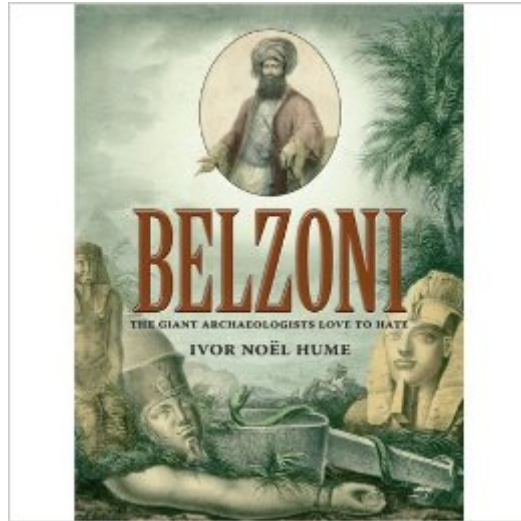


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Belzoni: The Giant Archaeologists Love To Hate



Synopsis

The Italian son of a barber. A failed hydraulic engineer. A giant who performed feats of strength and agility in the circus. Giovanni Belzoni (1778â1824) was all of these before going on to become one of the most controversial figures in the history of Egyptian archaeology. A man of exceptional size with an ego of comparable proportions, he procured for the British Museum some of its largest and still awe-inspiring treasures. Today, however, the typical museum visitor knows nothing of Belzoni, and many modern archaeologists dismiss him as an ignorant vandal. In this captivating new biography, Ivor NoÃ«l Hume re-creates an early nineteenth century in which there was no established archaeological profession, only enormous opportunity. Belzoni landed in Egypt, where he was unsuccessful in selling a hydraulic machine of his own invention, and came under the patronage of diplomat Henry Salt, who convinced him to travel to Thebes in search of artifacts. Among the many treasures Belzoni would bring back was the seven-ton stone head of Ramesses II, the "Young Memnon." The book includes gripping accounts of Belzoni's wildly productive, and physically brutal, expeditions, as well as an unforgettable portrait of his wife, Sarah, who suffered the hardships of the Egyptian deserts and later bore the brunt of the disillusionment that came with the declining popular perception of her husband. Including numerous illustrations, many in color, this volume brings one of archaeology's most fascinating figures vividly to life.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

How many of us as children pretended to play circus strong men and then as we grew, the field of

play moved to the sands of Egypt and we were Archaeologists hunting, then admittedly running away from, a fabric wrapped mummy fresh from the pyramid? Belzoni lived this life for us and this is his tale. First I want to address this book from a physical perspective. The book is beautifully bound in some of the nicest cloth I have seen on a book. The paper is really nice as well. The dust jacket is well designed and captures your attention. What really amazed me was the number of color plates throughout the book showing the paintings done by Belzoni. They were clear and very pleasant to look at. Some times you would think of this more as a text book than a biography. For those of you familiar with Ivor Noel Hume's work you will recognize immediately that we are experiencing this along with him. Much in the style of Martin's Hundred this book reads like a mystery where you keep turning pages to find out who did what to whom. Belzoni started as a strong man act and was able to use his wits to be one of the people on the ground floor of early Egyptian archaeology.. The descriptions of Egypt and the work in the tombs paints a picture of stifling heat and horrific labor problems. Not to mention the fact that a lot of this was new so creativity and engineering came into play so that these massive artifacts could be moved. Belzoni was able to supply plenty of both. Some of the fun of this book is reading how Belzoni worked with and around some of his rivals on the ground in Egypt.

Quick, name an Egyptologist. For me, the only name I could think of was Howard Carter, who made the sensational King Tutankhamen finds. Because of a witty and instructive current biography, though, there's now another whose name I am glad to know. *Belzoni: The Giant Archeologists Love to Hate* (University of Virginia Press) is by Ivor Noel Hume, who is himself an archeologist. Hume has books about his own work in more recent archeology, and was the director of Colonial Williamsburg's research program, but he has valuable insider's insights on the work of the almost-forgotten Giovanni Belzoni, who was among the first to bring back treasures from Egypt in the wild days when museums and collectors were glad to get statues and mummy cases and didn't mind that their acquisition came from some sort of smash-and-grab operation. So archeologists do "love to hate" Belzoni, although he cannot be faulted for not having a modern idea of professional propriety. And he was literally a giant, six and a half feet tall at a time when such heights were rarities. How an Italian commoner came to be digging around the Nile for Britain proves to be a lively tale. Belzoni was born in 1778, one of fourteen children sired by his father, a barber in Padua, Italy. He got training in hydraulic engineering, but when he wound up in England, he had no work prospects except using his height and strength in the fairs and circuses as the "Patagonian Sampson." A chance meeting eventually gave him the prospect of going to Egypt and

using machinery to shift the waters of the Nile, but this did not pan out.

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