



## The Ashes of the Buddha

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Piprahwa is the site of a well-known stūpa due north of Gorakhpur in north-eastern Uttar Pradesh and less than a km south of the Nepalese border; it can be seen on Google Earth at 27°26'52.03"N, 83°07'42.20"E. The stūpa became famous after its opening up by the local landowner, William Peppé, in January 1898. He unearthed a big stone chest at the base of the stūpa and found in it one crystal and four soapstone caskets, all five used as reliquaries. The lid of one of the latter carried an inscription in Brāhmī characters that spoke of "the Buddha of the Śākyas," a clear reference to the *śākyamuni*, the historical Buddha. At that time this was the first reliquary to be found containing named relics of the Buddha, leading to the assumption that the bone and ash fragments contained in the reliquaries were the only surviving relics of the Buddha. Expectations ran high, although today a number of such reliquaries are known, mostly from Gandhara, with inscriptions indicating that the contents derive from the funeral of the Buddha at Kuśinagara, and so the Piprahwa legend has lost some of its impact. One of the aims of this paper is to show that the Piprahwa stūpa is more than just one among many and that it has an illustrious history unrivalled by any other, with some features so far undocumented.

The stūpa stands on ground once part of the Birdpur Estate of William Claxton Peppé (1852–1936), who, although growing cash crops, was an engineer by training. Accordingly, his excavation was well organized. The report he sent to the Royal Asiatic Society in London without delay was accompanied by a map with all the stratigraphical details, providing relative heights, lengths and widths. This map was never printed, but it is preserved in the Peppé collection at the Royal Asiatic Society, London, where I saw it.

This excavation took place thirteen months after the birthplace of the Buddha had been found, just inside the Nepal border a few km away from the Peppé estate to the north-east, at a place called Rummindei, the Lumbini of old, which had been found by the local provincial governor, General Khadga Shamshe Bahadur Jang. However, through the publication of its inscription by Georg Bühler the general public was made to believe that the German subject Dr. Alois Anton Führer, employed as a rather low-grade "Assistant Archaeological Surveyor" in the service of the ASI, had masterminded, if not effected, the discovery.

Peppé excavated the stūpa on his estate with the knowledge of, but without the help of, any government agency, or from Führer or any other person, but when he found a stone coffer full of remarkable items at the bottom close to the centre of the stūpa he immediately wrote to Dr. Führer and also informed a number of local government officials. These included two senior members of the Indian Civil Service, both well-established antiquarians with a working knowledge of Sanskrit: the future historian Vincent Smith, District Magistrate in the local district headquarters at Basti, and Dr. William Hoey, then serving as Collector and Magistrate in the divisional headquarters at Gorakhpur.

Until only two years before that discovery, the geography of early Buddhism had been a matter of guesswork. After the pillar at Lumbini had fixed the birthplace of the Buddha a further sensation was in the air. While Führer was engaged in exploring the country north-west of Lumbini in a bid to find the ruins of Kapilavastu, Peppé was in the process of opening up his stupa with no particular expectations. Although working within 40–50 km of each other contact was limited to the exchange



Fig. 1. Dr. Alois Anton Führer when living in Switzerland. Photo: Creative Commons 4.0.

of letters carried on foot. A century later the impression was nurtured that both men were part of a group of conspirators working hand in glove to win over the king of Siam for the British crown in a bid to oppose the Russian advances by making him possessor of the Buddha's bones. Ridiculous as this construction may seem, it is built on the suspect reputation of Alois Führer and the attempts to attribute a similarly bad character to T. W. Rhys Davids, a Buddhist scholar of great renown.

### Criminal or Psychopath?

A. A. Führer (1853–1930) (fig. 1) had managed for a long time to appear as a serious German scholar: he published papers and books, he dug up antique statues in India, he efficiently reorganized the Museum at Lucknow. But slowly it became clear that his published papers and books were full of copies of others' work; at least one inscribed statue was probably inscribed by himself, and one extensive archaeological site with large stūpas in ruins described as ready for the spade did not even exist. Strangely enough, despite all of his wrong-

doings, his activities never served monetary ambitions: the inscriptions he found were reported to his mentor Georg Bühler at the University of Vienna, who published them and who financed his field campaign in the Terai. Führer's audacity in publishing texts written by others under his name hardly finds a rival. In 1991 (with an English translation in 1998) I showed how little Führer had to do with the discovery of Lumbinī, a paper which touches much common ground with what the narrative historian and biographer Charles Allen (2008) adduced for his suspenseful book, in which he added many new aspects from material unearthed in the collection of Neil Peppé, the grandson of the original excavator. In principle, Führer's misbehaviour has been well known since 1901, when V. Smith exposed the non-existence of Führer's "Kapilavastu" in a widely read monograph (Mukherji 1901), and since 1912, when H. Lüders (1912a) dealt with non-existing inscriptions and one existing but bogus epigraph. In two papers A. Huxley (2010, 2015) made Führer a leading figure in his Siam Conspiracy, a theory which is also the guideline for a self-published book by T. Phelps (2010) and his internet page. All well-deserved accusations against Führer need not be repeated here as they are common knowledge. The Siam Conspiracy theory, however, lingers on and will be referred to where appropriate.

One major misrepresentation in the work of Phelps, Huxley and even Allen is that they ascribe a certain competence in Indian languages to Führer. This may partly be due to the so far unrecognised existence of another Dr. Alois Anton Führer, well versed in Greek dialects with solid publications touching Indo-European studies, but he is not our man.<sup>1</sup> There is also Führer the Catholic clergyman and self-declared "discoverer of the birthplace of the Buddha,"<sup>2</sup> who after becoming a priest in 1878 handed in a dissertation in 1879 on script and writing in the Bṛhaspatidharmaśāstra at the University of Würzburg under Prof J. Jolly. The dissertation has only 28 pages, 8 of which are covered by 84 Sanskrit verses and 10 pages for their translation, which is dubious and useless and off the mark whenever the Sanskrit is tricky.<sup>3</sup> Nonetheless, Führer even received a prize that was offered as an award for the topic. A fuller treatment of the subject was also announced but never came. Once in Bombay, he was placed into the German Jesuit St. Xavier's College, and there he published (Bombay 1883) an old law text in Sanskrit he called Vāsiṣṭhadharmaśāstram.<sup>4</sup> He pretended to

have worked from manuscripts, but what he sent to the printer was nothing but the working base established by a group of pandits for Georg Bühler, who had published a translation of the text thus established in 1882 (Sacred Books of the East, vol. 14). After Führer's "edition" had been reviewed by O. von Böhtlingk in 1885 and 1886, Führer invented a manuscript "K" from Kota, Rajasthan, which for the second printing in 1914 furnished exactly those readings which Böhtlingk had proposed as emendations (Sänger 1998: 45f.).

Already in the early 1890s Bühler as well as Jolly knew that Führer was plagiarizing without scruples. In a review of Führer's *Sharqi Architecture*, Jolly (1890) noticed that the presentation of an inscription from Sāhet-Mahet "agrees almost word for word with Professor Kielhorn's paper on the same inscription, in the *Indian Antiquary* for March, 1888, pp. 61–64, and we do not see why Dr. Führer has nowhere referred to the paper of his predecessor." As Lüders (1912a: 163–67) has shown, in 1892 Führer copied a large introduction of Bühler himself on the Sanchi inscriptions for his own paper on alleged finds at Ramnagar. His mistakes in that *Report* are ample proof that Führer was ill-educated in Prakrit phonology and morphology, rendering e.g. Skt. *agnīśarmā* into written *agisimā* instead of *agisamo* (Lüders 1912a: 166b), and that he was ignorant to the same degree of Brāhmī palaeography, or, as Lüders (1912a: 176) put it, "extremely clumsy, showing that the engraver certainly was not accustomed to such work"). Although Lüders unmasked Führer in many ways, he never focused on Führer's activities in connection with the Piprahwa casket, or did he ever put its genuineness in question.

In India, finding himself filling a post for which he was not qualified, Führer started to misbehave, making up excavation reports, forging at least one inscription and distributing fake relics free of charge, including a supposed tooth of the Buddha to a Burmese monk (Allen 2008: 215). All this had happened before Peppé started to excavate his stūpa. Unfortunately, the misbehaviour of Führer became public very soon after Peppé's excavation hit the headlines in the newspapers. Because of this coincidence Peppé's finds would much later become linked with the frauds of Führer and promoted by those believing in the Siam Conspiracy theory. While Führer was in service and even decades after his dismissal no written doubts ever arose over the genuineness of the Piprahwa finds, which became the object of studies of such estab-

lished scholars as A. Barth, G. Bühler, J. F. Fleet, R. Pischel, É. Senart and H. Lüders, all of them capable of telling a fake from a genuine text.

Regarding the role of Führer we should ask whether he was more of a criminal or a psychopath. Allen (2008: 215) proposes a great deal of mental disorder in his character and suggests that his promotion of a supposed discovery of a non-existent Kapilavastu was a bid to secure funds for a further expedition when he would definitely find it. Führer never appears unfriendly or arrogant and admits his wrongdoings as soon as confronted with them. It does indeed appear that on his second, fateful expedition into the Nepal Tarai, Führer was driven to taking desperate measures, with the Nepalese authorities imposing severe constraints, an obnoxious Major Waddell harassing him and Bühler expecting prompt delivery of his report on an expedition which he himself had funded. Führer should have stayed a Catholic clergyman, but as things developed he first (1897) turned into an Anglican priest and married a British lady, and when she died in 1900 tried to become a Buddhist monk in Sri Lanka (Allen 2008: 213f.), ending finally, and married again, as a Christ-Catholic clergyman in Binnigen, Switzerland (von Arx 2005).

The recent and unfounded linkage of Führer with Peppé's excavation is all the more regrettable since this stūpa plays a particular role in the history of early north Indian Buddhism. What role that was became obvious to me in 2012 when I inspected the stone coffer from Piprahwa now housed in the Indian Museum, Calcutta, in the course of the filming referred to earlier (fig. 2). In that film I spontaneously expressed the view that the coffer might go back to the activities of Aśoka himself, and this apparently gave many a viewer the idea that I regarded the complete stūpa of Piprahwa as a construction of Aśoka. This paper is also meant to set clear what exactly I think is Aśokan at Piprahwa and what is not. With this in mind we have to begin by following the bones of the Buddha from the pyre to their present location.

### The Distribution of the Bone Fragments of the Buddha

When the Buddha died at Kuśinagara (Pali *kusi-nārā*, modern Kasiā; 26°44'21.19"N 83°53'26.24"E) his body was burned on the spot. A number of

*kṣatriya* relatives and two brahmin ritual performers insisted in receiving some of the bones remaining after the incineration. We are not told in which form these bone fragments were handed over, but there are a number of panels from Gandhara showing that in the North-West at least the distribution was thought to have used wrapper leaves folded into a ball shape.<sup>5</sup> In some rare cases we see the recipients approaching with regular reliquaries or globular water containers often used for ash burials. For the historical event nothing is certain, but the leaf balls are a probability, particularly since such burial rites are commonly in the hands of brahmins and we have at least two brahmins around, one from Veṭhadīpa and then Droṇa who had to collect the bones.

The single recipients are named in the oldest report, the Mahāpariṇibbānasutta of the Dīghanikāya (DN II: 167). The then ruling king of Magadha, Ajātaśatru, based at Rājagṛha, is named first as claimant and receiver. Then comes the mighty Licchavi clan of Vaiśālī, followed by the Śākyas of Kapilavastu, the Buddha's own family, then the otherwise unknown Buli clan living at the otherwise unknown place Allakappa; then the Koliyas of Rāmagrāma, that is, the clan of the mother of the Buddha. The standard phrase "I want a share because I am a *kṣatriya*" shows that the ruling families regarded themselves as related. Then a brahmin from Veṭhadīpa, a site near or within the confines of Kuśinagara (Marshall 995), which later assumes the name Viṣṇudvīpa (Vogel, Konow and Fleet 1907) says "I want a share because I am a brahmin," a reason which sounds baseless in itself, but we will have to understand it as "because I was the officiant brahmin at the funeral." Follow the Malla *kṣatriyas* from Pāvā and from nearby Kuśinagara. Now the collected bone fragments have found eight recipients, the Buddhist number of perfection. The clay pot (*kumbha*) used for collecting the bones went to the brahmin Droṇa, who was in charge of the collection of the bones and their equal division. This inauspicious but necessary work is usually left to some infertile women (Caland 1986: 103) or to some not so clever brahmin.<sup>6</sup> As latecomers, the Moriya/Maurya *kṣatriyas* from Pippalivana received the cinders. In their respective home towns all these ten recipients put their share inside a stūpa and celebrated the event through a festival (*maha*). Unlike most other groups, the Bulis at Allakappa cannot be located through lit-

erary evidence.<sup>7</sup> Another exception is the Moriyas at Pippalivana, occasionally (Fleet 1906c: 900; Deeg 2005: 358) and mistakenly placed midway between Lumbinī and Kuśinagara.

Centuries later, the Chinese pilgrim Faxian (in India ca. A.D. 399–412) travelled through the Ganges valley from the north Indian plains to Patna, his report providing us with a series of distances between his stations: From Śrāvastī (modern Sāhet-Mahet) he walked 120 km (12 Indian *yojanas* at ca. 10 km as the crow flies)<sup>8</sup> south-east to come to Nābhika 那毗伽, the birthplace of the former Buddha Krakucchanda, which was marked by an Aśokan pillar according to the report of Xuanzang, another pilgrim informing us about the area two centuries later. This birthplace was not unreasonably identified with the present-day hamlet called Gotihawa in Nepal, since it still holds the lower part of an Aśokan pillar in situ,<sup>9</sup> which is definitely not the lower part of the pillar at Nigliwa on which another of the former Buddhas, Konāgamana, is mentioned. From Krakucchanda's stūpa the Chinese pilgrim went 10 km to the birthplace of that other former Buddha called Konāgamana, alias Kanakamuni, depending on the sources. The actual find-place of a broken Aśokan pillar mentioning a memorial site of this former Buddha lies 10 km north-east from Gotihawa, perfectly answering the single *yojana*, but it remains uncertain as to whether this find-place is close to the site of the pillar's original erection. After travelling a further 10 km east, Faxian reached Kapilavastu, the Buddha Śākyamuni's hometown. Fifty *li* (at ca. 440 m, i.e. 22 km) have to be covered for a journey to Lumbinī, the village in the woods where the Buddha was born. Five *yojanas*, or 50 more km, lead to Rāmagrāma, the centre of the Koliya clan. A large stūpa south of Parāsi Bazar, today promoted as Rāmagrāma,<sup>10</sup> is 40 km away from Lumbinī and would roughly answer the requirements. All these distances and directions are clear and simple and leave little room for doubt. The only major discrepancy concerns the direction "east" from Kanakamuni (Nigliwa) to Kapilavastu, while the written data require either a "south-east," or a return to Krakucchanda (Gotihawa) for going plain "east."

