scholarly books, and travel guides. Beginning even before Napoleon's expedition to Egypt in 1798, which included a large group of scholars, architects, artists, and scientists, Europeans flocked to visit and record the ruins of ancient Thebes. Independent scholars such as John Gardiner Wilkinson lived at Thebes for extended periods; professional Egyptologists such as Jean-Francois Champollion, Ippolito Rosellini, and Karl Richard Lepsius organized scholarly expeditions to the site.

The beauty of the landscape and monuments such as the Colossi of Memnon, the Ramesseum, and the royal tombs of the Valley of the Kings also inspired poets, writers, and artists such as the romantic painter David Roberts, who published more than 100 works, many based on sketches done at Thebes. Explorers and Artists in the Valley of the Kings presents some of the wealth of etchings, sketches, and watercolors that were produced by European travelers to western Thebes between about 1740 and 1860 and tells the story of Europe's rediscovery of the ancient civilization of Egypt.

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