

## ACCESSING EGYPTIAN ARCHAEOLOGY THROUGH A BRITISH MUSEUM EXHIBITION

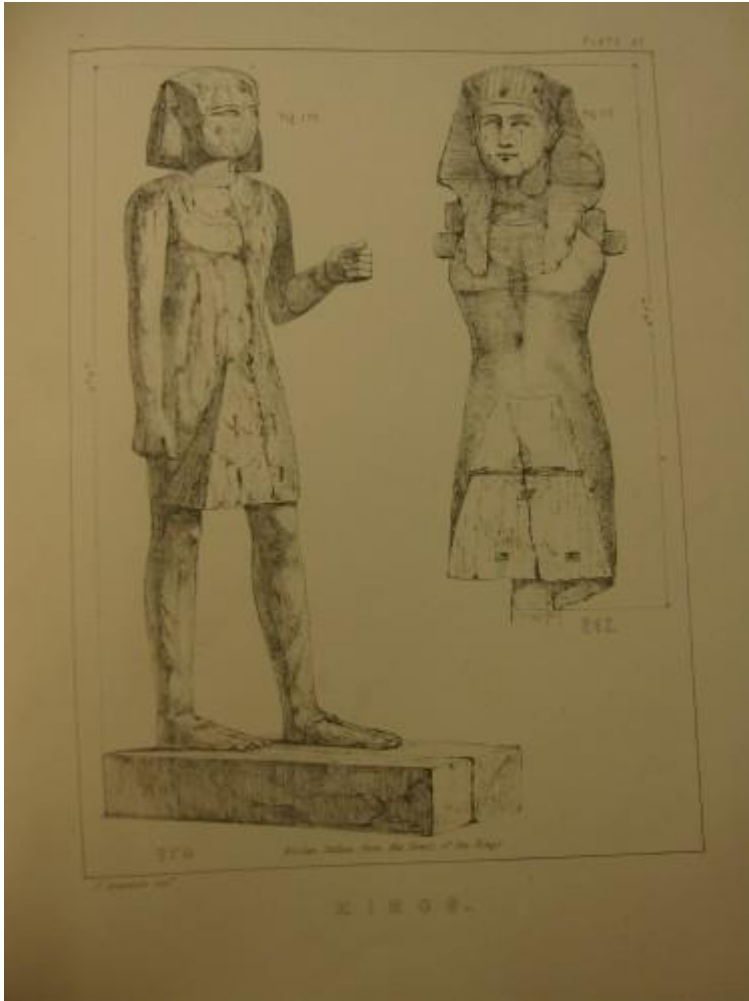
[July 29, 2011](#)[Margaret Maitland](#)[Day of Archaeology](#), [Day of Archaeology 2011](#),[Digital Archaeology](#), [Education](#), [Egyptafrica](#), [Asia](#), [BM's Partnership](#), [British Museum](#), [China](#),[curator](#), [Egypt](#), [Europe](#), [Geography](#), [Giovanni Battista Belzoni](#), [Great North Museum](#), [It towers](#), [king](#),[London](#), [museum](#), [Newcastle](#), [online catalogue](#), [online database](#), [online journals](#), [Pharaoh](#), [The Museum](#), [tomb of Ramses I](#), [United Kingdom](#)

As an Egyptologist, currently working at the British Museum, I've been involved in a number of archaeological digs, but most of my research life has been devoted to trying to make sense of what other people have dug up and trying to share it with a wider audience. And that's what I've been busy doing today.

A lot more ancient material than people might imagine has been found and then relatively ignored in pursuit of new discoveries, and it's not always shared with as many people as it could be. Part of the work of the curators at the British Museum, whom I have been lucky to join as part of the BM's [Future Curators programme](#), is trying to make sense of the archaeological legacy that has been left to us. Curators have many different responsibilities, including current fieldwork, but they also persevere in contributing research on the museum's existing collections, which is made freely available to the public in an [online database](#), [online research catalogues](#), and [online journals](#). Outside researchers are also gladly welcomed to work on the collections; there's always more that can be learnt from the objects.

Most of what I've been working on today relates to a BM UK touring exhibition, [Pharaoh: King of Egypt](#), which I've been highly involved in, that opened recently in Newcastle before it tours the country. The exhibition explores the ideals and realities of kingship in ancient Egypt, and, as part of the BM's [Partnership UK programme](#), allows objects from the national collection to tour to museums outside of London.

I started today with further research into the objects that are currently part of Pharaoh. Exhibitions shed light on objects both literally and figuratively, bringing them out of storage to be shared with thousands of curious people, as well as being an excellent prompt to pursue further research into them. My hands on research, examining the details on objects up close, has sadly already passed, and now I'm chained to the computer and library books, fleshing out the context. Today I finally got round to working on one of my favourite objects from the exhibition, the [massive wooden tomb guardian statue from the tomb of Ramses I](#). It towers at about two metres high and through the conservation work done on it, we learned that it is surprising in its construction as it is made from native Egyptian sycamore wood rather than the imported cedar wood which was usually used for large objects. Making sense of the object also involves tracing its history back to its discovery by Giovanni Battista Belzoni in 1817 and some subsequent misinterpretation in later publications!



Of course, as all archaeologists will understand, my research time didn't last long, as administration, meetings, and other commitments took over. I worked on our slowly evolving project of making the Pharaoh website a better guide and online catalogue for the exhibition: today we added the exhibition themes to the website, which you can see [here](#). Then we had a debriefing meeting to discuss what we learned during the installation of the exhibition at the Great North Museum: Hancock to help us better prepare for transporting and installing the objects in the subsequent venues around the UK. All sorts of things like scheduling, personnel, improved packing techniques, security, and providing contextual information and images were discussed.

Finally I also exchanged farewells with our visiting curators from Egypt and around the world, who were here for the past 6 weeks as part of the British Museum's [International Training Programme](#). I led a couple of sessions with the visiting Egyptian curators, as well as attending some of training sessions alongside the ITP participants, and I certainly learned as much from them as I was able to teach. On their last whole day here yesterday, they presented their ideas for future exhibitions based on some of the new approaches they'd learned from colleagues at the BM, partner museums, and each others. It was amazing to see presentations on exhibition concepts like the trade route between China & Europe or Somali wedding traditions, and given in partnerships such as Brazilian and Nigerian curators working together.

One can always learn more, whether from meeting new people or revisiting old objects, and continually asking questions is one of the most important tenets of archaeology.