Let us continue from Rāmagrāma. Three *yojanas* or 30 km more to the east the place was met where the future Buddha abandoned his servant and horse and continued alone and on foot. Another 40 km eastwards leads to the stūpa of

the charcoals (炭塔), the well-known site of the Moriyas, called *aṅgārānaṃ thūpa* in the DN. The sum of all marching distances of Faxian from Śrāvastī eastwards to the charcoal stūpa amounts to 275 km, with some minor uncertainties. Once we start counting only from Gotihawa, the sum of distances given in *yojanas* is 120 km, a distance that would bring us to the Aśokan site called Rampurwa, the only place where two of the Aśokan pillars have survived in full.<sup>11</sup> Today, Rampurwa is in a malaria-infested stretch of land, said to be in the grip of criminal gangs. The quality of the water is poor, and people used to suffer from goitre (Garrick 1883: 117). The village was “quite unknown to the people of the vicinity by that name” (Garrick 1883: 110, cf. Sahnī 1911: 181), while Pipariyā was and still is common. Is Pipariyā the site of the Pippali-vana of the Moriyas who are said to have built a stūpa over the charcoals? When approaching these two pillars from the south one first has to cross a town called Piparā, then to follow a canal for 4 km to reach the village of Pipariyā, at the north-western end of which the pillars are found (Falk 2006: 195). These seem to be associated with two “conical mounds of earth,” one 6 m (20’), the other 4.5 m (15’) high (Garrick 1883: 115, 116). Garrick opened both of them, without finding anything of high antiquity. On one of them both the excavated pillars are now resting.

To return to Aśoka and to Faxian: ancient Pippali-vana is positioned by Faxian where modern Pipariyā is found, and both would linguistically make a nice pair, but villages named after the Pippal tree are many. Still, the possibility remains. In addition, the position of Faxian’s charcoal stūpa is so far the only indication for why Aśoka erected two of his pillars at this out-of-the-way place. Aśoka could well have erected one pillar here because it once held the charcoal from the burial of the Buddha and a second because of its association with the traditional ancestral home of the Mauryas. Of the two pillars at Rampurwa, the lion pillar carries Aśoka’s Pillar Edicts, and when found it still held the lower part of the abacus in place atop the pillar fixed by a large copper bolt. Two stylized figures of a peacock on the upper plane of the pillar then came to light, which had previously been covered by the abacus since its erection (Falk 2006: 197, fig. 7), possibly referring to the *mayūra*, “peacock,” at the root of the clan name Maurya.

Linking an Aśokan pillar to a site from the distribution list of the bones may help in solving another riddle. So far there was no credible identification of the site of Allakappa, obviously the only or the main site of the Buri clan. The term *-kappa* defies a credible explanation for a locality; the preceding *alla-* is likewise incomprehensible. However, we have a huge pillar of Aśoka at Ararāj, which is spelled by Garrick (1883: 111) as “Arra-Raj,” after the deity (*rājā*) in a nearby temple. The site’s proper name was heard by him as /arra/, while others noted it as Rahariya or Rurheea (Falk 2006: 162). Some local names as preserved in the Pali DN live long, as is seen by the indisputable equation of present Rummīndē and Pali *lumbinī*, or Kasiā and the Pālī *kusinārā*. The Pali preference of *l* over *r* would also be seen once an equation of Pipariyā and *pippali-vana* was regarded as acceptable. *Alla-* would thus require a form *arra-* or similar, possibly present in Arra with the Arra-rāj as its local deity. The pillar there seems to be mentioned in Faxian’s report. First, he defines the distance between Kapilavastu and Kuśinagara as 12 *yojanas*, in fact 111 km from Piprahwa to Kasiā as the crow flies. Next, he speaks of another 12 *yojanas* to the place where the Licchavis were left behind by the Buddha when he was on his last journey. Faxian describes the site as marked by a stone pillar with a legend on it (Deeg 2005: p. 545, § 88). The distance between Kuśinagara and Araraj is 80 km, possibly prolonged by ferry stations not positioned on the direct line.

The identification of Pipariā/Pippali-vana alias Rampurwa with the charcoal stūpa of the Moriyas, if considered as justified, would show two things: a) the distances given by Faxian are again reliable. He seems to have noted down intervals given in *yojanas*, the measurement used and reported by the locals. At places Faxian also measures in Chinese *li*, and such distances are certainly based on his own experience. I assume that he did not visit all of the places he mentions. Apart from meagre characterizations he does not elaborate on any of the sites east of Lumbinī towards Pippalivana alias Rampurwa. I also assume that he personally visited the sites which he defines in *li*, thus providing either the distance from A to B, when he proceeded from there, or the day’s journey, that meant go and back, so that the walking distance was covered twice and then would need only half of it on the map. This way some seemingly odd distances could find their true correlation on the map.

Since the distances from Kapilavastu to the charcoal stūpa look reliable, the next distance given in the report, 120 km eastwards to Kuśinagara, needs an explanation, as Kuśinagara lies about 90 km south-west of Pippalivana/Rampurwa and not 120 km east.<sup>12</sup> However, this seeming discrepancy regarding distance and direction disappears when taking Faxian's report about what comes after the charcoal stūpa verbally. He says 復東行十二由延, what Deeg renders as "wenn man wiederum zwölf *yojana* nach Osten geht," and is verbally correct, creating the impression that Faxian continued from the charcoal stūpa. However, this does not do justice to the initial 復 *fu* ("return, repeat, again, wiederum"), by which Faxian returns to the starting point for his first line of sites listed in an eastern extension, which led from Kapilavastu to the *aṅgārastūpa*. As he never went to the charcoal stūpa his "again" returns the mind of the reader to Kapilavastu,<sup>13</sup> from where we have to go eastward for 120 km to reach Kuśinagara. In fact, the direct distance is 111 km. This double start at Kapilavastu shows, to my mind, that Faxian gives the northern march to the *aṅgārastūpa* only as a guideline, from hearsay, not from own experience. He went from Kapilavastu to Lumbinī and back, truly 50 *li* for both ways, and then from Kapilavastu to Kuśinagara, a place which he saw and about which he has lots to say (Deeg 2005: § 82–86).

In sum, we can say that the distribution took the bone remnants of the Buddha to eight initial sites, of which Rājagṛha, Vaiśālī, Kapilavastu, Rāmagrāma, Kuśinagara with Veṭhadīpa seem roughly definable; Pāvā is still somewhat uncertain.<sup>14</sup> The charcoal stūpa could be Rampurwa and Allakappa could be (Lauḍiyā) Ararāj.<sup>15</sup> One site did not claim a right to receive bones: Lumbinī, the insignificant village, the birthplace of the Buddha, did not receive bone relics.

### Why Ask for Bones?

According to the Dīghanikāya, the eight recipient parties placed the bones each in a *stūpa*, Pali *thūpa*. Outside the Pali canon and before Aśoka, the term *stūpa* is rare and in no place denotes a burial mound (Rau 1983: 39/936). A heap of accumulated garbage is called *saṃstūpa* in the Drāhyāyana- (1.5,15) and the Gobhila-Gṛhyasūtra (1.4,11), both texts belonging to the "younger

Vedic" period. For an earthen burial coverage we have to look at the Śatapathabrāhmaṇa (ŚB), which was composed in the eastern part of the Ganges plain. This text describes two sorts of a mound construction, one produced by demonic (*āsurya*) people, in the circular form similar to an early flattish stūpa. However, the text uses the term *śmaśāna* and not *stūpa*, in line with all other Vedic texts dealing with the deposit of the bones. These texts place the bones of a kinsman below an earthen coverage with just one aim: to ensure that this dead person disappears forever and does not bring further death or other calamities to the rest of the family. Nobody would ever think of dealing in any way with bones of a person not related by blood or marriage. The ŚB knows two purposes for such a construction: one is to provide a place to stay (ŚB 13.8.1.1 *gṛhān*) for the remnants, the other is to serve the memory of the deceased (ŚB 13.8.1.1 *prajñānaṃ vā*). The height of the coverage depends on the caste. For a *kṣatriya* earth will be accumulated up to a height of a man with raised arms, or as high as a mouth in case of a brahmin (ŚB 13.8.3.11). Much lower burrows are expected in the Sūtras (Falk 2000: 77). The form of the superstructure for such a *śmaśāna* is either square, as prescribed for Vedic brahmins, or circular for the non-brahminical "demonic" (*āsurya*) Easterners. The younger Vedic texts treat the circular construction just as an option without any derogatory connotation (Caland 1896: 141). In the Vedic tradition, this superstructure is not made of burnt bricks, but of sun-dried clay and sod (Caland 1896: 133). Despite the accordance in form and general purpose the ŚB and all other Vedic texts dealing with funeral monuments abstain from using the term *stūpa*, as if there was something foreign about it. In fact, the Pali (*thūpa*) and Aśokan (*thuba*), Prakrit (*thubha*, *thupa*) and Gandhari (written *thuba* where \**stuva* was to be expected) forms may preserve the original initial sound, while the additional sibilant leading to the form *stūpa* may be considered as resulting from a faulty Sanskritic back-formation.<sup>16</sup>

Non-Indic languages which use similar terms for "hill, burrow, cairn" are mainly found north of the Himalaya.<sup>17</sup> It may also not be by chance that the regions where the Śākyas lived possess an unusual number of early stūpas, just as it is particularly rich in previous Buddhas, as if the Śākyas and their cognates were part of a particular culture with strong relations to other tumu-

lus-building cultures outside India. Scythian or proto-Turkic funerary tumuli have a completely different character from a Vedic *śmaśāna* in India: Their contents are cherished, and regular visits of the clan strengthen the communal cohesion. Commercial as well as ethnic links between India and Central Asia have been many, from Shortugai on the Oxus in Harappan times to the epic Kurus occupying parts of the northern Ganges plain with their distant relatives the Uttarakurus, still known to Ptolemy as living at the southern rim of the Taklamakan desert.

Wherever we place the Pipphalivana of the Moriyas, it is not very far removed from the Śākyas' homeland in the Terai, and so Aśoka as a Maurya may have grown up with the notion of a cherished memorial *thuba/stūpa*, also for his own ancestors,<sup>18</sup> without realizing that its cultural roots were not brahminical. There are no such round burrows in India attributable with certainty to the times before Aśoka. The Pali Mahāpariṇibbānasuttanta is no counter-example despite its many detailed and mostly trustworthy references to the event, as it was enlarged and modified much after the Buddha's funeral, possibly at a time when Aśoka had already started to distribute relics and cult.

The topic needs and deserves wider research. For the moment I repeat that the memorial stūpa, thought to be Indian par excellence, has close and pre-Buddhist relations outside India both in its term and in its function. Again<sup>19</sup> it was Aśoka who spread a feature of non-brahminical tradition or inspiration to visually elevate the culture of his realm.

### The Collection and Redistribution by Aśoka

After the bones of the Buddha were distributed they rested with their guardians for more than a century until the third Maurya king Aśoka decided to distribute fragments of the bones all over India. He is said to have collected all of the eight shares but one. The Koliyas at Rāmagrāma would not part with their treasure in a stūpa as it was protected by Nāgas, the semi-divine beings living underground, in a watery region, responsible for surface water as well. Faxian (Legge 1886: 69) quotes a popular myth which states that the local Nāga was such a stout admirer of the Buddha

and so ready to part with immense treasures in veneration of the Buddha that even Aśoka could not compete with his magnitude of devotion and had to withdraw. Behind this watery myth may be nothing but a watery event, as hinted at in the Mahāvamsa (31,26): "The stūpa at Rāmagrāma was made at the shore of the Ganges. Then it split on account of the wave of the Ganges."<sup>20</sup> The relics were swept away by a river and became the topic of a legend which sees the bones finally resurface in Sri Lanka. Although Aśoka came too late to take hold of its relics, the stūpa of Rāmagrāma seems to have been rebuilt. If this really happened at the very place of the first construction we can understand the calamity, since the Rāmagrāma stūpa stands encircled by a river (cf. n. 11, below). The countryside is level and the monsoon can be heavy, so the water could have washed away earthen barrows in no time. When Aśoka's men came to open the Rāmagrāma stūpa there was nothing left but the welcome excuse that all the bones were now in the care of the water spirits.

Are there details about the other seven stūpas? The one at Rājagṛha was in the possession of the ruling Mauryas; the stūpa at Vaiśālī, which once belonged to the Licchavis, was now under the rule of the Mauryas as well. At Vaiśālī there is a stūpa shown today as the original one. Where a reliquary may have been, a deep breach was sunk into its centre in antiquity; in the filling close to the top a globular soapstone reliquary was found, devoid of any bones but containing at least some ash and a simple copper coin of the klippe type (Sinha and Roy 1969: 22; pl. VIII,B).

The share of the Śākyas at Kapilavastu is referred to in the inscription on the reliquary at Piprahwa, suggesting that Aśoka may have taken away parts of the bone collections but not all of the contents, so that the Śākyas were in a position later to deposit bones in their possession in their own responsibility.

The stūpas at Kuśinagara and Rāmagrāma yielded neither bones nor reliquaries, and the two supposed stūpas near the bull pillar at Rampurwā were devoid of anything resembling relics as well (Garrick 1883: 116; Sahni 1911: 187).

According to a relatively young legend (Rhys Davids 1901: 409), Aśoka distributed parts of the collected bones freely all over his realm. Even if the bones had been many, the alleged 84,000 monasteries and their stūpas furnished would

have required a dilution of the remnants to homeopathic dimensions.

