

Camp Kapilavastu, the
19th Jan. 1898

Dear Mr. Peppé

I am exceedingly obliged to you for your very kind letter of yesterday's date, and take this early opportunity of congratulating you most heartily to your great success in excavating part of Piprawa kot. **Kindly see carefully whether the stone chest or any of the other stone bowls found do not contain inscriptions, anything may give a clue for the date of that stupa.**

I am, Sir, very truly,
Yours sincerely,
A. Führer

after. I must surely say that I shall
make use of your kind
information and hope the work may
be useful.

If you wish to send me a few
lines, kindly address c/o P.O.
Lahore, District.

Believe me
Yours sincerely
A. Führer

P.S. Kindly send me the photographs
of the stupa found at Piprawa kot.

W. C. Peppé seeks the help of a Government expert – How involved was Dr. Alois Führer in the Piprahwa find?

At the same time that the Piprahwa stupa was being excavated, another dig was taking place eighteen miles away at Sagarwa. This was supervised by Dr. A. Führer, the Archeological Surveyor to the Government of the North West Provinces and Oude. Führer had an impressive track record of finds from remote caves and ruins. There is no evidence that he had met or had any communication with Peppé prior to the find, and it's unlikely that their paths would have crossed. Vincent Smith, the same Gorakhpur judge and respected archaeologist who advised Peppé on how to excavate the stupa, most likely made him aware of the government expert working two days travel away. Smith could not have imagined that seven months later he would be given the job of investigating Führer for faking inscriptions which Smith himself would denounce as 'impudent forgeries'.

There has been some speculation as to whether Führer might also have tampered with the Piprahwa discovery. The following selection of letters demonstrates that this was not the case. They show that Peppé's first contact with Führer was at the same time that he wrote to Smith, just one day before he notified the local collector, which he was obliged to do by law. The letters also show that Führer chose not to be involved due to the demands of his own excavations and that his requests to have some of the relics sent to the Lucknow Museum, of which he was curator, were ignored.

The first letter Peppé received from Führer was after he had written to tell him about the find significant passages are in bold:

Camp Kapilavastu, the 19th Jan. 1898

Dear Mr. Peppé,

I am exceedingly obliged to you for your very kind letter of yesterday's date, and take this early opportunity of congratulating you most heartily to your great success in excavating part of Piprawa kot. **Kindly see carefully whether the stone chest or any of the other stone bowls found do not contain inscriptions, anything may give a clue for the date of that stupa.**

I should be delighted to accept your kind invitation to come and see the excavation, but I cannot leave the excavations here, not even for a day, as the coolies, 200 at present on the work, would do a great deal of damage to the buildings now being unearthed, if not properly supervised.

I shall, however, be glad to come on about the 15th February, when the Nepalese Government will close the work for the season here, but if you like I shall be glad to continue the excavations from about the 10th March, and make a determined survey of the buildings unearthed and careful drawings of the relic caskets unearthed and their contents.

If you approve of it, kindly discontinue the work of excavating until I can superintend it, as the coolies might disturb the original plan of the buildings, if not properly looked after. I need hardly say that I will make no use of your private information and keep the whole matter to myself.

If you wish to send me a few lines, kindly address c/o P. O. Shohrutganj, Basti District.

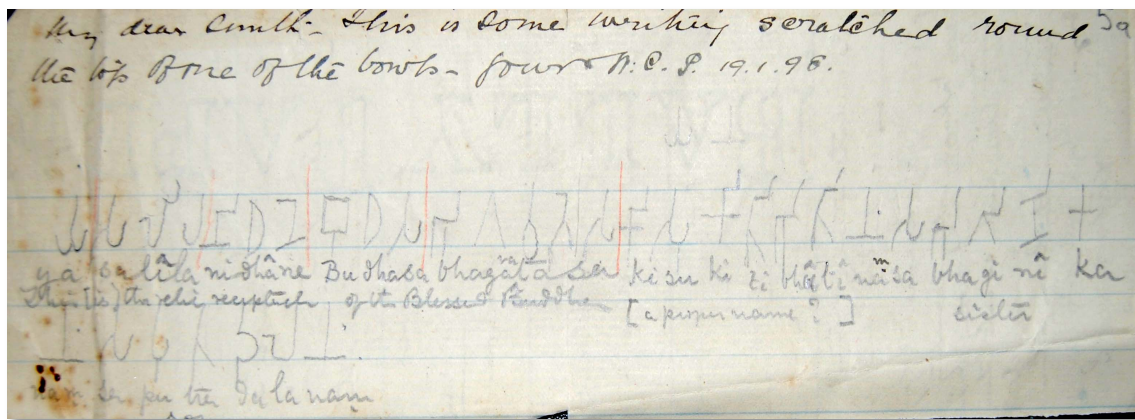
Believe me

Yours sincerely

A. Führer

P.C. Kindly excuse bad handwriting, as I am suffering from writer's cramp.

