

Portrait study of a European in Turkish Dress, probably Sir John Gardner
Wilkinson (1797-1875)

John Frederick Lewis, R.A.



REF: 1699

Height: 37.3 cm (14.7")

Width: 27.3 cm (10.7")

Description

John Frederick Lewis, R.A. (1804-1876)

Portrait study of a European in Turkish Dress, probably Sir John Gardner Wilkinson (1797-1875)

Watercolour over pencil and black chalk heightened with bodycolour

Sheet 37.3 by 27.3 cm., 14 $\frac{3}{4}$ by 10 $\frac{3}{4}$ in.

This intriguing portrait of a European man in Oriental dress by John Frederick Lewis is likely to have been made during the artist's decade-long sojourn in Egypt, 1841-51. During this time, Lewis lived in a large wooden, Ottoman-style house, in a district of Cairo 'far away', according to William Thackeray, 'from the haunts of European civilisation'. A prominent member of the expatriate community during the mid-19th century was Sir John Gardner Wilkinson (1797-1875), who by the 1840s had gained acclaim and fame for his ground-breaking studies in Egyptology. During and after his 12 year sojourn in Egypt between 1821 and 1833, when he was based mainly at ancient Thebes (Luxor), Wilkinson published several articles and books on the subject. His most famous work was *Manners and Customs of the Ancient Egyptians*, published in 1837, which established him as the 'Father of British Egyptology'. Its description of ancient Egyptian society, with numerous illustrations, caught the popular imagination, and passed through many editions during the course of the 19th century. In 1839 his achievements were recognised with a knighthood.

Wilkinson revisited Egypt another four times between 1841 and 1856, and during the first of these return trips he met Lewis at least twice. On 8 December 1841, he was among those gathered at Lewis's house for a séance of the notorious Egyptian magician, Shaykh Abd al-Qadir al-Maghrabi. Later that month, a brief entry in Wilkinson's *Journal* for 1841-42 reads: 'Saty 18 Dec dined with Col. Barnet at 6. Met Mr Lewis and Mr Coste' (The Griffith Institute, University of Oxford, Wilkinson MSS. 1.69). In January 1844 both men are in Cairo and moving in the same circles, since both are mentioned in a letter written by Bonomi to a friend. Later in the decade, Murray's *Handbook for Travellers in Egypt* was published (1847) and in it Wilkinson, who was its author, writes of the drawings of Cairo, 'this truly Eastern capital, which we may shortly hope to receive from the hand of Mr. Lewis'. Most pertinent of all is the evidence in a sale from Lewis's studio held in 1855, a few years after his return from Egypt, in which lot 129 is 'Sir Gardiner[sic] Wilkinson, in Oriental Costume' (Christie's, 5 July 1855, bought by the dealer, William Vokins). A portrait of 'Sir G. Wilkinson' is also listed in a letter of 14 April 1857 from Lewis to another dealer, John Scott (Private Collection). Another similarly sized version of the portrait that is here identified as likely to be of Wilkinson, exists in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford (WA.OA966), currently titled *Study of a Seated Oriental Man, smoking*. The figure is almost identical, but added, lower right, is a brass-mounted glass nargile (or hookah) from which the man is smoking.

The sitter in these two portraits is a fair-skinned man with a long flowing moustache and blue eyes, whose hooded eye-lids droop down at the corners. He wears a red fez over a white skull-cap, over the top of which is the hood ...