How did he pass on the bones? In leaf bags (*puṭa*), in folded birch-bark? Even if the number of 84,000 foundations is exaggerated, the question about suitable containers must have come up. I assume that this distribution led to the invention of the classical soapstone caskets which come out of the blue in Mauryan times and continue in local adaptations of a remarkably uniform shape. The shape of the inscribed reliquary at Piprahwa is clearly based on a type of double pyxis common in Bactria and the Near East (Falk 2016: 133–36), mimicking a “pyxis on pyxis.” It occurs at least four times at Piprahwa, presupposing a good supply of comparatively large containers when this region was furnished.<sup>21</sup> It is also found at Guḍivāḍa near Machilipatnam, taken by Rea (1894: 2) as belonging to the earliest type of stūpa in this part of Andhra Pradesh. One is turned from soapstone and another from rock crystal, on display in the British Museum (OA 1882.10–10.2, 3, 4.). A late but successful model of small size was used at Sanchi in many copies (Willis 2000: figs. 54ff.), a flattened globe with a tiny unusable handle which is manufactured to this very day, used i.a. to hold the oily cotton used by Sitar players to grease their fingertips. Once the soapstone industry had got up speed all sorts of shapes came to the market.

With bone fragments in stock in suitable containers Aśoka could sanctify a great number of monasteries and holy places with a morsel of the historical Buddha’s remnants. Thus he introduced a cult which served several requirements at once: foreigners could perceive visibly how far and wide a truly respectable Buddhist spirituality prevailed in Aśoka’s dominion,<sup>22</sup> and the locals were drawn to the Buddha by suitable legends, turning his way to *nirvāṇa* into a fully fledged religion with a helpful deity content with flowers instead of bloody sacrifices. The only further element needed was a story about what the Buddha had done at each site where a stūpa could be built. The race for etiologies was on.

Along with the introduction of the soapstone reliquaries, Aśoka may have understood from the Rāmagrāma case that stūpas should be made to withstand the forces of nature. And that meant inventing the burnt brick stūpa.

When did that happen? We know from the Nigliwa pillar that Aśoka in his 14th regnal year raised the stūpa of Koṇāgamana “a second time”

(*lājinā . . . thube dutiyaṃ vaḍhite*). Because of *vaḍhite* this phrase is ambiguous and has commonly (also in Falk 2006: 189b) been taken as referring to an enlargement of an already existing edifice. However, a “second enlargement” presupposes a first enlargement, which in turn presupposes a primeval construction, and this is more than what we find at the brother-site at Gotihawa. Therefore I take *vaḍhite* here as “raised, made to grow high” and see a primeval construction built of sod and earth, possibly accumulated over bone fragments. The stūpa at Gotihawa, when opened by Waddell, was empty, either because it always was empty, raised for memorial purposes, or because bodily remnants were either not recognized or had been dissolved. The process referred to in Aśoka’s Koṇāgamana inscription is a complete and second (*dutiyaṃ*) raising, this time in burnt bricks.<sup>23</sup> In any case, this happened in Aśoka’s 14th year, six years before the king came in person, paid his respects and had a pillar erected.

We know from several sources that Aśoka had himself attached to the Buddhist order seriously in his 11th regnal year. His reflections on stūpas and their form seem to have taken shape in or after that 11th year.

### Aśoka Supplies Lumbinī with Bones But Not with a Stūpa

In the twentieth year in which Aśoka came to the so far undefined stūpa of Koṇāgamana he also came to Lumbinī. He had a pillar erected there as well, and had it inscribed with a text in well-balanced prose, saying that he paid his respect, that he had a *vigaḍabhī(cā)* made in stone and a stone pillar erected. He freed the village of all taxes and made it *aṭhabhāgiya*, that is Skt. *āṣṭabhāgiya*, “connected with the eight parts,” that is, the eight parts into which the bone remnants were divided after the incineration of the Buddha. Making Lumbinī “having a share in the eight parts” has to mean that he brought a morsel of the Buddha’s bones back to his birthplace (Falk 2012). Thus he sanctified the site. On the one hand, Aśoka obviously came with a *vigaḍabhī(cā)* made of stone (*śilā/śilā*) and erected a pillar, but he certainly does not say that he reconstructed or enlarged a *stūpa*. In fact, there is no Aśokan stūpa anywhere at Lumbinī. So where are these bone relics? From





Fig. 2. The coffer in the courtyard of the Indian Museum, Calcutta, with the author and Charles Allen taking measurements. Note the bosses protruding from the lid.

the absence of an early stūpa we can infer that the bone morsels may have had something to do with the enigmatic *vigaḍabhī(cā)* made of stone which somehow took on the function of a stūpa.

In 2012 I showed that there is no need for a stūpa to give a reliquary a home. In Lumbinī a small cubical brick construction was unearthed which contained a reliquary.<sup>24</sup> In Sarnath a large temple was built in Gupta times, and at its southern side a small cubicle was constructed around a pre-existing monolithic stone railing of Aśokan singularity which enclosed a small cubical brick construction of about the same size as that found at Lumbinī. In both cases, both of these brick constructions were topped much later by brick stūpas, placed remarkably out of the centre. What concerns us here is the idea of something cubical inside a monolithic stone railing, as found in Sarnath. What I did not envisage at the time of the 2012 paper was what suddenly appeared during the said Calcutta Museum filming session when I inspected the stone coffer just outside the room where all the reliquaries from Piprahwa are on display. The realisation came to me then that there are only a few km between Lumbinī and Piprahwa and that a removal from the birthplace to the stūpa needed to be considered. Could it be possible that the Piprahwa stone coffer originally stood in Lumbinī, either free on all sides or inside a railing? If the coffer was Aśokan and was later

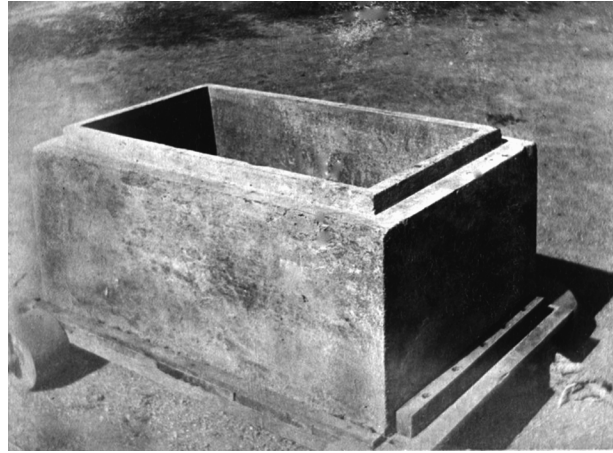


Fig. 3. The coffer when first pulled out of its original location and with the lid removed. After Allen 2008: 29, Courtesy Neil Peppé.

removed to Piprahwa, then the stūpa at Piprahwa and the coffer inside it needed not to date back to the same time, as everybody had always taken for granted. In fact, the coffer could be Aśokan and the stūpa of Piprahwa post-Aśokan.

### The Coffin as an Aśokan Artefact

For this daring explanation to have validity we first need to know why the coffer should be Aśokan at all. With its modern iron girdle keeping the broken lid fragments in place it does not look too appealing to a casual passer-by. On closer inspection, however, we see that it deserves admiration. Like the railing at Sarnath, its body and lid were cut separately from one single block of stone despite its large dimensions. The sandstone comes from Pabhosa (Falk 2006: 156), with few but characteristic black inclusions. This is the stone preferred for most of the Aśokan pillars and capitals. All sides are at perfect right angles, all levels are perfectly even, not polished to a glaze but absolutely even. The lid and the body are united through a perfectly cut tongue and groove. Although the lid broke under the weight of the bricks at Piprahwa, it did not cave in the container because the tongue-and-groove joint held the parts in place.

I was unable to inspect the inside, and there is only a photograph (fig. 3; Allen 2008: 29) to allow judgment to be made. This was taken by W. Peppé

and allows me to say that the inside is as smooth as the outside. By contrast, the underside of the body was not smoothed,<sup>25</sup> similar to the underground parts of most pillars.

The piece was bulky and heavy, and it was transported from afar, 300 km over land, or, more likely, ca. 700 km by river. No such coffer with or without lid had been made in India before. All of its successors, mainly at Sanchi, are much smaller and technically of a less sophisticated nature. Still, the fact that some coffers at Sanchi show similarities can be taken as proof that the prototype from Piprahwa was known about.

There is no predecessor to this coffer found in India, and its perfection forces one to think of Aśoka and his meticulous workmen imported from the West. Where did the idea of such a coffer come from? We know that Aśoka had sent messengers to the Seleukid kingdom, and perhaps even to its neighbours. Stone coffers are numerous from Egypt to the Levant, mainly used as sarcophagi, serving as containers for human body remnants. Some have lids which are extremely heavy and are meant never to be removed. Other manufacturers seem to have thought of removable lids and provided them with appendages to fix ropes or beams useful for hoisting and lowering the lid. The coffer from Piprahwa has two half-circular appendages on either long side of the lid (fig. 2) which may be interpreted as a further element of an idea borrowed from the West. Near Eastern coffers preserving body parts can be on public display in temples and mausoleums, another idea which may have appealed to Aśoka.

There is more which links the coffer to the Near East: its measurements. In plain cm, it is 132.16 cm long, 81.96 cm wide and 66.71 cm high.<sup>26</sup> Seen from the longer side, we have a double square of  $(66 + 66) \times 66$  cm. How to account for the width? The 81.96 cm comes very close to the 81,576 cm which would result from a Golden Cut applied to the length ( $132.16 \times 0.618$ ), one of the formulae accounting for the aesthetic appeal of classical architecture, found “naturally” in nature, known and applied first by Euclid of Alexandria in the 3rd century B.C. and used as the base of the A4 paper size to this day. The stonemasons working for Aśoka may well have imported this new ratio along with other techniques. As in the caves of Barabar and Nagarjuni Hills (Falk 2006: 255), lengths and widths were not chosen arbitrarily but follow some rules.

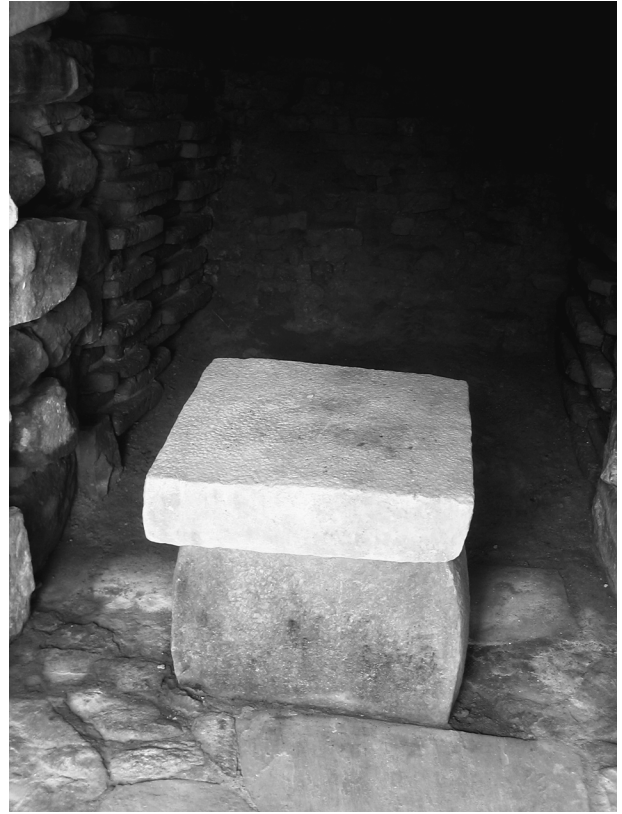


Fig. 4. Reliquary casing found below the slabs of the circumambulation path of the main stūpa at Satdhara, now inside a chamber left in the stūpa dome. Photo: author.

So I see Aśoka bringing bones of the Buddha to Lumbinī, thus having the village partake of a share of the originally eight parts, making it *āṣṭabhāgika*. These bones were presented in a coffer with a closed lid, open to public view, probably in front of a tree, possibly inside a sort of railing.

We may even go further and ask if this cubical coffer presented in the open for adoration was not the model for the many cases of “thrones” before trees with people kneeling by the side of it, with the Buddha being present but “not represented” in a so-called “aniconic phase” of early Buddhist art. S. Huntington (2007) has expressed her disbelief in this standard explanation with good reasons;<sup>27</sup> her illustrations show that the “throne” in almost all cases looks more like a box with a lid, with adorants putting flowers and even their hands on the lid, their adoration being the same as the one given to a stūpa, the heads directed at the “throne” and not at a person sitting (for us invisibly) on a throne. The large stone casings



Fig. 5. "Relic casket adorned with fish topped lid, containing minute flowers of gold, precious stones. Crystal. Ht. 11.5 cm, Cir. 34 cm. ca. 3d cent. B.C., Piprahwa, Basti, U.P." (NN 1997: 16).

like those preserved for Sāriputta and Moggalāna at the Sanchi Museum (46 × 46 × 46 cm, Cunningham 1853: 297) or at Satdhara (fig. 4)<sup>28</sup> would perfectly suit such an ambience. This explanation requires only that people in the time of Bodhgaya, Bharhut and early Sanchi still knew about the coffer(s) being approachable in the open, although the one at Lumbinī may already have disappeared inside the stūpa of Piprahwa. In other words, the Buddha is "invisible" because his relics are there where the view goes, inside the coffer, later misunderstood and converted into a "throne."

### The Crystal Reliquary as an Aśokan Artefact

With Aśoka installing the relics inside the stone coffer at Lumbinī in his 20th regnal year, we still have a question left: the bones would not lie inside the stone coffer just like that. They would be contained inside a smaller and particular container, surrounded by flowers, jewellery, silk and

other paraphernalia known from other relic sites. Where is this small container?

When the coffer was shifted to Piprahwa any reliquary inside must have been part of the removal, otherwise the coffer was without religious significance. When inspecting the contents after the opening, W. Peppé found a number of reliquaries, all of them now at the Indian Museum, and all on display save two: the inscribed reliquary is held in a safety vault and replaced by a copy in the showroom. The other one is also in the same safety vault, because it is truly exceptional being cut from crystal. Its shape is a flattened globe, body and lid, which latter supports a fish on a short stem (fig. 5). The fish is hollow, hollowed out horizontally following the curved contours of the fish from its mouth, and the resulting cavity is still filled with gold glitter. According to the catalogue (NN 1997: 16, acc.no. A19741) the fish contained "minute flowers of gold, precious stones."<sup>29</sup> Its overall height is 11.5 cm, its circumference is 34 cm, that makes a diameter of 10.8 cm. All other reliquaries found in the coffer were made of soapstone, standard shapes and material, but if any container should go back to the original installation at Lumbinī it must be this crystal one. Its exceptional nature was recognized by S. P. Gupta (1980: 308, 333), but so far it has never played a role in the discussions around Piprahwa. Worked crystal is often used for reliquaries, but then dome, socle and umbrella are completely turned on a lathe. There are also birds and other objects worked in the round, of irregular shape, but then the forms are comparatively simple. The Piprahwa crystal reliquary is the only specimen, to my knowledge, where a lid was half worked on the lathe and the rest, the stand with fish, shaped without a turning device. No doubt, this piece was already exceptional at the time of its creation, and a royal figure like Aśoka would not have hesitated to use it for the foremost occasion imaginable.

