

### III. Notes

## **‘At Variance With Both General and Expert Opinion’: The Later Works of Lieutenant-Colonel Professor Laurence Austine Waddell**

**Gabriel Moshenska**

UCL Institute of Archaeology  
([g.moshenska@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:g.moshenska@ucl.ac.uk))

‘What delusions will not arise, as soon as man seeks for supposed “origins”!’ Houston Stewart Chamberlain (1911: 293).

An intellectual history can trace the movement of an idea into, and out of, the academic mainstreams of its time. Less often, it might turn its gaze on ideas that never gained widespread acceptance but remained and remain esoteric. Such marginal works are of value to historians in so far as they allow us to tentatively trace the margins of a past intellectual community. Few scholars can have inhabited these margins, and built more spectacular intellectual edifices there, than Lieutenant-Colonel Professor Laurence Austine Waddell.

From 1917 until his death, aged eighty-five, in 1938 Laurence Austine Waddell wove an elaborate and painstakingly detailed narrative of old world prehistory that identified the Aryan race as the root of all progress, innovation and civilisation in the past five thousand and five hundred years. Waddell’s hyperdiffusionist and virulently racist writings on archaeology and ancient history were widely read in Britain, influencing the works of Fascist intellectuals, such as the medievalist J. H. Harvey, and the modernist poet Ezra Pound (Casillo 1985; Macklin 2008). Today his works, particularly his book *The Phoenician Origin of Britons, Scots and Anglo-Saxons* (1924), circulate among far-right groups, and can be found on the internet. My aim in this short note is to outline the ideas expounded in Waddell’s later esoteric works, their contemporary and modern receptions, and their relationship to his earlier life and work.

Waddell’s career path reflects the opportunities available to bright and energetic young men in the British Empire during the late Victorian era. Having graduated in medicine from Glasgow with the highest honours and worked as a surgeon for two years, Waddell joined the Indian Medical Service in 1880, serving as Assistant Sanitary Commissioner, and later, as Medical Officer for the district of Darjeeling, before taking up a post as Professor at Calcutta Medical College (Thomas 1939). During this period he served as Medical Officer for a number of military campaigns and expeditions both in, and to the north of India, rising to the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel. This experience, together with his knowledge of Tibetan language and culture, led to his being recruited for the Younghusband mission into Tibet in 1903–4, an exercise in colonialist brutality during which Waddell is alleged to have looted a prodigious quantity of Tibetan Buddhist texts and relics (Carrington 2003).

By this time Waddell had gained experience, and a degree of respect, as an archaeologist, having excavated the site of Pataliputra in 1895, where his search for Western influences on prehistoric India anticipated his later diffusionist writings (Basak 2008; Waddell 1903). He also claimed to have carried out a series of topographic surveys and studies of antiquities and inscriptions leading to the first accurate location of the birthplace of the Buddha (Waddell 1897). In 1905 Waddell and his family returned to Britain to a ‘rather sinecure’ job as Professor of Tibetan at University College London (Thomas 1939: 503). A few years later he retired to Scotland, taking up residence on the Island of Bute,

where between 1924 and 1930 he produced a series of large, well-illustrated volumes of archaeology, ancient history and paleolinguistics built upon, in the words of his obituarist, 'conjectures ignoring all principles and results of sober research' (Thomas 1939: 504).

Waddell's first book on this subject, *The Phoenician Origin of Britons, Scots and Anglo-Saxons* (1924) focuses on the translation of an inscription on the Newton Stone, a monument at Newton House near Aberdeen. The stone is now thought to be early Medieval in date, judging from the Ogham inscription running up one side. There is also a second set of Ogham inscriptions, together with another peculiar text that is thought to be an early nineteenth century hoax (Macalister 1935). It is this latter nonsensical text that Waddell claimed to have deciphered (a claim made, with similar lack of veracity, by numerous scholars over the previous century). Waddell's translation attempt was inspired by the prominence of a swastika in the text, a symbol he associated with Aryan sun-worship. He claims that it reads:

This Sun-Cross (Swastika) was raised to *Bil* (or Bel, the God of Sun-Fire) by the *Kassi* (or Cassi-bel[an]) of *Kast* of the *Siluyr* (sub-clan) of the "*Khilani*" (or Hittite-palace-dwellers), the *Phoenician* (named) *Ikar* of *Cicilia*, the *Prwt* (or Prât, that is 'Barat' or 'Brihat' or *Brit-on*) (Waddell 1924: 32).

The remainder of the book consists of a series of proofs, drawing on linguistics, numismatics, palaeography and archaeology, to show that the above inscription was commissioned by one Port-olon, King of the Scots in 400 BC, to declare himself a Briton, a Hittite and a Phoenician.

