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Burckhardt, Johann Ludwig

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EASTWARD HO!

*Diplomats, Travellers and Interpreters
of the Middle East and Beyond, 1600-1940*

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THE TOMB IN CAIRO OF JOHN LEWIS BURCKHARDT

I

The tomb of the great Swiss orientalist and explorer of the Near East and northeast Africa John Lewis Burckhardt (1784-1817) speedily fell from public notice after his death, at least from the eyes of the Europeans. It remained for over half a century unmarked, and it seems that only a handful of British and other Franks who had themselves known Burckhardt personally, or were the descendants of those friends, knew of its whereabouts within the vast tracts of cemeteries on the northern and eastern sides of the medieval city of Cairo.¹ It was not until 1871 that a handsome memorial, with an inscribed headstone or *shāhid* and a protective structure around it, was erected on British initiative.²

The impetus for this act of *pietas*—Burckhardt had studied in London and Cambridge, and from the opening months of 1809 till his death eight-and-a-half years later had been in the formal employment of the London-based Association for Promoting the Discovery of the Interior Parts of Africa—seems to have come from the British Consul-General in Cairo Edward Thomas Rogers and from the local notable Joseph Hekekyan. Rogers Bey (d. 1884) occupied various consular posts in the Levant, culminating in the Egyptian Consul-Generalship 1868-75; after retirement from this, he acted as Agent in Britain for the Egyptian government, and in 1881 was a member of the Education Board set up on the recommendation of ‘Alī Pasha Ibrāhīm’s commission and

- 1 F. A. Stocker (on whom see below, p. 71 n. 8) remarked in 1874 that virtually no one in the Cairo Swiss community knew anything of the whereabouts of Burckhardt’s grave, nor even that it had been restored by British efforts three years previously.
- 2 The author visited the tomb in 1972, and his description of the tomb, given below, relates to that time; he has unfortunately not been able to visit the tomb since then and to acquire up-to-date information about its state of preservation.