Apart from the number of stone reliquaries, Peppé (1898a: 575) also saw remnants of boxes made of wood, which soon crumbled to fragments.

### The Flower Jewels as an Aśokan Donation

The coffer contained the reliquaries, some possibly kept in wooden boxes. The lids of the reliquaries were partly in place although some had

become detached. The crystal reliquary's body lay at the southern end of the coffer, while the lid lay more in the centre. The floor of the coffer was strewn with precious items (fig. 6). Smith first prepared an inventory (1898a: 585f.) and then published a long list after sorting the raw materials (1898b: 868–70), be they gemstone or precious metal.

Before October 1898, these materials had already been divided and distributed. The Peppé family was allowed to keep a considerable portion in their possession. Another large part went to the Indian Museum, where they now seem to be untraceable, while smaller portions went to the Provincial Museum, Lucknow, and to the British Museum (Smith 1898b: 868). A further small collection of twelve jewels was afterwards given to the Buddhist Society in London, where they were discovered only recently (Allen 2008: 235). Unfortunately, Peppé did not preserve the contents of each reliquary separately but put everything in two containers, one for bones and ashes, one for gems and similar items.

Gemstones in small numbers have been found with many reliquaries. By contrast, the amount found at Piprahwa is stunning, not to speak of the quality. It would pay to study these items in detail with gemological competence. Nevertheless, without such competence I propose here first reflections on a category of these completely undervalued items I call the star-shaped flowers (fig. 6). They were made from a flattish cone hollowed out in the centre and given six or more petals by sawing out the material between them. All flowers have a central hole to thread them for necklaces, garlands or the like. At the meeting point of the petals a round turning point is seen because the stone was given shape not with a flat rotating cutting disk but with a thread saw. Such jewels are extremely rare on the subcontinent. Although the larger and simple beads from the coffer have ample parallels in jewels coming from the excavations of Vaiśālī (Sinha and Roy 1969: 175–89) or Jaugada (*Indian Archaeology - A Review* 1956–1957: pl. XLV), such conical multi-petalled beads occur, as far as I can see, only exceptionally at Sanchi, not at Taxila (Beck 1941), not at Arikamedu (Francis 2004), not at Akta/Varanasi (Jayaswal 2009: figs. 48, 57, 58, 67, pls. XX, XXXI); and, what counts most, not otherwise at Piprahwa

and Ganwaria (Srivastava 1996: pls. LVII–LXI (fig. 7).

The single exception inside India is telling:

a) From Sanchi we have just one drawing from the hand of F. C. Maisey, reproduced in Willis 2000: fig. 11. In the reliquary container box of Śāriputta from Stūpa no. 3 were found seven beads, amongst them a flower-shaped bead with six pedals and a central hole. A side view clearly shows its flat conical shape. It is described by Cunningham (1853: 299) as “a star shaped bead made of *lapis-lazuli*.”

The stone directs our view to the North-West, where there is more:

b) Two and a half more parallels come from Ai-Khanum, the old city at the eastern border of Bactria. It was ransacked in around 145 B.C. or earlier. The treasury consists of a large courtyard and many adjoining rooms of smaller size. Inside the courtyard (Rapin 1992: 400) were found two star-shaped beads (nos. O17-16, O17-17), both of agate, one broken, both six-petalled, conical with a hole in the centre (Rapin 1992: pl. 78-O17,16, 17, pl. 116,7; pl. 125). These beads are of the same diameter as those from Piprahwa, but the base cone was more pointed. Rapin (1992: 173) takes the flower to be a lotus and therefore located their homeland in India. Francfort (1984: 74), however, does not exclude a home that was closer in Badakhshan or adjoining areas.

A third piece from Ai-Khanum has survived as two adjacent petals, but the material again is lapis-lazuli.<sup>30</sup> Carnelian would point to India, but lapis-lazuli must have been imported from or worked in Badakhshan. So we have here one lapis flower in Sanchi with the ashes of Śāriputta, the most influential follower of the Buddha, and another (fragmented) one in Ai-Khanum in the king's treasury. Together they seem to indicate the high value, and at the same time the rarity of such stonework.

When looking for further parallels we see two lines. The first continues in Ai-Khanum. Among the jewels published by Rapin are a number of forms also found in Piprahwa. Most telling are two green leaves on stem, from stone looking like malachite,<sup>31</sup> the lowest part in a tree-like arrangement in one of the four Peppé showcases. The upper side shows ribs branching off at an angle; the underside has two long grooves to represent the stem in between. A similar leaf comes from Ai-

Khanum, with the same ribs above and the stem below (Rapin 1992: pl. 78), labelled "O19,11," 14 × 5 mm of orange colour cut from Chalcedony (Rapin 1992: 337).<sup>32</sup> Another striking parallel is "1 bird cornelian" (Smith 1898b: 870), today not contained in the four Peppé showcases, while Peppé's wife Ella had drawn two birds for the illustration included in Peppé 1898a, numbered 8 and 9. One is in red cornelian, the other one in metal (Peppé 1898a: 576). An absolute parallel to the stone piece comes from Ai-Khanum, labelled "O19,10," in the outlines of a bird, of red cornelian too, 6 mm large (Rapin 1992: p. 337, pl. 78) (fig. 8).

The parallelism is beyond doubt. The treasury in the Hellenistic city of Ai-Khanum had held some ornaments of the same fabric as pieces found in Piprahwa. The beginning of Ai-Khanum goes back to the times of Seleukos Nikator and his successor Antiochos I (r. 281–261 B.C.); the end of Ai-Khanum is debated, as the reasons given for ca. 145 B.C. are not compelling (Cribb in Falk ed. 2015: 47), but not necessarily wrong, and jewels in a treasury may be very old. The contacts between Ai-Khanum and India are obvious from the first depiction of Hinduistic deities decorating coinage from Ai-Khanum issued under Agathocles (r. ca. 185–170 B.C.). So, no narrow time-frame arises from the comparison, and dates before, during and after Aśoka are all possible.

The second ancestry for the star-shaped jewels derives from a look at southern Thailand, which has a number of early bead centres where even Hellenistic seals were found, as well as standard and cubical seals inscribed in Brāhmī (Pongpanich 2552: 147–60).<sup>33</sup>

The most important site is Khao Sam Kaeo, a short distance north of Chumphon, on the inside of the Gulf of Thailand, opposite the southernmost point of Burma. That means it can be reached from India following the coastline from the Ganges delta for about 1800 km, but then it needs a 100 km march from the Maenam Kraburi water mouth to the Gulf side. This march is mentioned already in the Chinese chronicle Hanshu, ending with the first century B.C. It describes a connection from China to southern Thailand, in which one lands at a place called Shenli 諶離, which must be in the vicinity of Khao Sam Kaeo; then follows more than 10 days transport on foot to the country of Fugandulu 夫甘都盧, most likely at the Isthmus of Kraburi (Borell 2015), followed



Fig. 6. A selection of star-shaped flowers and leaves from Piprahwa; 3 to 10 mm; green, lilac, red, white, yellow, transparent and bluish colors; the two lowermost leaves are green.

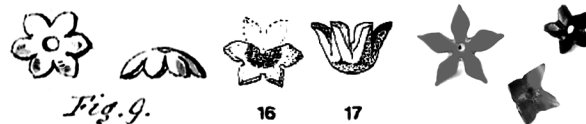


Fig. 7. Flower-shaped jewels: a. "Fig. 9" above, from Sanchi, reliquary of Sāriputta, no measurements, lapis-lazuli (Maisey in Willis 2000, fig. 11, no. 9); b. and c. "16" and "17" from Ai-Khanum treasury (Rapin 1992: pl. 78, nos. 16 and 17); d.–f. from ancient Thailand (Pongpanich 2005), red, orange, blue.



Fig. 8. Four birds; a. "8" above, Piprahwa, no measurements, red cornelian; b. "9" Ai Khanum, 6 mm wide, red cornelian; c., d. early Thailand (Pongpanich 2009: 77), no measurements, orange cornelian.

by more than two months sailing to the land of Huangzhi 黄支. If Huangzhi is Kanchi(puram), the route should have led all around the Bay of Bengal along the coastline.<sup>34</sup>

Khao Sam Kaeo yielded jewellery in great numbers (Bellina 2002) decades ago; as an archaeological site it is described in Bellina et al. 2014: 72–79; its links with India regarding pottery styles and techniques go back to the 4th century B.C. (Bouvet 2006); it yielded copper bowls obviously imported from India in Śuṅga times, as can be deduced from griffins depicted in Northern Śuṅga style (Glover and Jahan 2014). A recent and still unpublished find, a classical high quality ring stone inscribed in early Brāhmī letters,<sup>35</sup> leads us right into Mauryan times and to Northern India. It comes from the same factory as did those ring stones from Taxila and the Ganges plains. It seems that Thailand was a meeting point for Indian and Chinese sailors, as the worked gems show, including seals of Chinese type with Mauryan symbols (Bellina et al. 2014: 68).

Although India scarcely furnishes any parallels, at the moment it may be convenient to assume that the star-shaped flowers were made in India, also with lapis-lazuli, and that the technique then went to Thailand, where recent excavations unearthed so many more of them, as if, after the Mauryas, the whole industry shifted to South-East Asia. The scarcity of star-shaped stone flower beads in India in any case testifies to the exclusiveness of the type to an extremely affluent part of society. Wherever the star-shaped flowers came from, whether from Badakhshan, India or Thailand, they rather befit a royal, that is Aśokan, donation at Lumbinī than the one of a disempowered petty Śākya clan chief.

Summing up this stage of enquiry, we envisage Aśoka in around 248 B.C., in his 20th regnal year, coming to Lumbinī, having the pillar erected and installing some relics. This much is attested by his own pillar inscription. Both coffer and crystal reliquary at Piprahwa are unique, the star-shaped flower jewels not less, and the coffer displays an Aśokan sense of gigantism in stone and his typical technical exaltation. The crystal container befits a royal person. My proposal to link coffer, crystal reliquary and jewels to the Aśokan donation at Lumbinī may seem hazardous, but whoever denies this possibility has to explain how the Śākya family at Kapilavastu came to invent and realize the idea of the coffer without compare, using a huge

stone to work from, of a kind not found inside their shattered and generally stoneless dominion.

### The End of Aśoka and Lumbinī under Threat

Aśoka had spent a great deal of the state income on changing his country from a “clay and bricks” state to a state with up-to-date stone technology, and lots of the expensive stonework was devoted to pursuing religious tenets. After Aśoka’s demise it took only a few decades before the Maurya dynasty came to a violent end. There was still some local support for the Buddhists under the succeeding Śuṅgas, but the general protection for the Buddhist order was a thing of the past. It needed two hundred years to pass after the Mauryas before enough support was available, mainly through foreign invaders from the West who helped to resurrect Buddhist stone art. G. Verardi (2011) has assembled evidence of the traces of aggression against Buddhist institutions. Still, it is not possible to say when exactly Lumbinī came under threat. Aśoka’s care for Lumbinī certainly included the support of a monastery. However, even a number of monks would not be in a position to safeguard the coffer and its contents once Aśoka was no more. The only means for defining a sort of chronological anchor is the inscription on one of the soapstone caskets inside the Piprahwa coffer.

### The Kapilavastu Question

Lumbinī was a village, or a garden, but never the home of a government, something that would have guaranteed the presence of soldiers and fighting noblemen. We can surmise that the former capital of the Śākyas, Kapilavastu, was equipped with protective forces. But where was Kapilavastu? There are two candidates and a number of answers.

The older idea, first proposed by Mukherji (Allen 2008: 192f.) was that the old royal palace surrounded by a brick wall was near the present Tilaurakot, where there are a number of brick foundations. The bricks are impressive, but we have to take into consideration that the wide use of burnt bricks is only as old as Aśoka, so the presently visible vestiges cannot date back to the



Fig. 9. Baked clay sealing from Tilaurakoṭ reading *negameye*. After Rijal 1979: 37.

Buddha and his family. There are some flat burnt-brick stūpas outside the brick foundations, but this is no proof in any direction. The compound is quite large and wide and provides ample space inside the outer walls for draft animals just like a classical caravan station, but what is more important is the written evidence. We have two tokens in burnt clay from this compound, one unearthed by Rijal (1979: 37), reading *negameye* in a circular arrangement in Brāhmī script (fig. 9) not different from the one used by Aśokan scribes. The second one was found in 2016 by the team led by R. Coningham, reading the same term written in one straight line.<sup>36</sup> Again the script is very traditional. Such tokens can be used for visitors to ask for entry into the station once the doors are closed in the evening. In any case, a person called “living in the *nigama*”<sup>37</sup> wants to get back to the *nigama*, and this latter is a term for a trading post. Whether early trading posts were used as the seat of a king may be questioned, but some *nigamas* later turned into state centres, as *nigama/negama* seals from Bhīṭā (Marshall 1915: 56, nos. 57–62, all Kushan period) or Vesali (Sinha and Roy 1969: p. 124 + pl. XXXI, no. 42, Gupta period) make clear.

There is a place which definitely was close to Kapilavastu, and that is Piprahwa, where the attendant Buddhist monastery used a seal saying *devaputra-vihāre kapilavastu-bhikhu-samghe*, “in the monastery of the (Kushan) *devaputra*, in the order of monks at Kapilavastu.” The published specimens (Srivastava 1979: pl. 6, 7; 1996: pl. XLVII-A, XLVIII-B) are clear enough to exclude any doubt. The script is of a Gupta type, and the name of the monastery shows that the time of the Kushans had not passed long ago. Still, there are about seven hundred years between the Kapilavastu of the Buddha and the seals in question. However, the fact remains that Tilaurakoṭ can be shown to have been a trading post in early times, and Piprahwa can be shown to have been close to Kapilavastu a considerable time later. Recent excavations (Mani and Mishra 2013) have shown that the Buddhist compounds at Piprahwa did not occupy city ground and so the search for the palace area of Kapilavastu can continue.

The Chinese pilgrims went to places they took for Kapilavastu. Faxian went north from Gotihawa, 10 km, to see the hometown of Koṇāgamana, and from there he went east for less than ten km to Kapilavastu. Since Tilaurakoṭ is situated between Gotihawa and Nigliwa, he could have passed it on his way to Koṇāgamana. Instead, he had to move further east from Nigliwa for the capital, so that Tilaurakoṭ was not the Kapilavastu shown to him.

