



# Brandy, Balloons, & Lamps: Ami Argand, 1750-1803

*John J. Wolfe*

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John J. Wolfe's lavishly illustrated *Brandy, Balloons, and Lamps: Ami Argand, 1750–1803* is the first biography of the remarkable Genevese scientist who literally turned on the lights at the beginning of the Enlightenment to illuminate the Industrial Revolution. Featuring 53 color plates and 106 black-and-white illustrations, Wolfe provides a colorful record of how Argand advanced Western civilization.

Though modest about his accomplishments, Argand moved with ease in royal and scientific circles. Among his many inventions, he developed such a superior method of distillation that Louis XVI named him superintendent of the distilleries of France. With the Montgolfier brothers, he launched the world's first hot-air balloon. And dwarfing his other accomplishments, he revolutionized lighting for everyone.

Well aware of the importance of illumination, the best minds among a generation of intellectual giants turned their energies to the improvement of lighting. Scientists conducted experiments in France, England, and America, with the French and English governments offering handsome awards to anyone who could devise a method to improve street lighting. Joseph Priestley, Antoine Laurent Lavoisier, Jean-André Deluc, and James Watt debated conflicting theories of phlogiston. But it was Argand who gave the world an oil lamp that was cheaper, cleaner, and ten times more powerful than previous devices of illumination.

Wolfe tells Argand's amazing story through contemporary sources, including lively exchanges between Argand and his supporters, foes, and family.

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