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The Buddha and Dr Fuhrer: An Archaeological Scandal

Charles Allen

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This true account of the scandal that enveloped the discovery in 1898 of an inscribed casket said to contain the ashes of the Buddha, is set against the background of the high noon of the British Raj. In January 1898 a British landowner, William Claxton Peppé, excavated a large Buddhist brick stupa on his estate close to India’s border with Nepal. At a depth of 24 feet he uncovered a huge stone coffer. What made this discovery so important was an inscription found on the top of one of the reliquary caskets - declaring it to contain ashes of the Buddha. This news aroused world-wide interest since no other so well authenticated relics of the Buddha had ever been found. But almost immediately it became known that a German archaeologist, Dr Anton Führer, working nearby at the same time had not only made bogus claims and faked his results but had also been associated with the dig. Führer was quickly unmasked by a British magistrate who himself had a stake in the excavation.

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