

Alfred Russel Wallace notes 1: authorship of two early works

For the past couple of years we have been investigating some questions regarding the early life and writings of the British naturalist Alfred Russel Wallace (1823–1913). These notes pull together the results of this work, various elements of which were carried out by the authors (identified hereafter by our initials), largely as individual efforts. This discussion focuses on Wallace’s supposed authorship of two works published in 1856 and 1857.

In a recent note CHS discussed Wallace’s temporary adoption of a journalistic hat (Smith 2008), noting two articles, “A new kind of baby” and “The Dyaks” which had appeared in *Chambers’s journal* as unsigned communications, and why there was reason to believe Wallace had written them. They are in my bibliography of Wallace publications (Smith 1991).¹

Shortly after the note’s publication I was contacted by MT, who informed me that nineteenth-century records of payments made to authors by W. & R. Chambers Ltd. survive in the National Library of Scotland in Edinburgh. MT agreed to look at these records. With a renewed interest in the question I did some more investigating on my own, and before hearing back from MT discovered a note apparently written by Wallace himself that is part of the Wallace collection at the Natural History Museum, London, that has been mounted online for public viewing. The note is a list of pre-1862 articles that Wallace claimed to have authored, and “A new kind of baby” was included.²

Several days later MT informed me he had found that £1 10s 0d. (one pound ten shillings) had been credited to G. C. Silk of 79 Pall Mall, London, for the essay “A new kind of baby”.³ This is certainly Wallace’s lifelong friend George Silk (this same address, 79 Pall Mall, was used on a letter Wallace sent to Silk in 1862 (see Wallace 1905: 1: 380)). Further investigation of any extant Wallace-Silk correspondence might determine the exact particulars of this story, but very likely Silk was either acting as Wallace’s agent, or with permission rewrote the more formal recounting of the famous incident involved (Wallace’s attempt to raise an infant orangutan) that Wallace had published six months earlier (Wallace 1856b).

MT was also able to determine that two other possible Wallace items in *Chambers’s journal* from 1856 and 1857 had been credited to (or at least payments had been made to) James Augustus St John (the father of Spenser St John, Rajah James Brookes’s personal secretary in Sarawak), and to the Reverend Andrew Horsburgh.⁴ MT was unable to find information on another possible Wallace work that appeared in *Chambers’s journal* in 1854, “Hunting the tapir”, but its early date of publication, emphasis, and writing style make a link to Wallace unlikely.

Regarding S34, “The Dyaks”, about a month later I was contacted by GD, who informed me that a source he had been studying quoted material attributed to a work published in 1858 by Horsburgh. This material closely resembled text found in “The Dyaks” that I had put up online. Horsburgh was a missionary in Sarawak when Wallace was there. GD made a number of points about the contents of “The Dyaks” that argued in favor of its authorship by Horsburgh and not Wallace, but I was not fully convinced that, for example, Wallace might not have been independently reporting intelligence from this or another source. I therefore attempted to find a copy of Horsburgh’s pamphlet *Sketches in Borneo* (1858). No original copies exist in the United States, although a photostatic copy is in the South Asia Collection at Cornell University. This confirmed that “The Dyaks” was one of several essays by Horsburgh he later combined to create *Sketches in Borneo*.

NOTES

¹ This assignment (as entries “S30” and “S34,” respectively) was carried over to my “Alfred Russel Wallace page” website, at <http://web2.wku.edu/~smithch/index1.htm>, in 2000.

² Wallace Collection, Natural History Museum, London: item WP6/8/2.

³ W. & R. Chambers Ltd. papers, “Authors’ ledger” no. 2, p. 373: National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh; Dep 341/290.

⁴ St John was paid for “Wild man of the woods” (*Chambers’s journal*, third series, 6: 129–131, 1856); Horsburgh for “People of Sarawak” (*Chambers’s journal*, third series, 8: 93–96, 1857). See “Authors’ ledger” no. 2, pp 96 & 380, respectively, NLS Dep. 341/290.

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