

RAVENSWORTH EXPEDITION

FIELD NOTEBOOK — EXCERPT

Transcribed from the pocket notebook of

C. RAVENSWORTH

Site VO-7, the Veiled Oasis · Western Desert

1–14 February 1909

Four consecutive leaves, original pagination preserved. Abbreviations, cross-outs implied in the phrasing, and irregular hand retained as in the source notebook; spelling and dating conventions are Miss Ravensworth's own and have not been regularised.

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1 FEB. [1909]

Wind fr. NW all forenoon, dropping by 3. Sand into the developing tent again — 3rd time this wk. Told Ibrahim the sill wants a new frame; he is probably right & I have not the timber to spare him.

VO-7, Ch. 2: floor clearance complete to bedrock. Objects 118-124 (potsherds, 1 fragment ground stone) bagged & logged. Nothing remarkable.

Doorway to inner chamber ("Ch. 3", F-S's numbering) now fully exposed. Single dressed slab, mortared all round. Seal impressions along the upper edge, blurred, but the mortar unbroken so far as I can find w/ a probe. No sign of old forced entry — more than can be said for half this site.

F-S wants the slab lifted "first thing" on the 3rd, not the 2nd — off to Report on the well-shaft tmw, does not want it opened w/o him. Fair enough, though it means another day of nothing to log but weather.

2 FEB.

Clear, hot by midday. Re-photographed doorway & seal before anything touched, in case lifting damages the impressions — 6 exposures, VO7-D1 through D6.

El-Bahari back fr. the river camp in the afternoon, in time for this after all. Asked to examine the seal himself before we lift; agreed — no reason not to have two pairs of eyes on it.

F-S's word for tomorrow, at supper: slab up at first light, before the heat; I am to hold the lamp & keep the book running — "don't stop to admire anything, Ravensworth, describe it" — as if I ever once had. Did not dignify with a reply.

Kit laid out tonight: bar, wedges, 2 lamps + spare oil, tape, small scale, plate boxes. 4.30 call.

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3 FEB. — Chamber 3, opening

5.50 a.m. First light into the chamber. Slab lifted clean — mortar sound, no prior disturbance either el-Bahari or I could find. F-S & Ibrahim on the bar; I held the lamp, as instructed. Chamber small, dry, roughly 4 x 3 paces, ceiling low enough F-S had to stoop. Floor clear but for one object, on a low stone plinth. No burial goods, no jars, no visible inscription.

THE CASE. Squarish, thick-walled, dark stone — basalt, I think — two-part, lid seated in a rebate & sealed w/ what looks like lead. By tape, roughly 2 ft 3 in x 1 ft 4 in x 1 ft. Heavy; did not attempt to shift it.

Lid loosened (seal cracked along one edge, not by us — old damage, or old re-sealing? note for later) & raised enough to look in.

WITHIN: two limbs of black glassy stone, curved, polished, joined at a grip wrapped in what may be leather & gilt. Fittings at both ends, pale yellowish, near gold to the eye, chased w/ a pattern not clear by lamp. A cord, fibrous, coiled by the grip — not linen; have not touched it.

Shape hard to read at first: a small boat's hull, keel-up — no, the limbs curve too much for that. A bow, is my honest reading, though large & oddly made; set down w/ no great confidence.

Private note, plainly: for one moment, lamp held just so, the thing looked to lie drawn — curved hard the other way — rather than at rest, undisturbed these centuries. Not so on the second look; one bad lamp, one bad angle, & three nights of poor sleep. Shall not make more of it.

Lid re-seated, object left in situ. No. 137 assigned (case), 137a (assembly), 137b (cord); to be photographed, then crated for removal. F-S very pleased; said so twice, which for him is effusive.

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4 FEB.

Case removed to the house yesterday evening, no mishap. Opened again this morning in proper daylight, el-Bahari present. Measurements retaken, more carefully than Sun.: assembly approx. 5 ft 8 in tip to tip as it lies (curved, not straight — want a proper drawing), grip approx. 9 in. Cord, uncoiled w/ care, approx. 5 ft 5 in relaxed. Weight a little over 10 lb. Fittings confirmed pale gold-coloured metal, not gold leaf over wood as I half wondered — solid through some depth at least; a worn repeating pattern, sun & boat motifs I think, though I would not commit that on my own authority.

F-S in & out all morning, delighted — calls it the find of the season. Uninterested when I mentioned, once & in passing, that the thing had struck me oddly by lamplight; said lamps make liars of good stone. Probably right. Did not raise it again.

5 FEB.

El-Bahari spent today at the string-eye w/ a glass, his own initiative. Thinks there may be a few signs, very worn, possibly none at all — will not commit either way; I saw nothing myself but scratches. Wants the north window unshuttered first — carpentry, which means F-S, which means delay.

Plates fr. Sun. developed, tolerable but not good — lamp exposures never are. El-B wants a proper trestle series before final crating; F-S agreed, weather permitting.

Case (137) & assembly logged into the register proper this evening, copied fair fr. this book. Cord to wait on proper tweezers up fr. Cairo.

N.B. — 3rd Feb. Have gone back & underlined the date above twice now for no reason I can point to. Leave it as it stands.

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14 FEB.

Assembly (137/137a/b) crated finally this morning, packed w/ the wool F-S had sent up fr. Alexandria for the purpose — case, limbs & cord together, as found, per el-B's instruction, not separated. Marked for the house store pending the season's consignment.

Trestle series (field, object no. 137) completed 11th, in reasonable light at last; el-B satisfied w/ the plates, or as near satisfied as he ever owns to being. Full details in the plate register, not repeated here.

Back onto the east tombs today — R.9 & R.11 both wanting proper clearance before the season closes, & F-S is right that we cannot spend the rest of Feb. on one chamber, however good the find in it. Objects 138-141 logged fr. R.9 this p.m., nothing beyond the ordinary: a broken headrest, 2 amulets (poor cond.), a scatter of beads not yet counted.

Weather turning — first real haze of the season this evening, dust rather than cloud. Ibrahim predicts a bad week for photography. We shall see.