To unearth a stupa containing a reliquary urn with no identifying marks would have been unusual, so it makes sense that Vincent Smith should also send a letter asking Peppé to search for any kind of inscription. Peppé, however, had already found one, faintly scratched around the top of one of the urns. He dutifully made two copies of the text and sent one to both Smith and Führer.



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

Although no philologist himself Smith possessed enough understanding of the Brahmi language to attempt an initial translation, which he then added beneath Peppé's reproduction of the text. In his reply to Peppé he writes that the depositor believed the bones and ashes to be the relics of the Buddha. (See letters 5b and 6)

Führer's translation reaches a similar conclusion. He is still unable to leave his own excavation and does not encourage the alternative: that Smith and Peppé might visit him.

Camp, the 24th Jan. 1898

Dear Mr. Peppé,

I am exceedingly obliged to you for so kindly sending me a plan of your excavations, a photograph of the relic caskets and the copies of the inscription on the lid of one of the bowls. From a cursory glance at it, I can safely say that your shrine contains real relics of Lord Buddha, as the reading "Bhudasa Bhagavaton" is quite clear. This is indeed a great find, and you have done a great service to ancient history by unearthing it. The place is still within the environs of Kapilavastu, at least within the country of the Sākya.

I shall be glad to follow out the plan of the buildings, when coming on the 15th inst, and if [] [] [] for exploring also the other mounds in the neighbourhood and the ancient road to Kapilavastu, you mention.

I shall be glad to see you and Mr. V. Smith, if you can arrange [] []. But you will have a very trying ride, as the distance from here to Birdpur is certainly 18 or 20 miles if not more. Kindly let me know [] [] [], when you intend to come, as it is very difficult to get provisions here and I [] horribly [] anything.

As soon as I can make out the whole inscription, I shall let you know.

Yours sincerely

A. Führer

Führer's dishonest dealings with a Burmese monk became known to authorities in Rangoon on 15 January and were officially passed on to the government of the NWPO (for whom he worked) on 2nd of February. It is possible that Smith had been alerted to the suspicions regarding Führer and these had consequently played a part in his decision to visit Führer's excavations at Sagarwa with Peppé.

In Führer's next letter, he thanks Mrs. Peppé for the shirt that has presumably been sent to replace the one he lent Peppé when he visited the site. He also asks Peppé to continue excavations without him. (This letter also confirms the Prince Priest's arrival at Birdpur no later than February 1st: see letter collection 'Prince Prisdang Jinavaravansa - How a former Siamese ambassador turned Buddhist monk influenced the fate of the Piprahwa relics'.)

Camp, the 3rd. February 1898

Dear Mr. Peppé,

*Please accept my [] thanks for your kind letter of today and that nice [] shirt Mrs. Peppé so very kindly sent me. I hope to be at Piprawakot on the 22nd February, as Captain Bir Jung [Nepalese liaison officer] says he cannot stay any longer here, although we have spent only about 800/- out of the 2000/- sanctioned by the Nepal Durbar. At present I have commenced excavating a very old lion temple which existed at the [] at the home of Buddha Gautama and as the foundations are just being exposed **I am afraid to leave the coolies here alone. I shall therefore be much obliged if you could kindly instruct your men to uncover the monastery which existed near the [] stupa.** When coming to Piprawakot, I shall try to find whether a railing ran round the stupa.*

I have written to Government for sanction to use the 3000/- still available in our Budget. Thus I hope I shall be able to let you have payment for your coolies.

In one of those small square stupas, you saw to the south-east of the lake, I found a very fine bronze urn, with relics; the urn is of the same shape as those found in ancient Greek cities. I am reluctant to give you at present a complete translation of the inscription on the shrine relic casket, as I cannot yet make out the meaning of the last word of it. I shall, however, [] supply you soon with it.

Would you please tell that [?] kalaiwalah' [?] from Bansi to come to Sagarwah, where my camp is, as soon as he has finished your work. I told the [] last [] to come to Rummindei in the beginning of February, and he may have gone there already, or be ready to go there.

With kind regards

Yours sincerely

A. Führer

In Führer's following correspondence with Peppé he once again postpones his visit to the Piprahwa stupa and warns that he will not be able to work on the site until the following season.

Camp Sagarwah, the 23rd Feb. 1898

Dear Mr. Peppé,

Please accept my sincerest thanks for so kindly sending me my wife's letter and a paper. We have only just today finished our work, and I am going tomorrow to Lori Kudan near Taulihon [Taulihawa], where there had [] another Asoka pillar. I hope to arrive at Piprawakot on Friday evening [ie 26 February] at about six o'clock, and shall be glad to see you on Saturday morning, in order to see what is to be done next season, as I fear it will be almost impossible for me to commence the work this season, as I have to go to Khajnapore [?] in Bundelkhand on some urgent work. Of course, my draftsman will prepare drawings of the places [] [] by you and also to do photos of all the relic caskets, and their contents, if you will so kindly permit it.

