

THE RAVENSWORTH EXPEDITION

COMMITTEE CORRESPONDENCE
ON THE PRINTING OF THE REFRACTION SECTION
February – June 1909

*Copied into the Minute Book by order of the Committee,
for the use of members only.*

Being the correspondence of the Director with the Chairman and Committee,
touching the observations recorded at §§ 45–55 of the Annual Report,
and the decision as to their printing.

NOT PRINTED — FOR THE USE OF THE COMMITTEE ONLY

ITEM 1 · THE DIRECTOR TO THE CHAIRMAN

Camp at Ras el-Qaus, Upper Egypt

12 March 1909.

Sir Aubrey Lister-Hume, Bart., F.S.A.,
Chairman of the Committee.

DEAR SIR AUBREY,

You will have had my letter of the 20th of February, in which I gave notice that something irregular had been observed at the mouth of Tomb R.14, and that I proposed to say nothing further of it until the matter had either resolved itself or continued long enough to be examined properly. It has now done the latter, and has since ceased; and I think it right to lay the whole of it before you before I set pen to the season's report.

The facts, shortly, are these. Upon nineteen mornings between the 3rd of February and the 9th of March, an arc of coloured light was seen standing in the air over the shaft mouth, always before sunrise and never after. Dr. Ambrose, to whom I am obliged for a patience with the instruments that I could not myself have supplied, kept a careful record throughout, and I enclose his memorandum of the readings for the Committee's own examination, rather than attempt to render it in my own words and risk some inaccuracy of a figure. I will say only that the appearance was not, upon any reading I can construct from his notes, an ordinary trick of sand or heat-shimmer; and that it stopped, so far as the record shows, upon the same day that the stela was lifted from its socket and carried down to camp. I set the coincidence down as I find it and draw no conclusion from it whatever.

What I am unable to settle for myself, Sir Aubrey, is whether this material belongs in the season's Annual Report at all. It is an accurately observed fact, attested by instruments and by more than one witness, and I do not think I have the right to suppress it merely because its character is unusual; a surveyor who leaves out an inconvenient observation is, in my judgment, at fault in a way that no explanation afterwards can quite repair. But I am equally conscious that the Committee's name stands upon the title-page with mine, and that I have no right to attach it to anything that invites the ridicule of people who have never stood on that ridge at five o'clock in the morning. I should be glad of your guidance, and the Committee's, before I draft the relevant section, and I will hold the passage back from the printer until I hear from you.

I should add, since the Committee will wish to know it, that Canon Starling has written to me privately of certain comparative matter touching the device carved upon the stela itself, which he thinks may bear some relation, however distant, to what Dr. Ambrose recorded above the shaft. I have not seen his note in a finished state and offer no opinion of it; I mention it only so that the Committee has the whole of what is presently before me, and not merely the part of it that is mine to send.

I enclose Dr. Ambrose's memorandum, as I have said, and remain, with great respect for the Committee's judgment in a matter I find myself unable to weigh alone,

Your obedient servant,

E. A. RAVENSWORTH.

Director of the Expedition.

Encl.: Memorandum of Dr. F. L. Ambrose, herewith.

ITEM 2 · ENCLOSURE FORWARDED WITH ITEM 1

MEMORANDUM

Instrumental record of an optical appearance observed at the mouth of Tomb R.14

From: F. L. Ambrose, M.D., Physician to the Camp.

Dates: Nineteen mornings between 3 February and 9 March 1909.

Instrument: A field polariscope of my own assembly (Nicol prism, graduated bearing-ring, and a direct-vision spectroscop of Browning's pattern, mounted together upon a single tripod head for convenience of observation before sunrise).

1. The appearance was first reported to the Director by Mr. Halloway on the morning of 3 February, and was thereafter watched for and recorded upon nineteen mornings out of the thirty-five between that date and the 9th of March, on which last morning it was seen for six minutes and not afterwards.
2. The bearing of the centre of the arc was taken with the prismatic compass upon nine mornings and found constant, within $1^{\circ} 30'$, at 284° . The bearing did not alter with the sun's own change of rising-point over the period, which amounted to some 4° .
3. The light was examined with the Nicol prism upon four mornings and found strongly plane-polarised, extinction being nearly complete at one position of the prism. The plane of polarisation was tangential to the arc throughout its length.
4. The appearance was not seen upon the 10th, 11th, or any subsequent morning up to the striking of the camp, the stela having been removed from its socket on the 9th. I offer no conjecture as to the bearing of the one fact upon the other. I record only that the watch was kept, with the instruments ready, upon every one of the eighteen following mornings, and that nothing was seen.
5. I have no further observations to offer, and no theory. The figures are as I took them.

F. L. A.

ITEM 3 · A MEMBER OF THE COMMITTEE TO THE CHAIRMAN

THE EXPEDITION COMMITTEERavensworth Expedition to Ras el-Qaus • Anglo-Egyptian Survey, 1908–9
41 Bloomsbury Square, London, W.C.*2 April 1909.*Sir Aubrey Lister-Hume, Bart., F.S.A.,
Chairman of the Committee.