Xuanzang’s text is a repository of uncertainties, and he may not have visited Kapilavastu at all but culled the details from earlier reports. The standard pilgrim itineraries from more than fifty monks from the time of Xuanzang do not present a single further monk visiting Lumbinī.<sup>38</sup> But once we take his description seriously the general impression arises, in the words of Watters (1905: 15): “the narratives of the two pilgrims [Faxian and Xuanzang] agree in placing Lumbinī about nine or ten miles (14.5–16 km) to the east of Kapilavastu.” Piprahwa lies 15 km straight west of Lumbinī, and Tilaurakoṭ 25 km north-west, so another point for Piprahwa.

We can only be sure about one thing: Faxian was in Kapilavastu in person and he was also in Lumbinī. His Kapilavastu certainly was not Tilaurakoṭ.

Why did he go there? First, in his time Kapilavastu was not yet that deserted place it was to become shortly after his visit. Second, Faxian

may have been told not to miss Kapilavastu by Buddhahadra, who was an Indian, born in the Śākya clan of Kapilavastu (Shih 1968: 90) and active as a cleric in China, who traced his ancestry back to the uncle of the Buddha, King Amṛtodana. This is ample proof that the Śākya clan was still around in the fourth century A.D. and aware of its lineage. We do not know where they met, but Faxian knew Buddhahadra, to whom he allotted the task of translating the Mahāpariṇirvānasūtra (T 376) into Chinese. According to a Chinese biography (Shih 1968: 91), Buddhahadra was born in a town called 那响利 *naxuli* or *nahouli*, which probably renders nothing more than *nagarī*, “town.” More important is the question of whether both monks met before Faxian set off for his tour in A.D. 399. If they did, Buddhahadra may have aroused in Faxian the wish to visit those famous sites of his family. This seemingly peripheral issue arises out of the observation that no pilgrim known by name touches Kapilavastu after Faxian. I-Ching, in his description of “eminent Monks” in early Tang times has a whole series of travellers, starting the 56 living ones and 15 expired ones with Xuan Zhao/ Hsüan-chao 玄照 (second trip shortly after A.D. 665). Not a single one of these pilgrims went to Lumbinī. The most attractive places were Bodh Gayā, Nālandā and Rājgir. If someone ventures to go to northern Bihar, then Vesālī and Kuśinagara (Lahiri 1986: 42) must suffice; another exception is a trip to Śrāvastī (Lahiri 1986: 100). On the whole we can say, with the doubtful exception of Xuanzang, no Tang period Chinese monk even thought of visiting Lumbinī. Chinese monks went to Sāketa because of the heavenly ladder; they went to Sarnath because of the first sermon; they went in flocks to Bodh Gayā and they went to the tooth relic in Ceylon. Even those returning through Nepal went only to Kuśinagara, because of the *parinirvāṇa*, some even to Toyikā as the birthplace of Kāśyapa Buddha, but they or their biographers never mention a visit to Lumbinī or Kapilavastu, although this place can be on the way from Kuśinagara to Toyikā.

If this general disinterest in Lumbinī and Kapilavastu was also prevalent in the time of Aśoka, then it can serve as a further argument for the need to protect the Aśokan vestiges inside a brick construction.

So, if we look for a historical Kapilavastu, Piprahwa has much better cards, housing a

Kapilavastu-vihāra amongst the three monasteries still visible today, and it has another large place, Ganwaria with another two monasteries,<sup>39</sup> just 1 km south-west.

### A Rescue Operation Leads the Coffer to Kapilavastu

If Lumbinī was under imminent threat at the end of Maurya rule of being ransacked and its treasures destroyed, it would have been tempting to shift the coffer to the home of the Śākyas, petty noblemen by now, to Kapilavastu. The distance is just 15 km as the crow flies, to be achieved on bullock cart in one day. Where to put it? I imagine that there were activities underway to build a stūpa for a number of reliquaries at the same time, all covered by so many bricks that no sudden attack could do much damage. Violating a personal installation of Aśoka at Lumbinī needed good reasons to be effected, and building a stūpa of the intended magnitude needed sufficient funds. The funds came from the local petty royalty, the Śākyas. They had received their own share of the bones after the incineration at Kuśinagara and may have had to cede parts of their share to Aśoka. They may have thought it a good idea to unite their remaining part with the one brought by Aśoka to Lumbinī. Others may have thought likewise. In any case the coffer received more ashes than it ever had contained before. The container of the Śākyas holding the bones was not made from crystal, but was of the standard soapstone type which I guess was spread with the distribution of Aśoka’s so-called 84.000 portions.<sup>40</sup> From Gandhara, from the stūpa of Qol-i Nāder near Kabul, we know that reliquaries from different stūpas could be united inside a single new foundation (Falk 2010: 578b), possibly to provide greater security to groups of monks uniting at a new site. A similar union may as well have happened at Kapilavastu, so that the assembly of different reliquaries may reflect an assembly of different endangered *samghas* in a sort of rescue operation.

### The Role of the Śākyas

When Peppé first wrote to V. Smith and Führer to inform them that he had found some reliquar-



ies in his stūpa they enquired whether there was any inscription. By that time Peppé had seen an inscription on one of the soapstone reliquaries. He very faithfully copied the letters and sent his drawing to Vincent Smith, who returned it with a short comment and his reading. That small strip of paper is preserved and is accessible in the Peppé collection of the Royal Asiatic Society in London, and it shows how Smith tried to make sense of the copied letters. He was not fully experienced in Brāhmī, made some misreadings and some wrong word divisions, but in the end he got most of the vocabulary right. A couple of months later a number of specialists had made corrected readings and translations and finally there was agreement that it should be read like this:

*sukitibhatinaṃ sabhagiṇīkanaṃ saputadalanāṃ  
iyaṃ salilanidhane budhasa bhagavate <saki>yanāṃ*

According to Lüders (1912c: 95, no. 931) this means: "This receptacle of the relics of Budha (*Buddha*), the Holy One (*bhagavat*), of the Sakiyas (*Śākyas*), (is the gift) of the brothers of Sukirti (*Sukīrti*), jointly with their sisters, with their sons and wives."

This understanding cannot be called in question as there is no violation of form or meaning. However, I think it is still not what the original author had wanted to say. The subject is written *nidhane*, Skt. *nidhānam*. The text deals with the *nidhāna* of the bones of the Buddha, who is called *bhagavat*, just as he is called *buddha* and *bhagavat* on Aśoka's pillar at Lumbinī. The *nidhāna* is declared to be one "of the brothers of Sukīrti, with (his/their) sisters, sons and wives." The final *sakiyanāṃ/śākyānāṃ* can be drawn to *sukīrtibhrātṛṇāṃ*, so that all the people mentioned are specified as Śākyas, or to the Buddha, implying that he as well was one "of the Śākyas." The double meaning was probably intended.

A minor question concerns *sukīrti*. Is Sukīrti one (then) living Śākya person, possibly the clan chief, with his family? Or is this an epithet of the Buddha, "the Very Famous"? Sukīrti as an epithet of the Buddha is not common, but it is attested once in early Buddhist literature: The Mahāvastu (1.136) in its description of the eighth *bhūmi* lists 250 names of *samyaksambuddhas* and has a *sukīrti* in a prominent second position. How-

ever, the crucial term is *nidhane*. It was taken as to mean "container" from the start. This meaning is possible, in principle, but very rare.<sup>41</sup> In addition, there are rare cases where other terms denoting a container appear compounded with *śarīra*, as in Gandhāra on the Rāmaka reliquary (Fussman 1980: 5), where we read *ramakasa . . . io śarīra-uḍi tena ime śarīra pratithavida*, "this is the bones container (Skt. *śarīra-kuṇḍī*) of (the donor) Rāmaka; by him these relics (*sarīra*) were installed." The same *sarīra-uḍi* is found on a cubical container (Fussman 1985: 48) where the whole container is "installed" (*śarīra-uḍi pradeṭhaveda*), with various misinterpretations of *uḍi* so far. Here the possessor of the casket appears in the genitive.

Another relevant parallel is found at Devnimori in Gujarat, where two parts of a reliquary are attributed to two persons.<sup>42</sup> First, in *daśabalaśarīranilayaś śubhaśailamayasa svayaṃ varāheṇa* / we learn that "by Varāha himself a receptacle (*nilaya*) was made from auspicious stone for the relics of the Buddha (*daśabala*)," followed by *kuṭṭimakṛtā kṛto yaṃ samudgas senaputrena*, "by Senaputra, the jeweller, was made this container (*śamudga*)." As the ashes and bones are commonly kept inside a metal capsule inside a stone container I assume that *śarīra-nilaya* refers to the outer and inscribed reliquary and that the *śamudga* is the inner and metal reliquary containing the bones.

So a term *śarīra-nidhāna* might well denote a "relics-container," although the compound is not found any place else with the assumed or any other meaning. On the other hand we have a second meaning with ample examples. Instead of *śarīra* we find *dhātu* "relics" in the same position: *dhātunidhāna* is regularly and frequently found in combination with stūpas describing the "depositing" of relics inside a stūpa. The Dhātuvamśa uses *dhātunidhānaṃ* mainly with forms of *kṛ/karoti*, "to make, to effect," the agent being the king. The Mahāvamśa in its 31st chapter, labelled *dhātunidhānaṃ*, uses the term copiously, as in 31,19: "On the island of Laṅkā there will be a high stūpa for the deposition (of the relics)," *laṅkādipe mahāthūpe nidhānāya bhavissati*.

With the same meaning the verb *ni-kṣip* is used at the stūpa of Bhaṭṭiprolu, *budhaśarirānaṃ nikhetu*, "for the deposit of relics of the Buddha" (Lüders 1912b: 814).

This allows us to advocate a slightly different translation:

“This enshrinement (*nidhāna*) of the corporal remnants (*śarīra*) of the Buddha [1: of the Śākyas], the Lord, (is to the credit) of the [2: Śākyā] brothers of the ‘highly famous’, together with their sisters, with their sons and wives.”

Seen this way, the dimension of the statement changes completely, from a simple “this is the reliquary box of the Śākyas holding the relics of the Buddha” to mean “this whole stūpa construction has been installed by us Śākyas for the relics of the Buddha.”

This understanding of *nidhāna* is different from the one most frequently found, but it is not new. The first to consider the standard meaning of *nidhāna* was Barth (1898a: 147) who added to his “réciptent de reliques” in a footnote “Ou ‘(le) dépôt de reliques’.” Fleet followed in 1905 (p. 680) with “receptacle (or deposit),” reduced one year later to “deposit of relics” (1906a: 150).

### Palaeographic Dating

When was this stūpa built to hold the relics of the Buddha now inclosed with the stone coffer? The size of the bricks is often adduced to separate early and later, Mauryan and Śuṅga, building phases. However, all early brick lengths are based on a standard Indian measure, the *hasta* (24 finger breadths, or 40.8 to 45.6 cm), varying with every architect, and the final brick size is dependant on the shrinkage in the drying and firing processes. The width of Mauryan bricks initially is two-thirds of the length (van Lohuizen-de Leeuw 1956: 290). It seems that only during the first phase were triangular bricks used on the inside of the brick circles, which are later replaced by brickbats. Gotihawa shows triangular bricks (Verardi 2007: 116), the Mauryan part of the Jagat Singh stūpa at Sarnath uses “slightly wedge-shaped” bricks of various sizes (Marshall 1911: 65) but at Piprahwa they are not found in the first construction.<sup>43</sup> In any case, the bricks are of such a size that they could always be counted as “Mauryan.”

The palaeography has been adduced, too, with similarly open results. The shape of all letters is

very traditional, and shows no difference from Aśokan parallels. The *bha* has its second leg drawn separately, a feature that started disappearing when Aśoka’s caves at Barabar were donated (the so-called Visvamisra cave shows both old and new form) and when the caves at Nagarjuni Hills were handed over by Daśaratha. Caves 1 and 3 show the “modern” integrated right leg, Cave 2 seems to present the original form, which had completely disappeared when the stūpas of Bharhut or Sanchi received their first inscriptions. The medial *-u*-vowel stroke in *pu* and *su* is attached to the centre of the bend and not to its right vertical. The *dha* has its belly to the right, that is Aśokan, as at Mahasthangarh; younger sites as Bharhut, Deorkothar, Kharavela etc. have the curve to the left; the *ya* has the anchor form with two bends below, while all Nagarjuni Cave texts have nothing but the simplified single bend; in addition, the *anusvāra*-dot is by the side of the letter at Piprahwa, not on top of it. All these are features of truly Aśokan script, some of them extinct at the middle of the second century B.C. The language replaces *ra* by *la*, °*taḥ* becomes °*te*, not °*to*, features also found in Aśokan texts reproducing the local Māgadhī. The only difference is the non-use of long vowel signs at Piprahwa, but this can be interpreted as an early or late feature according to taste; for an early example see Sohgaṛa.<sup>44</sup> Thus we can say that the Piprahwa text should be older than Bharhut, and a time of origin in the later part of the third century B.C. is not at all impossible.

### Confusion over the Readings

As stated above, after writing to Smith and Führer about the find of the coffer Peppé realized that there was a string of letters around one of the reliquaries. He took his lined writing paper, copied the letters accurately in such a way that the position of the letters in relationship to the lines reflected a lower or higher position on a hypothetical baseline. According to Allen (2008: 53) Peppé did this three times for three copies, but it seems that the two younger copies came not from his hand but from his secretary, who was less true to the letters. This would result in some confusion about the true form of the legend and it led one of the modern conspiracy

theorists to claim Smith to be part of a gang of fakers.

Peppé's eye-copy sent to Smith is preserved in the Peppé collection at the Royal Asiatic society, and published by Allen (2008: 54). A line above reads:

*My dear Smith. This is some writing scratched round the top of one of the bowls. Yours W.C.P. 19.1.98.*

Smith returned the slip four days later with a note, dated to the 23. 2. 1898, with his readings in pencil and a subdivision of the string of letters marked through vertical lines in red. Smith could not understand all of the terms. Here it suffices to compare just one phrase dealing with the relics "of the Buddha, the Lord," (*salilanidhane*) *budhasa bhagavate*, followed by *saki(yanam)*, "of the Śākya." Peppé had copied all letters perfectly and no other reading was possible.