Believe me,

Yours sincerely

A. Führer

His next letter is sent after he has finally made his visit to the stupa and returned to the Lucknow Museum where he was curator. Peppé has clearly not followed up on whatever arrangements Führer assumed had been made.

Lucknow Museum

The 31st March 1898

Dear Mr. Peppé

***The long looked for 26th March has come and gone, and I am sorry to say I had not the pleasure of seeing you here.** If you are still coming do kindly allow me to prepare coloured drawings of all the objects found in your excavations, I shall be very happy to send a man to Birdpore on any day you mention, so that he could bring a part of the valuables here, in order to prepare an illustrated report. Or, if you do not mind, you could send the things by registered post (unpaid), and I shall return all objects with as little delay as possible. As our draftsmen are still employed at Sikandra near Agra, we could not commence the coloured*

before the 1st Aug. next; but I envisage all most the whole [?] work [?] finished order in 3 or 4 months.

Would you be so kind as to send me No 11, Vol. XII, of the Hansei Lasshi [?] that Japanese Art Journal, which I left with you, as I wish to refer to an article in it. If you should come, I can send you later on Nos I -12 of the same journal.

Hoping you and yours are enjoying good health

Believe me,

Yours sincerely

A. Führer

PS. The photos taken by my draftsman [name?] turned out well; [] I send you a set or two?

The last letter from Führer makes it clear that, at some point, he had lobbied for the relics to be donated to the Lucknow Museum. He is disappointed that nothing has arrived and offers to 'receive the relics in small installments'. It may be that word of Führer's dishonesty had begun to spread or that the argument put forward by the dynamic Prince Prisdang turned monk simply left Führer empty handed. (See separate collection of letters 'Prince Prisdang Jinavaravansa - How a former Siamese ambassador turned Buddhist monk influenced the fate of the Piprahwa relics.'),

*Lucknow Museum
the 21 April 1898*

My dear Mr. Peppé,

Kindly excuse that I have not yet replied your kind letter of the 5th instant. I am so sorry to hear that your little daughter is seedy and hope bye now she is much better [].

I shall be glad to receive your relics in small instalments when ever you can conveniently spare them.** I have sent a short report up to April on your excavations[] [] [] them sent to an Indologist could know [] them better; at the same time **I sent photographs of the mound, the relic-caskets and the inscribed casket. I have also applied for funds to undertake the excavation of the monastery, & the other mounds [] [] [] [] []**. Dr Hoey's translation of the inscription is certainly incorrect and does not convey the right sense. **I have sent Prof. Bühler at Vienna copies of the photographs and a correct impression of the [] inscription.** He will send you soon a printed copy of [] [] [] [] the Academy of Sciences at Vienna. **I have also written to Govt saying that I would prepare a [] [] report on your relics,[] [] inscription in the same [] with my report on the excavation at Kapilavastu.

I am sorry just now I have no copies left of our photos of your relic [], as I[] [] [] [] [] []. I shall arrange with my Museum to prepare a duplicate set for your, and shall send it in four days.

My leave is as yet not sanctioned, although I applied in February for it, [] intended to go on leave from the 1st of April.

With kindest regards

Yours sincerely

A. Führer

What is also clear from this last letter is that Führer, as Archaeological Surveyor to the Government, was able to document certain aspects of the find. He was the conduit to both Government and the European academic community. Führer was also able to enlist his mentor, the highly esteemed scholar Georg Bühler, to provide a translation of the inscription.

Vincent Smith's correspondence with Peppé is also posted on this website. It shows that Smith advised Peppé before, during and after the excavation of the site. The two men were close and jointly issued a paper on the find to the Royal Asiatic Society (See Essays).

Führer's correspondence, on the other hand, shows that he played no role in the actual excavation and that he didn't even visit the site until six weeks after the discovery. His documenting and reporting of events at Piprahwa may have later been construed as actual involvement.

Vincent Smith's promotion to Acting Chief Secretary meant that, five months after the above letter was written, he would have to confront Führer about fictitious work progress reports and forged inscriptions. Smith reported that: "I charged Dr. Führer with that forgery and he did not attempt to deny it". Führer's career was over.

It was not until 1912 in H. Luders' paper '*On some Brahmi inscriptions in the Lucknow Provincial Museum*' that everyone was made aware of just how crude and inept Führer's forgeries had been. Luders wrote ;

"I am not sure whether the pages of the *Epigraphica Indica* are really the proper pages for such a joke...I cannot help declaring this inscription to be a forgery"