MY DEAR CHAIRMAN,

I have now read, as you asked me to, both Ravensworth's letter of the 12th of March and Dr. Ambrose's memorandum which he enclosed, and I set down my view of the matter while it is fresh, in case it is wanted before the next meeting.

I will say at once that I have no quarrel with Dr. Ambrose's figures themselves. He appears, from the memorandum, to be a competent and a careful observer, and I do not for a moment suppose that the bearing he gives, or the polarisation, was other than he found it. My hesitation is not with the readings but with what a printed report, once it is in the hands of subscribers and of every learned body we correspond with, will be understood to say beyond the readings.

The Society already numbers among its correspondents one or two gentlemen who consider our Egyptological reports too free with speculation as it is, and I need not remind you how readily a plain instrumental fact, printed beside a carved image of a bow, will be read by the unfriendly and the credulous alike as an intended connexion, whatever care we take to say otherwise. My own colleagues at the Royal Astronomical Society, I may add, would want some plain atmospheric account offered together with any figures we print, if only to show that the ordinary explanations have been considered and not merely waved aside. I do not myself insist upon any one of them, but a blown haze of quartz-sand, or a thin skein of cirrus catching the light low on the horizon, would each answer well enough as a hedge, without committing the Committee to more than a suggestion.

I should therefore propose that Dr. Ambrose's readings be printed, if at all, in the barest technical form the narrative will bear — dates, bearing, and the fact of polarisation, and little more — and that any comparative or interpretive matter, if Canon Starling or another member wishes to pursue it, be kept entirely apart from the Report's own descriptive sections, in some separate appendix that a reader wanting only the archaeology may pass over without a sense of having missed anything belonging to the excavation proper. I think this would meet the difficulty better than either printing everything together or suppressing the observation, which I agree with Ravensworth we have no right to do.

I am, my dear Chairman, as always,

Yours very truly,

ALDOUS TREHERNE.*Fellow of the Royal Astronomical Society.*

ITEM 4 · THE CHAIRMAN TO THE DIRECTOR — THE COMMITTEE'S DECISION

THE EXPEDITION COMMITTEE

Ravensworth Expedition to Ras el-Qaus • Anglo-Egyptian Survey, 1908–9
41 Bloomsbury Square, London, W.C.*20 April 1909.*Prof. E. A. Ravensworth, M.A., F.S.A.,
Director of the Expedition.

MY DEAR RAVENSWORTH,

Your letter of the 12th of March, and Dr. Ambrose's memorandum with it, have now been before the Committee, and I am able to write to you with something that I think we may fairly call a common mind upon the matter, though it was arrived at, as these things generally are, by a certain amount of give on more than one side.

Mr. Treherne, whose caution in these matters the Committee has learned to value, put the difficulty to us very fairly: that Dr. Ambrose's readings, taken alone, are unobjectionable, but that a Report is read by many who will supply for themselves whatever connexion the writer has been careful not to state. The Committee was not disposed, for all that, to agree that the observation should be left out, and I do not think any member seriously proposed it; a body that has always prided itself on printing what its officers actually found is not now going to begin striking out the inconvenient parts of the record.

The decision, then, is this. The phenomenon is to be printed plainly and factually within the Report's own descriptive sections, in Dr. Ambrose's figures and in substantially his own words, and without any interpretation beyond the plain physical hypotheses that occur to a careful observer and are there rejected or allowed to stand upon their own evidence. All comparative or interpretive material — and I understand Canon Starling has already been turning over some matter of that kind, touching certain other literatures — is to be kept out of the Report's own narrative entirely, and printed, if you judge the Canon's remarks sound and worth the room, as a separate and clearly numbered appendix, distinguished in every way from the Report proper. A reader who wants the facts and a reader who wants the speculation need then never trouble each other, and the Committee's own name stands behind exactly as much interpretation as it has actually offered, which is to say none.

I should be glad if you would show this letter to Dr. Ambrose, with the Committee's thanks for a record kept, by every account, with great care under trying conditions, and if Canon Starling's note is ready in time you may send it forward with the rest of the season's papers for the printer.

You mentioned, in the letter that opened this correspondence, that Canon Starling had written to you privately of some comparative matter of his own. The Committee has not seen it and does not ask to before it is finished; but you may tell him, if it is of use to him in the writing, that the Committee's present mind is that such a note, if he completes it and you judge it sound, will find a place — provided always that it is kept, as I have said above, entirely to itself, and does not stray into the Report's own account of what was actually measured and seen.

I add one line that is my own curiosity and not the Committee's business, and you need not answer it in any paper that comes before your colleagues: have you, yourself, off the record of the Committee's own papers, formed

any private view of the matter? I ask only as one who has read your letters on this excavation with more interest than a Chairman is perhaps obliged to feel, and you are quite at liberty to leave the question where it stands.

I am, my dear Ravensworth, with the Committee's confidence and my own regard,

Yours very sincerely,

AUBREY LISTER-HUME.

Chairman of the Committee.