In *The Indo-Sumerian Seals Deciphered* (1925) and *A Sumer-Aryan Dictionary* (1927) Waddell drew on new discoveries in the Indus Valley to suggest that the Aryan Sumerian Phoenicians he had previously identified as the settlers of Britain were also the Aryan invaders who brought civilization to prehistoric India (e.g. Waddell 1925: 114). In both of these works Waddell claimed to have translated with ease the Indus seal inscriptions that had baffled other scholars. The racial element of Waddell's work, always strong, was becoming more prominent and by 1929 he was quoting with approval the Nazi racial theorist H. F. K. Günther, and had begun to use the word 'Nordic' alongside 'Aryan', something that he later retracted (1930a: x).

The colossal book, *The Makers of Civilization in Race and History* (1929) marked Waddell's attempt to apply his new historical ideas and techniques on a wider scale, drawing links between Ancient Egypt kingship, Norse mythology, the legends of Troy, and the mysterious genesis of the Goths. In this, his largest and most ambitious work, Waddell continued to employ the pseudo-scholarly techniques so beloved of purveyors of fringe archaeologies up to the present: these include artistic and linguistic associations, where simple images or word fragments are compared across cultures to demonstrate a supposed cultural connection (Schadla-Hall 2004: 259). Waddell argued that the first Sumerian Aryan king has become known by different names in the various Aryan traditions, including Thor, King Ar-Thur, King Adam, St George and Zeus. This same Sumerian monarch established agriculture, monogamy, writing, urbanism, fire production and industry, and possessed the bowl we now know as the Holy Grail (Waddell 1929: 468–469).

In 1930 Waddell published two books based on chapters in *Makers of Civilization*, the first being the self-explanatory *Egyptian Civilization: Its Sumerian Origin and Real Chronology*. In this short book he claimed to have overturned existing Egyptian king lists and chronologies by identifying Menes, founder of the First Dynasty, with the Sumerian Manistushu, son of Sargon the Great. He also argued that Menes was identical to King Minos of Crete (Waddell 1930a: 75). Waddell's other work of 1930 was a reworking of the Old Norse *Edda*, the epic poems and prose first written down in Icelandic in the thirteenth century. The book was called *The British Edda*, with the gloriously descriptive subtitle *The Great Epic Poem of the Ancient Britons on the Exploits of King Thor, Arthur or Adam and His Knights in Establishing Civilization Reforming Eden & Capturing the Holy Grail About 3380–3350 B.C. Reconstructed for First Time from the Medieval Mss. by Babylonian, Hittite, Egyptian, Trojan & Gothic Keys and Done Literally into English*. In this book Waddell brought his racist rewriting of world history full

circle, returning to the British focus of the 1924 *Phoenician Origin*. The perceived aim of reclaiming a British text from its Scandinavian captors might have motivated Waddell's rejection of the Aryan/Nordic link discussed earlier.

Waddell's entry in the *Dictionary of National Biography* ends with a brief list of his later books, discussed here, and notes that 'These works, containing much painstaking research and impressive to many, did not win the approval of experts.' (Thomas 2004). In the preface to *The Indo-Sumerian Seals Deciphered* (1925) Waddell reflects on the reception of *Phoenician Origin*, published the year before, and states that:

It would be an affectation to ignore that ... I am in opposition to much of what is held to be, if not established doctrine, at any rate good working theory with regards to Sumerian, Phoenician, Indian and British history. I am also at variance with both general and expert opinion as regards the nature and causes of the so-called 'Higher Civilization' (Waddell 1925: xiv–xv).

Is this the attitude of a scholar attempting to overturn consensus, or one seeking to build his intellectual edifice outside or alongside it? I believe it is the latter. In the passage immediately following that quoted above Waddell expands on his notion of 'Higher Civilization':

I take the phrase to mean, not, as a visitor to the earth from Mars might suppose, aeroplanes and motors, telephones and wireless, athletics and gambling, trashy books, novels and newspapers, and a religion based largely on myths and réchauffés of the rites and superstitions of savages; but briefly, art, science and a healthy contented populace (Waddell 1925: xv).

These are the words of an old man, then in his early seventies, at the beginning of his last great intellectual enterprise. In its affection and disdain for both the ancient and the modern this passage also reveals Waddell the fascist, in the contemporary sense of the word no less than the modern.

Waddell's hopes of rewriting the story of civilization with the Aryan race as the first and only protagonist rapidly faded as his works and ideas remained restricted to, if well rooted in, the ultra right wing fringes of society and scholarship. J. H. Harvey, member of the pro-Nazi Imperial Fascist League and later a respected medievalist, wrote a short book *The Heritage of Britain* (1940) which aimed to summarise Waddell's works for a narrower audience on the fringes of the British Fascist movement (Macklin 2008). The British-Israelite W. T. F. Jarrold used Waddell's study of the Newton Stone to support a Biblical origin for the Anglo-Saxon race (1927). Today Waddell's works are read and referenced most commonly by white supremacists, esoteric scholars and conspiracy theorists such as David Icke (1999).