Smith did not know that *bhagavate* would render a Sanskrit *bhagavataḥ* with an Eastern *-e* instead of an *-o*-ending. He looked for a genitive corresponding to *budhasa* and thought that *bhagavatāsa* would do, assuming that some letters were "erroneously copied," changing *tā* to *te*. This way the next word would start with *ki*, not providing any sense at all. A faker capable of producing a perfect Prakrit sentence would probably shrink back from displaying such an utter ignorance of grammatical basics. There are more misunderstandings in Smith's first analysis, but pursuing just one suffices to argue against the conspiracy theorists.

Führer had received two further eye-copies through Peppé, which he seems to have forwarded to Bühler in Vienna and to Auguste Barth in Paris. However, before he did so, he replied to Peppé on 26 January 1898 that he had taken a "cursory glance" and had found the words *bhudasa bhagavaton* (Allen 2008: 55; 2012: 13)<sup>45</sup> and so the relics must be those of the Lord Buddha himself. The misreadings and misspellings provide ample proof of his limitations, disqualifying Führer as the author of a perfect fake as well. When Führer finally visited Piprahwa in person on February 26 for the first time, the international reading competition was already in full swing and Führer found no way to co-author or cooperate with Peppé in any way (Allen 2008: 157), as he had requested.

On January 30 1898 Führer forwarded one of those imperfect eye-copies to Bühler (1898: 387) in Vienna, which read *salala* instead of *salila* and *bhagavata* instead of *bhagavate*. Given the accuracy of Peppé this cannot have come from his own hand; A. Barth (1898a: 147) names the copyist of his exemplar, E. D. Judson, an assistant of Peppé. Bühler replied on February 21 to both Führer and Peppé with a reading (1898a: 388) which has the *sakiyanam* right, but the crucial words are still read as *budhasa bhagavata*, the latter restored to *bhagavata[sa]*. The same day he wrote to Rhys Davids in London,<sup>46</sup> telling him about the find ("not found by Führer") and asks Rhys Davids to look for a Sukīrti in Pali literature. Bühler begs Rhys Davids to be absolutely silent about all of this, obviously believing that he is the only person in possession of a copy of this exciting inscription. He expects to receive photographs through Führer by the end of February and plans to be in Vienna on Monday, February 28. At around that time Führer was also expected to present a preliminary report on his "Kapilavastu" excavations. The Nepalese authorities had become "furious" over unjustified claims by Führer, who was expected to state very clearly that these excavations were a Nepalese undertaking.

While still waiting for the photographs from Führer, Bühler received a copy of a lecture on the Piprahwa stūpa, the casket and its inscription which A. Barth (1898a) had delivered in Paris on March 11 at the academy. Through Führer, the plagiarizing but formerly useful peon of Bühler, Barth had received yet another copy made by Peppé's secretary E. D. Judson which read *salāla* for *salila*, *nidhani* for *nidhane*, but had *bhagavate* right. Barth's translation is correct, apart from the syntactical oddity of taking *sukitibhatinam* as a *dvandva* compound, "Sukīrti and his brothers." For Bühler, who regarded Führer as his exclusive informant, this must have amounted to plain treason, open betrayal.

Instantly, on March 15, Bühler (1898: 389) sent his own reading and interpretation for publication to the RAS, of largely the same content as found in Barth's paper, "in confirmation of [Barth's] results." This was a meagre end to an initially very promising enterprise.

On April 8 Georg Bühler took a rowing boat from Lindau and skulled it out into Lake Constance.

The next day the boat was found bottom-up, and after some days Bühler was declared dead.

Without knowledge of Bühler's demise, on April 15 1898, Barth (1898b) delivered a second presentation at Paris, after having received a number of photographs through Führer. Apart from questions of syntax, the grammatically correct reading was now established and the case could have been settled.

But there were further problems: An immense number of incredible discoveries around Aśoka and the Buddha had accrued in a short time, on territory immediately close to the British possessions, yet the people profiting from these treasures were German or French scholars. Although Smith and Rhys Davids were in close contact with them, the most prolific British epigrapher, J. F. Fleet, was not, and he fought against plans to establish a series of publications of inscriptions conducted by the RAS, but run or financed in part by foreigners (Huxley 2015: 75). As an experienced epigrapher Fleet was also in favour of clear pieces of evidence, like untampered rubbings and photographs, and against eye-copies. The Piprahwa vase had disclosed its true reading only in instalments. Fleet's fight for reliable material was fully justified, and he based his reading and comment on a plaster cast that was sent to him by W. Hoey (Fleet 1906a: 149). Unfortunately, this fight has been reinterpreted recently as a fight against the genuineness of the Piprahwa reliquary. Huxley (2015: 78) even invented a threat in direct speech by making Fleet say: "If you continue with your present plans', he was saying, 'I shall publicly expose all three Terai forgeries'," by which Huxley meant the Aśokan pillar texts from Lumbinī and Nigliwa and the reliquary text from Piprahwa. In his writings Fleet nowhere says anything against any of the three texts. He published his version of Piprahwa from 1905 onwards. Huxley's invented sentence is plain dishonesty, surpassing Führer's, who never pulled others into his constructions. Huxley, however, makes Fleet to be a trickster who knows about something shabby going on but keeps silent out of personal ambitions. This is a characterization Fleet certainly does not deserve.<sup>47</sup>

Against Huxley's blunt statement (2015: 72) that "[m]any archaeologists thought Nigliwa, Paderia and Piprahwa to be forgeries" we hold that no such thoughts are documented, and for good reasons. Huxley would certainly have

named his archaeological witnesses had they really existed.

### "Fake" Arguments

One of the arguments put forward by the adherents of the Siam Conspiracy Theory concerns the shape of one letter *ti*, which is different in two representations. On the paper slip with the eye-copy of Peppé this *ti* is perfect, while on the inscribed reliquary on display in the Indian Museum, Calcutta, some lines are conspicuously prolonged and out of shape. For the conspiracy theorists, the explanation is that Peppé had held the original drawing, which the faker copied faultily on the reliquary. So, the Piprahwa text on the casket was the result of a copying process which inadvertently went wrong.

This argument was presented in pictures by Phelps on his internet page ([piprahwa.org.uk](http://piprahwa.org.uk)) as in his recent self-published reworking and enlargement of his theory (2009: 49, with figs. 13, 14). Unfortunately, Phelps was not aware that the inscribed reliquary on display in the Indian Museum is just one of several soapstone copies made at the end of the 1890s. One of these copies went to the British Museum in London, another one in gypsum to Berlin,<sup>48</sup> and one is still on display in Calcutta or lent out,<sup>49</sup> while the original, from which Peppé produced his drawing, is in a strongroom at the museum.<sup>50</sup> The difference between the *ti* on the paper slip and the reliquary on display simply goes back to the copyist employed by the museum or ASI, who did a nice job but could not prevent some slips of his instrument here or there.

A second argument based on a discrepancy was developed when comparing the arrangement of the text. It is found in two lines on Peppé's first eye-copy on the narrow slip sent to Smith, where the second line starts with *naṃ* of *bhaginikanaṃ*. Phelps then noticed that the same text is arranged slightly differently in the publication of Peppé (1898a: 577), where the second line starts with the *ti* of *bhatinaṃ*. In the Roman rendering of Smith (1898a: 586) the same arrangement is preserved, reading wrongly *bhagavato*, showing that Smith could not follow Peppé's accuracy where the Brāhmī clearly reads correctly *bhagavate*. The difference concerning the beginning of the second line made Phelps think that the faker(s) had access to several copies all written in two

lines, which for the final versions was scratched in one round. However, the solution is much simpler. What aroused Phelps' suspicion,<sup>51</sup> and what is also presented as a second copy done by Peppé by Allen (2012: 16) is nothing but the photograph of the upper half of one sheet of paper being part of Peppé's 1898 handwritten JRAS paper. All the pages of the manuscript are preserved in the RAS collection, but already the published cutting (Allen 2012: 16) shows that the text preceding the copied Brāhmī letters in Peppé's hand is the text preceding the same text in the printed version (Peppé 1898a: 577).

For his paper Peppé had tried to arrange the letters in a rounded arrangement in several garland-like bends to mimic the circular arrangement on the object, and, when not all of the letters fit on one line, the fourth bend starts the second line. Neither in Peppé's handwritten version nor in the printed form (JRAS 1898: 577) is any of the lines numbered, and it is unclear why Smith for his transliteration added "Line 1" and "Line 2."

To accept such an argumentation requires "strong belief" of a religious nature, and not logic. In my view, the differences so painstakingly tracked and described by Phelps produce not a single reasonable argument against the genuineness of the Piprahwa inscription.

### How the Coffin Was Found

The descriptions of the excavation process at Piprahwa are confusing in places, and I would like to summarize the accounts and add some notes.

Peppé first dug a sort of well ("ten feet broad and eight feet deep"), not in the centre of the hill but slightly removed to the north of the centre. He mentions this briefly (1898a: 573) without showing it on his plan. The reason is that the first well did not go down very far. Srivastava (1996: 5) describes this well saying that Peppé "bored a shaft in the stūpa in 1897. After digging down to a depth of eight feet [2.44 m] he abandoned it." Srivastava's plan (1996: 29, fig. 3) gives a top view of brick layers of the complete construction (fig. 10). In the centre is some oblong white space labelled "shaft bored by Peppé," which without explanation given is more than irritating. This white space has an extension in the north-eastern corner beyond the cut, and this must represent the first well, which did not reach down to the

bottom. In January 1898, with some advice given by more experienced excavators, Peppé first cut a trench north-south across the complete top of the brick hill, and then he sank a second well in the true centre of the mound. He found a conical pipe starting below the layer of an enlargement at the top of the first and original construction, the pipe going down to the ground level, and he found a soapstone reliquary near the top of the pipe, where the original dome and the superimposed enlargement layer met. Near the brick floor he hit the lid of the stone coffer. He delayed opening the coffer, writing "it so happened that we delayed opening this casket [= coffer, HF] three days after we had unearthed it" (Peppé 1898b: 3). This unexplained pause must be seen in the light of a small drawing (fig. 11) which Peppé added to his still unpublished ground plan. The drawing shows a side-cut of the hill with a ramp running down to the bottom of the shaft. This ramp is never mentioned by Peppé, only drawn on the plan, crossed out by the JRAS redactor with the remark "omit." It very likely needed the three days to build a pull-board to size and to remove the bricks from the bottom of the shaft to the rim of the dome, so that the finished ramp could serve to pull the coffer up to the rim and down the other side. As the coffer's weight is close to 700 kg a hoisting device would have been too risky.

Before Peppé pulled the coffer out and up from the bottom, the lid was removed from the coffer and the contents collected. Then it was shoved back into its former position, now on the pull-board and without lid, and photographed (Allen 2008: 29, above; fig. 12).

This is the prehistory of the oblong "shaft bored by Peppé" in the ground plan of Srivastava. What is shown as one white space without distinction consists of the first and short well in the north, the new and deep shaft in the centre and the ramp in the south.

Already Peppé saw that the stūpa was built in two stages. Combining his and Srivastava's data we have a first construction consisting of 1) a plain clay basement, 75 cm high and levelled, on which rests also a brick *pradakṣiṇapatha* outside. Two cabins were sunk into this basement, each to hold one soapstone reliquary of the standard type. This level was sealed with 3 to 6 cm more clay (Srivastava 1996: 30). Above this are 12 layers of bricks for a floor, 61 cm (2 feet) according to Peppé (1898a: 575), 90 cm following

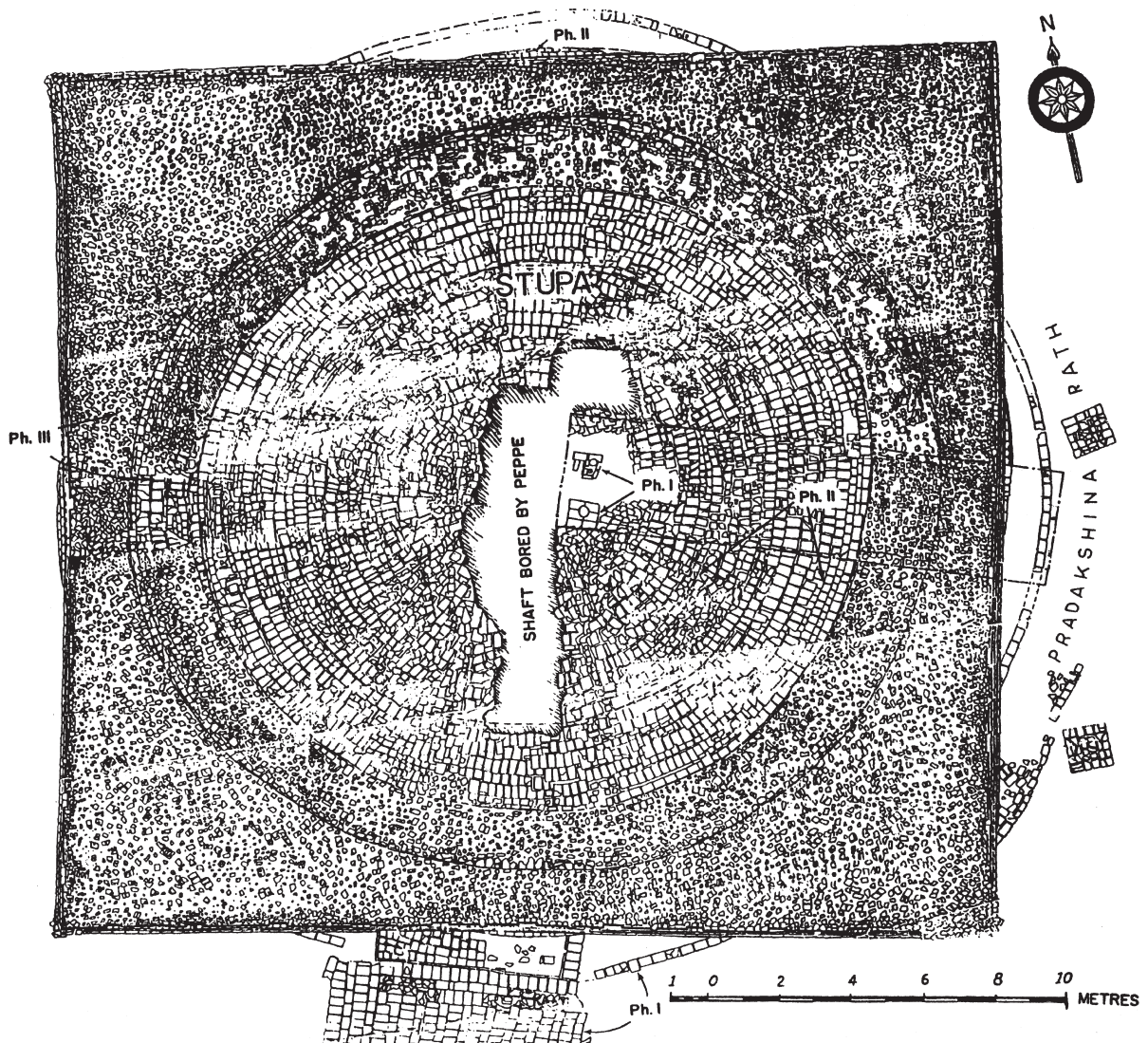


Fig. 10. Ground-plan outlining the excavations of 1898 and 1974. After Srivastava 1996: p. 29, fig. 3.

Srivastava (1996: 30). On this brick floor the coffer was placed and on it the dome was raised, 3.66 m (12') high, 18.90 m wide at the base,<sup>52</sup> then contracting to about 16 m. Srivastava interpreted the first 12 layers (90 cm), that is the floor, not as a floor but as part of an original cover for the two chambers in the mud base beneath. He adds a phase II starting with the coffer put on top and being covered by a dome of 45 layers and 3.66 m height. The total height during his Phase II is thus 90 + 366 cm, that is 4.56 m. In fact, there is no need to separate his I and II into two

phases; the coherence is already obvious through the pipe going down all the way from the top of the first dome down to the clay floor. Srivastava's Phase III is what Peppé correctly regarded as the second phase adding height and width, including a new circumambulation path which can be recognized by the smaller size of the bricks. According to the inscription on the Śākya reliquary, the first stūpa including base chambers and the coffer belong to an encasement (*nidhāna*) that would have been set up around 200 B.C., towards or after the end of the Mauryas.<sup>53</sup>

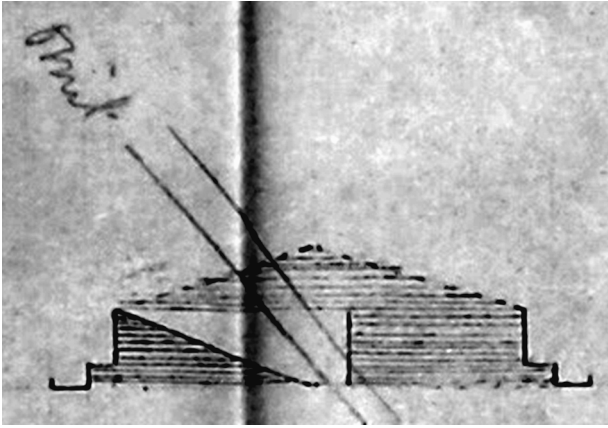


Fig. 11. Drawing of a side-cut inset by Peppé into his general plan of his excavation showing the ramp leading up from the coffer level to the rim of the dome. The plan was never printed. While a printed form was in preparation a redactor crossed the side-cut out and marked it for deletion.

This stūpa was not hemispherical, as shown in all graphical reconstructions, but flattish. When the Kushans arrived, the first stūpa had disintegrated sideways, and the ground around it had risen about 60 cm, so that the reinforcement started almost on the same level as the floor of the coffer. The stūpa then received its new circumambulation path. The enlarged cylinder carrying the dome started with a width of 22.40 m<sup>54</sup> and the new dome on top of the old flattish dome was at least 3 m (10') higher than the original one. While Srivastava's phases I and II cannot be distinguished by the size of the brick used, all around 40 × 27 × 7 cm,<sup>55</sup> clearly smaller bricks with an average of 36 × 25 × 6 cm were used for the enlargement. This enlargement including the square platform of 23.50 m width can be dated in the time of the Kushans, who have left numerous vestiges of their dominance in the area. At Ganwaria, 1 km from Piprahwa, coins of Kaniška and Huviška came to light (Srivastava 1996: 25).

The square bricks used throughout<sup>56</sup> show that already in its first phase the stūpa represents a younger building technique than the one employed for the core of Gotihawa (Verardi 2007: 129a), where triangular bricks were used. Their use looks like a reasonable means of filling the layers, but their production slows the building process, while they can easily be replaced by brickbats. The whole technique of building stūpas



Fig. 12. The coffer in its original position, with enclosing brickwork removed, uncovered, on pull-board.

in bricks was new<sup>57</sup>; the learning curve may have been steep. Piprahwa was built when the triangular bricks were already outdated.

The excavation by Srivastava in 1973–1974 laid a new trench, from the eastern side to the centre (fig. 10), ending more or less where Peppé had found the coffer. The base level below the coffer's original placement was removed until the clay level was reached. There Srivastava found two compartments built of bricks placed upright and with flat brick covers, each containing one more soapstone reliquary of the standard type. Srivastava (1996: 238) berated Peppé for not having gone deeper than the coffer level. However, Peppé, for one, says (1898a: 575, b: 3) that he has dug "for two feet below the bottom of the box," without result. Indeed, one photograph of Srivastava (1996: pl. VII) shows exactly Peppé's cut through the floor bricks with the trial hole in the mud level about 1 m away from Srivastava's brick boxes.

Srivastava had found something extraordinary, but this did not lead to much admiration (Srivastava 2005). His documentation is so superficial at places, while his published photographs never show the find-spot of the new reliquaries in the context of the whole cut, that there was much disbelief that further reliquaries could have been found even below the oldest known reliquary deposit. Fortunately, K. Werner (2009: 10) visited the site in April 1976 one day after the reliquaries were removed and saw the find-places definitely inside the dome and not outside.

In his last paper, Härtel (2000) expressed his general disbelief in the trustworthiness of Srivastava's

report, but for our own evaluation it pays to reconsider the case in the light of the assumed “Aśokan coffer from Lumbinī” proposed in this paper.

Early stūpas in Bihar can be built along very different lines. At Vesali, the first construction measured 8 m wide and (possibly) 3.45 m high, consisting of just earth, without even sun-dried bricks (Sinha and Roy 1969: 21). Gotihawa rests directly on a former habitation level without any artificial clay platform (Verardi 2007: 87).

The two chambers found by Srivastava were inserted into the clay basement before it was sealed with the 90 cm brick floor. The contents of these newly found reliquaries could be other parts of Aśoka’s diluted collection, or they could be ashes of reputed Buddhist clerics. Nothing should be excluded. Bone fragments given to the Śākya may well have been subsequently subdivided, as it happened to Mauryan relics in ancient Gandhara (Falk 2005: 349) or in more recent times (Asher 2012). The identical fabric of the soapstone reliquaries indicates some sort of contemporaneity of the deposits in the two chambers and inside the coffer (Verma 1987: 88). The vertical pipe starts on top of the clay level which seals the lower reliquaries, rises through the base brick layers, expands for one layer and widens gradually until it reaches the original top, thus connecting clay and brick levels, again either indicative of contemporaneity, or at least demonstrating knowledge by the builders of the brick construction of what was below it, turning the pipe into a sort of communication channel between the parts. We may also recall that a further reliquary was added at the top of the pipe of the first brick dome and encased by the bricks of the enlargement, as if people took care to have all levels participate in the connection.

The coffer was not placed just anywhere. It was adjusted “true magnetic north-south” (Peppé 1898a: 574f.), which cannot be done just by chance. So, a reunion of several true relics of the Buddha may have taken place, possibly twice, with some parts added earlier at Lumbinī inside the coffer, and others later when the stūpa was structured in clay basement and core.

### A Chinese Account of the Enlargement Phase

It seems that the circumstances of the Kushan-period enlargement were explained to a Chinese pilgrim other than Faxian. There is a book called the

*River Classic* (*shui jing* 水經), dealing with rivers in China and outside, written by Sang Qin 桑欽 during the Three Kingdoms period 三國 (A.D. 220–280). It was enlarged along with a commentary as the *River Classic Commentary* (*shui jing zhu* 水經注) by Li Daoyuan 酈道元 during the Northern Wei period 北魏 (A.D. 386–534), with quotations from many other sources. One of these sources is the *Wai-guo-shi* 外國事 written by a Yuezhi monk *Zhi Sengzai* 支僧載 during the Chin dynasty (A.D. 265–420; Petech 1950: 6). Sengzai’s report on Kapilavastu follows here in the translation of Petech (1950: 33), with the Chinese put into Pinyin, and additions in square brackets:

[T]he kingdom of Jia-wei-luo-yue 迦維羅越 (Kapilavastu) has not got a king now. The city and the ponds are desert and dirty, and there is only the empty space. There are some *upāsaka*, about twenty households of the Śākya family; they are the posterity of king Śuddhodana. Once they formed four families [*zing* 姓] who dwelt inside the old city and acted as *upāsaka*; formerly they highly cultivated religious energy (*vīrya*) and still maintained the old spirit. In those days, when the stūpas were dilapidated, they completely repaired them. The king (of Kapilavastu), over and above this, took care of one stūpa, and the king of Si-he-tiao 私訶條 sent gifts as an aid to finish it. But now there are [only] twelve monks who dwell inside that [city].

As Petech understands it, there were several stūpas at the time of the visit in Kapilavastu, all in bad shape. The Śākya were much reduced in number and had no king of their own. The village was sparsely inhabited. At an undefined earlier time there was a king (王) who looked after one particular stūpa and managed to get financial support from the king of Ceylon (*simhadīpa*, Si-he-tiao 私訶條). I propose to understand one phrase differently from Petech, who sees a king “of Kapilavastu” at work whenever a king is mentioned. However, this is not the only possible interpretation. The first mention says, as does Faxian, that around A.D. 400 the Śākya had no king of their own, in contrast to the period covered by the biographies of the Buddha. The second mention says: When the stūpas were in bad shape “the king” financed the repair of one of them. There is no need to take this king as one of the Śākya who lost his royal status shortly after the Buddha’s life. A parallel quotation from Zhi’s *Wai-guo-shi* states that Kapilavastu is “now subject to the kingdom of Po-li-yüeh 播黎越” (Petech 1950: 34), a term for Pāṭaliputra, most likely referring to the Guptas. We see our pilgrim com-



ing to Kapilavastu, certainly before A.D. 420, in Gupta times, and he hears about a time of repair; “the king” referred to should best be one of the Kushans, most likely Kaniṣka or Huviṣka, founding the *devaputra*-monastery at Piprahwa. With a *devaputra* supervising the enlargement of one particular stūpa at a place called Kapilavastu and a Ceylonese king supporting the undertaking we have reasons to believe that the stūpa selected for this royal involvement must have been something very special.

Presupposing that the memory of the relics from Lumbinī interred at Piprahwa was kept alive up to the Kushans, the report of the Yuezhi monk preserved in the *River Classic Commentary* makes good sense, speaking again for Piprahwa as Kapilavastu and against Tilaurakot which to my knowledge has no stūpa repaired in Kushan times.

The end of the Buddhist communities in the area is documented by the forceful destruction by fire of the monasteries at Ganwaria, 1 km south of Piprahwa, dated to around A.D. 300 by Srivastava (1996: 25), that is after Kaniṣka and before or with the advent of the Guptas.

### Summary

The stūpa at Piprahwa was not built together with the stūpas of Krakucchanda and Koṇāgamana but is younger. Most likely, Aśoka had nothing to do with it. Instead, Aśoka brought relic bones of the Buddha to Lumbinī. This he lets us know in his pillar text from that site. He also installed something more at Lumbinī, an activity connected with the item called “*vigaḍabhī(cā)* made of stone.”

I suggest that this activity included the stone coffer found at Piprahwa, and it included the crystal reliquary with a fish handle, also found in Piprahwa.

For these assumptions nothing but circumstantial evidence can be adduced: The coffer is singular, made from sandstone used by Aśoka for his pillars, quarried close to Kauśāmbī at the Yamuna. There is no Indian predecessor of this coffer and only much smaller and coarser successors. The crystal reliquary is unique as well, and was no doubt very costly. The coffer contained masses of jewels, the star-shaped flowers being almost without parallels in India, and only on a par with jewels kept by the Indo-Greek kings in their treasury at Ai-Khanum on the Oxus. A royal background for these gifts is therefore not at all unlikely.

How did the coffer make it to Piprahwa from Lumbinī? Transport was not difficult—it only needed a bullock cart and one day to cover the 15 km.

The coffer was placed on the prepared brick foundation, below which a clay layer had already received two cabins for one reliquary each. The coffer was opened, and a number of neighbours with soapstone reliquaries in their possession added them to the coffer at the side of the original Aśokan crystal reliquary. A Śākya family wrote on their casket that they were responsible for the enshrinement of the bones.

Why did the coffer need to be shifted at all? It seems that the coffer was at Lumbinī at a time when no political power would protect it. After the Śuṅgas had killed the last Maurya king the brahmins started to reclaim political supremacy. Lumbinī is a hidden and insignificant site, where a sandstone coffer could be smashed and plundered in no time. Placing the coffer below a large heap of bricks at a site which served as the headquarters of the Śākyas added to the sanctity of Kapilavastu and preserved the bones of the Buddha from mishandling.

W. Peppé was lucky to find the coffer, and he did a good job in documenting his enterprise and his finds. Srivastava’s report makes confused<sup>58</sup> and confusing<sup>59</sup> reading, but his discovery of the lower-placed reliquaries does not deserve the scepticism he found himself confronted with.

During Peppé’s excavation A. A. Führer had nothing to do with it, but he acted as a relay station between the excavator and some experienced epigraphists in Europe. His general misbehaviour was never linked to the casket and its legend, which only became the object of dispute because a secretary of W. Peppé had introduced various mistakes in his eye-copies. No wonder that J. F. Fleet insisted on getting rubbings or photographs or both, to do away with the ever recurring uncertainties. However, Fleet’s discomfort had nothing to do with doubts over the genuineness of the reliquary or the inscription it bears. Such doubts were invented by the adherents to the Siam Conspiracy Theory.

G. Bühler would have liked to play a more prominent role in the decipherment and kept his knowledge of the inscription a secret. He used Führer as a scout for epigraphs, funding his Kapilavastu excursion and praising him whenever possible to disguise his ineptitude. In connection with Führer’s so-called Kapilavastu excavation, Smith had

started to describe the gross fakery of Führer, and all of Bühler's protection was about to become part of the painful discussion. In addition, Führer had included A. Barth into his delivery service, either as to demonstrate independence from Bühler, or to take Bühler out of the shooting range or even as a sort of revenge on the same. We will never know.