While his writings may have been excluded from mainstream scholarship, it would be incorrect to dismiss Waddell as a lone crank: his work was well received by the public, and collected a number of favourable press reviews. In a period when Elliot Smith's hyperdiffusionist writings enjoyed widespread support, while race science and eugenics were considered respectable subjects of study, Waddell's works, while unquestionably esoteric, were not so far from the academic mainstream as we might now suppose. For this reason, as well as for his enduring influence, Waddell's writings deserve the attention of intellectual historians no less than the incredulity of archaeologists and ancient historians.

## Acknowledgements

My thanks to Amara Thornton and Chana Moshenska for their helpful comments on an earlier version of this text.

## References

- Basak, B. 2008. Pataliputra: The Changing Perceptions of a Site. In G. Sengupta and S. Chakraborty (eds.) *Archaeology of Early Historic South Asia*, pp. 39–53. New Delhi: Pragati.
- Carrington, M. 2003. Officers, Gentlemen and Thieves: The Looting of Monasteries During the 1903/4 Younghusband Mission to Tibet. *Modern Asian Studies* 37, 1: 81–109.

- Casillo, R. 1985. Ezra Pound, L. A. Waddell, and the Aryan Origin of 'The Cantos'. *Modern Language Studies* 15, 2: 65–81.
- Chamberlain, H. S. 1911. *Foundations of the XIXth Century*. London: John Lane.
- Harvey, J. H. 1940. *The Heritage of Britain*. London: The Right Review.
- Icke, D. 1999. *The Biggest Secret: The Book That Will Change the World*. Scottsdale: Bridge of Love Publications.
- Jarrold, W. T. F. 1927. *Our Great Heritage with Its Responsibilities*. London: Covenant.
- Macalister, R. A. S. 1935. The Newton Stone. *Antiquity* 36: 389–398.
- Macklin, G. 2008. The Two Lives of John Hooper Harvey. *Patterns of Prejudice* 42, 2: 167–190.
- Schadla-Hall, T. 2004. The Comforts of Unreason: The Importance and Relevance of Alternative Archaeology. In N. Merriman (ed.) *Public Archaeology*, pp. 255–271. London: Routledge.
- Thomas, F. W. 1939. Colonel L. A. Waddell. *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* 3: 499–504.
- 2004. Waddell, Lawrence Augustine (1854–1938), rev. Schuyler Jones. *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/36671> (accessed 18 Feb 2010).
- Waddell, L. A. 1897. The Discovery of the Birthplace of the Buddha. *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, July: 644–651.
- 1903. *The Excavations at Pātaliputra (Patna): The Palibothra of the Greeks*. Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Press.
- 1917. Aryan Origins of the World's Civilization. *Asiatic Review*, February: 1–15.
- 1924. *The Phoenician Origin of Britons, Scots & Anglo-Saxons*. London: Williams and Norgate.
- 1925. *The Indo-Sumerian Seals Deciphered*. London: Luzac & Co.
- 1927. *A Sumer-Aryan Dictionary*. London: Luzac & Co.
- 1929. *The Makers of Civilization in Race and History*. London: Luzac & Co.
- 1930a. *Egyptian Civilization: Its Sumerian Origin and Real Chronology*. London: Luzac & Co.
- 1930b. *The British Edda*. London: Chapman & Hall.

## IV. Book reviews

Christopher Evans 2009. *Fengate Revisited: Further Fen-edge Excavations, Bronze Age Fieldsystems & Settlement and the Wyman Abbot/Leeds Archives*. Cambridge Landscape Archives: Historiography and Fieldwork (No. 1). Cambridge: Cambridge Archaeological Unit. ISBN 978-0-95448-248-0.

Reviewed by Niall Sharples

The prehistory of Britain in the early twentieth century is sometimes thought of as documented by the archaeology of Wessex, but this is a slight exaggeration as areas such as Yorkshire and the Fens have contributed a great deal due to the activities of local antiquaries. The Fens attracted interest because they produced large quantities of metalwork, but the area around Peterborough became important as a result of the hand digging of large clay pits to supply the local brickworks. This was overseen by a competent local amateur, Wyman Abbott and his observations resulted in a string of interesting discoveries which put the region on the archaeological map. The importance of these discoveries was undermined by Wyman Abbott's failure to publish his excavations, but the quality and size of some of the pottery assemblages was recognised by scholars such as E. T. Leeds and C. F. C. Hawkes who subsequently published some of the material. The assemblages were of sufficient importance to be used as type-sites for British prehistory; the Late Neolithic is partially defined by Peterborough Wares, which include the Fengate sub-type; the Early Iron Age pottery was used to define Cunliffe's Fengate Cromer style.