Allen's (2008: 173ff.) well-documented account of Bühler's last days leaves little room for thinking of an accident on Lake Constance, not even mentioning the passive role Barth may have played in Bühler's changed view of the world.

The relics found by Peppé were a part of those of the Buddha himself, just as the reliquary text at Piprahwa says. These bones, now at Bangkok in a small temple on a wonderful artificial hill,<sup>60</sup> should thus be revered for what they are.

## Acknowledgments

Thanks to the efforts of Charles Allen the Piprahwa "case" remained under discussion for over two decades. The filming with him at Sanchi, Panurgaria and Calcutta under the care of Icon Films was an unforgettable experience. A number of out-of-the-way official reports were first sent by Th. Phelps decades ago. Later, Charles Allen supplied even more copies of letters and photographs. Karel Werner provided information concerning his visit at Piprahwa and one picture of the 1976 excavations. Matters pertaining to South-East Asia were discussed with Brigitte Borell. In a most painstaking way, Charles Allen went through a first draft looking after my English expression and misconceived contents. Neil (GB) and Chris Peppé (USA) helped to get me permission to see the jewels when in London. Elisabeth Steinbrückner commented on a number of preliminary versions. To all of them I express my sincere thanks.

## Notes

1. This second Alois Anton Führer was also born in Limburg an der Lahn, also at the end of September, but while our culprit was born on 26. 9. 1853, the namesake was born 30. 9. 1854, studied Classics, wrote a dissertation on the Greek dialect of Boeotia and became a Gymnasium teacher at Arnsberg and Münster. His self-description is found in *Dreiundsechzigster Jahresbericht über das Königliche Paulinische Gymnasium zu Münster in dem Schuljahre 1882–1883* (Münster, 1883), p. 32.

2. His self-description for the Swiss journal *Der Katholik* (Bern), published 1928, was used by von Arx (2005) for the short biography.

3. Also when the Sanskrit is simple, cf. BṛhDhś 1.7,38—Führer's no. 62, dealing with types of evidence as documents, witnesses or an authority. The following *tadabhāve* says "in case this (= document or witness) is not available." Führer misunderstood this common phrase as "when [the] taker has died."

4. None of the 30 plus manuscripts inspected for a new edition contains this compounded title, while *vāsiṣṭham dharmasāstram* and *vāsiṣṭhasmṛti* are used.

5. This is in line with Vedic habits where the bones are collected with pincers made from *palāśa*-wood and dropped into bags made from *palāśa*-leaves (*palāśapuṭe prāsyati*, *Kātyāyanaśrautasūtra* 25.8,2).

6. On Buddhist monks sharing brahminical attitudes regarding all sorts of contact with corpses, see Schopen 2014: 284f.

7. Petech (1950: p. 52, § 52) presumes a confusion between Koliyas and Bulis in the *River Classic Commentary*.

8. 10 km applies to the distances as given by Faxian, but also to the 250 km from Kuśinagara to Rājagṛha, given as 25 *yojanas* by Buddhaghōṣa (Fleet 1906c: 907).

9. Sources are assembled by Verardi (2007: 318), who himself shows (2007: 15) that the site is old enough to be the birthplace of a pre-Buddhist saint but that there is no definite proof for an identification. The pillar was brought down already in the third century A.D. (Verardi 2007: 131b), which may be the reason for Faxian to keep silent about it; Xuanzang again seems to accumulate older material. For a larger piece of the upper part of the pillar being used as a linga in the temple at Taulihawa cf. Khadga Shumsher Rana 1904 in Joshi and Joshi 1996: 63f.

10. Visible in Google Earth at 27°29'52.00" N, 83°40'52.13" E; cf. S. R. Shrestha, "Ramagrama Excavation," *Ancient Nepal* 142 (1999): 1–12; 148 (2001): 1–29; 157 (2004): 1–36; 163 (2006): 1–63 without touching the core.

11. Visible in Google Earth at 27°16'11.81" N, 84°29'58.07" E.

12. Xuanzang, as so often, is of no help as he seems to misinterpret Faxian and has the charcoal stūpa an undefined distance south-west of Kuśinagara (Watters 1905: 26). In addition, he confuses the single brahmin of Veṭhadīpa and turns him into a multitude of brahmins not linked to any particular place (Watters 1905: 23).

13. The same use of 復 *fu* introducing an alternative way is found where Faxian describes his way from New Rājagṛha to Bodh Gayā at the beginning of chapter 31. First he says that 4 *yojanas* west leads to Gayā town, followed by 復南行二十里, 到菩薩本苦行六年處, "on the other hand, going south 12 *li* (right from New Rājagṛha) leads to where the Bodhisattva practised se-

vere austerities for six years." The reason for not going to Gayā first is explicitly mentioned: that site is empty and waste (城内亦空荒), something that he certainly heard of before leaving Rājagṛha.

14. Two places have been proposed and are mentioned in Chakrabarti (2001: 211), first Padrauna, 20 km NNE of Kasia, proposed by Cunningham, and Fazilnagar (Sathiyāon), proposed by Carlleyle with more likelihood. Hoey (1900: 80) had Papaur (26°13'4.47"N, 84°24'25.16"E) in mind, 5 km east of Siwan, probably too far removed from Kuśinagara. The Thūpavaṃsa (4.14) positions Pāvā 3 *gavūta* (7.5 km) east of Kusināra, at least in the direction of Fazilnagar.

15. It is tempting to link the stūpa of Droṇa containing his *kumbha* with the huge stūpa at Lauriya Nandagarh (26°59'11.70"N, 84°23'39.02"E; 2 km to the SW of the Aśokan pillar), which contained a smaller stūpa by the side of which was a "copper vessel" containing a sheet of birch-bark, inscribed but not documented (van Lohuizen-de Leeuw 1956: 283).

16. Not even the initial cluster *st-* is used unanimously, but has a variant *sth-*, as is seen in the Kāthakapaddhati, where the bones are "encased in a non-collapsing brick construction" (*abhrāṃśinyām aiḍukāyām samsthūpya*, (Caland 1896: 108, "Reliquienschrein").

17. For "hill" cf. Turkish *tepe*, Mongolian *дов*, Hungarian *domb*; cf. Greek *tymbos* "burial mound, cairn", Late Latin *tumba* or Kurdish *tām*, lastly English *tomb*.

18. This is in line with fragment 27 of Megasthenes, who was ambassador to the Mauryan court, preserved by Strabon (*Geography* 15.1.54) saying that "Their funerals are simple and their mounds small" (λιτὰ δὲ καὶ αἱ ταφαὶ καὶ μικρὰ χόματα).

19. On the tenets pursued by Aśoka by his introduction of script and writing cf. Falk forthcoming.

20. Mahāvāṃsa 31,26a–c, *rāmagāmamhi thūpo tu gaṅgātīre kato tato, bhijji gaṅgāya oghena* (. . .).

21. The sizes of height × width are: Piprahwa clay chamber 1: 12 × 7 cm, chamber 2: 16 × 9 cm (Srivastava 1996: 25; pl. XCIV), in the coffer: inscribed reliquary 17.8 × 11.4 cm (7" × 4,5"), second double pyxis 15.2 × 10.2 cm (6" × 4") (Peppé 1898: 574); casket at upper end of pipe "small, broken, similar in shape, soapstone" without measurements (Peppé 1898: 574). Much smaller are the Sonari caskets of similar shape (Willis nos. 15, 16, figs. 94, 95) with 7.3 × 5 cm and 6.7 × 5.6 cm where the upper pyxis has lost its character and has turned into a three-fold pinnacle. Cf. also the much smaller and very different globular casket at Vesali (5 × 5 cm; Sinha and Roy 1969 pl. VIII).

22. I have dealt with this undervalued motive of Aśoka in Falk forthcoming.

23. Verardi (2007: 115, fn. 250) thinks that the removal of a former earthen stūpa is improbable, as the brick stūpa rests on level soil of a "modest thickness."

24. Of a similarly cubical shape may have been the "square relic-stūpas" excavated at Sagarwa by Führer (Allen 2008: 109).

25. An inspection was arranged through the kind cooperation of the Museum officers, to whom I express my sincere thanks.

26. These are measurements taken by Peppé (1898a: 574): 4'4" = 132,16 cm, 2'8.25" = 81.96 cm, 2'2.25" = 66.71 cm.

27. Her own explanation is too laden with symbolism to become more attractive than the traditional one. The depictions at Amaravati and other south-east Indian sites certainly presuppose the idea of an invisible Buddha, possibly a "creative misunderstanding" of the earlier northern coffer depictions.

28. The lid measures 85 × 85 cm; its present position inside the stūpa is modern, lid and case were found below the latest circumambulation slabs; s. Willis 2000: fig. 76.

29. It is unclear whether the fish has any symbolic meaning or whether the container came ready-made from the manufacturer. In Aśokan contexts fish occur at the Karṇa Caupār cave at Barabar, where one fish along with a swastika and a dagger fills the polished space below the inscription (Falk 2006: p. 262, fig. 15). More fish are drawn on the lion capital at Rampurwa (Falk 2006: p. 198 fig. 10). Pongpanich 2009: 77 shows a great number of fish-shaped jewels in the round from ancient Thailand.

30. Labelled "O20,1," Rapin 1992: pp. 175, 339; pl. 78.

31. In the inventory of Smith (1898b: 869) this seem to be "2 plain pieces leaf" counted fifth under "ornaments mounted between glass."

32. Rapin takes the piece to be an inlay, "incrustation," but because of the worked underside it may rather be taken as part of a composite ornament. For another piece cf. "O24,1," in blue transparent stone, 9 mm long (Rapin 1992: p. 340, pl. 79).

33. The technological exchange between India and Thailand is still governed by unquestioned old models, exemplified by glassmaking in Thailand which started early, at least in the 6th century B.C. It was common to expect Indian exports of glass to Thailand, but now the reverse direction is not excluded. Dussubieux and Gratuze (2010: 257): "The pre-existing model that placed India at the centre of the glass industry and glass distribution network now needs to be revised. The numerous glass types existing in South and South-East Asia in antiquity show that several glass-producing centres operated at different locations and their production fed different exchange networks that evolved over time." For similar results concerning agate and carnelian beads cf. Theunissen, Grave and Bailey 2000.

34. This recalls the Chinese cloth and bamboo ware which was sold in India around 120 B.C. (Falk 2015: p. 62f. § 035) according to the same Hanshu.

35. This was communicated by Brigitte Borrell, for which, and much expertise more, I express my deep gratitude.

36. The piece will be published in the excavation report; I thank Prof. Coningham for making me acquainted with it.

37. Most often, *-eya*-derivatives are built on feminine nouns or masculine nouns in *-i*, but cf. *naimiṣeya*, “living in the Nimiṣa woods,” *āṅgeya* “a prince of Aṅga”; a close semantic relative is *nāgareyaka*, “citizen” (Gaṇa to Pāṇini 4.2,95).

38. Huijiao’s 慧皎 *Gao seng chuan* 高僧傳 (Shi 1968) contains itineraries prior to A.D. 553; Yi Jing’s 義淨 *Datan xiyu qiufa gaoseng zhuan* 大唐西域求法高僧傳, T51, no. 2066, translated Lahiri 1986; contains itineraries prior to A.D. 713.

39. Visible on Google Earth at 27°26′31.91″ N, 83°7′14.61″ E.

40. There may be doubts about the use of soapstone for reliquaries in Aśokan times, but no doubts have so far been raised against the use of the same soapstone for the ring stones (Willis 2000: 94, no. 24), which are exclusively Mauryan, as they were turned on a lathe.

41. In the *Arthaśāstra* 12.4,28 a person can hide in there, “container” may not be the only solution to this enigmatic rule.

42. Srinivasan 1967, with different understanding of the legend and, accordingly, a different translation.

43. That is what Srivastava separates into Phases I and II; for his Phase III, however, he (1996: 31) finds some “wedge-shaped” bricks, whether chopped or form-pressed we do not learn.

44. I regard the texts from Mahasthangarh and Sohagaura as dating to the times of Aśoka. One argument is a unique way of writing the *ma* by placing a half-circle above a full circle without the two touching each other. This form is found at Sohagaura and in the Aśokan schism-edict at Sanchi.

45. All handwritten letters in the Peppé collection of the RAS have been put into legible fonts by R. B. Parsons; the transcription is reliable.

46. This arises from a letter of Bühler to Rhys Davids, dated “Zurich, poste restante, 21/2/98,” unearthed by Ch. Allen in the Rhys Davids Papers kept in the Cambridge University Library.

47. Much less does T. W. Rhys Davids deserve to be called a faker of the Piprahwa casket legend. Apart from Ventura (2013) few will have been fascinated by Huxley’s kind of character assassination.

48. One “Gipsabguß einer altbuddhistischen Reliquienschale mit Inschrift, gefunden in Piprahwa, Bastidistrikt” made it to the Museum für Völkerkunde, Berlin, in 1905 through the offices of A. Alcock, “Superintendent der Natural History Section des Indian Museum in Kalkutta” (Müller 1906: XXXIII).

49. This copy has been presented in Vienna and published in colour in Klimburg-Salter 1995: p. 62, fig. 2, “Replik eines Reliquiers mit Inschrift.”

50. According to Asher (2012: 151a) it was recently transferred to the National Museum, New Delhi.

51. Phelps has removed this argument from his “revised and expanded” internet page and from his book (2009).

52. Cf. the Mauryan level at Gotihawa with a diameter of 19.5 m (Verardi 2007: 115b).

53. Srivastava places everything below the coffer into the time immediately following the death of the Buddha.

54. Cf. the enlarged stūpa at Gotihawa with its 22 m (Verardi 2007: 121), which seems to be dated in a rather vague “Post-Mauryan Period to the 2nd Century AD.”

55. Although the stūpa at Gotihawa is older, its bricks are smaller and thinner, roughly 25 × 33 × 6 cm (Verardi 2007: 116).

56. According to Srivastava (1996: 31) some of the bricks used for the final dome are wedge-shaped, centuries after the foundation of the Gotihawa stūpa.

57. Clear cases of building in bricks before Aśoka are difficult to find; Verardi (2007: 128) trusts TL data for the Gotihawa bricks, which would make 280 B.C. possible.

58. Verma (1987) points out several flaws. Similarly to our model he expects all reliquaries to come from several branches of the Śākya families.

59. Cf. Chakrabarti (1995: 187), where strata, measurements and chronology taken from Srivastava are mixed up.

60. Wat Saket, the “Golden Hill,” 13°45′13.68″ N, 100°30′24.01″ E.

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