

A Search for Jaina Bone Relics from Kaṅkāḷī Tīlā at the State Museum of Lucknow

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It remains an open question when and where Jainas first started to preserve and venerate bone relics of prominent mendicants in purpose-built *stūpas* in spite of their doctrinal rejection of this practice.¹ A.A. Führer's (1892: 141) "List of accessions to the Lucknow Museum during the month of March 1890" records "10 pieces of old pottery filled with the ashes of some Jaina monks." (Figure 1) These had been "excavated from the Kankālī Tīlā; Mathurā," (Figures 2) and donated by the "Assistant Archaeological Surveyor North-Western Provinces and Oudh Circle," that is, Führer himself, who was also Curator of the Provincial Museum in Lucknow from 1885 to 1892.² When in 2010 I discussed the cited text I noted:

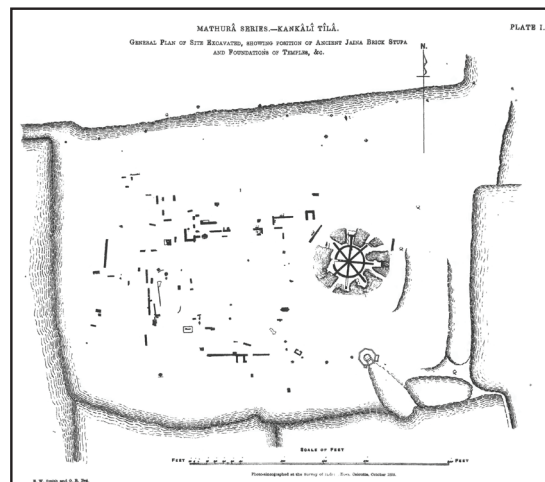
If the ashes came indeed from the location of the stūpa at Kaṅkāli Tīlā, which according to Jinaprabha Sūri's unlikely account [in his 14th c. *Vividhaṭṭhakaḷpa*] was repaired in the eighth century on the instructions of Bappabhaṭṭi Sūri,³ rather than from the two [adjacent] Jaina temples apparently destroyed in the twelfth century, or from other locations nearby, then this would be the oldest archaeological evidence for Jaina bone relic worship. Unfortunately, no further details are given, and it remains uncertain whether the relic vessels are still in existence, if they ever were.⁴

1 Empirical evidence for this practice was first published in this journal.
See Flügel 2008.

2 I owe this reference to my late colleague Andrew Huxley (1948-2014). On A. Huxley, see D. Campbell 2014.

3 He is dated between V.S. 800 and 895: <https://jaina-prosopography.org/person/901>.

4 Flügel 2010: 442. A single “*stūpa* made by the gods at Mathurā,” *madhurāe deva-nimmaya-thūbho*, is mentioned in Jinadāsa’s 6th c.



Map of excavations of the Jaina *stūpa* at Kaṅkālī Tīlā ca. 1889
(Edward W. Smith 1901, Plate I) (See also Figure 2, below)

I also remarked that my “efforts to trace these reliquaries which usually contain bone relics have been without success. It is unclear why Führer refers to ‘Jaina monks’.”⁵ Since no-one seemed to have scrutinised this intriguing piece of information, after two unsuccessful attempts,⁶ I travelled for a third time to Lucknow on 14-15 October 2014 to see for myself whether the recorded pots are preserved in the vaults of the State Museum

Nisīha-cuṇṇi and in Saṃghadāsa's 7th-8th c. *Nisīha-bhāsa* 2927 as a destination for pilgrimages in North India, besides the birthplaces (*janma-bhūmi*) of the *śīrthaṅkaras*, and their "living images" (*jīyanta-pratimā*) at Kōśala, etc. For sources stating the existence of five Jaina *stūpas* in Mathurā see Shah 1955/1998: 63 who regarded the evidence as "certain."

5 Flügel 2010: 442 n. 146.

6 In the years before 2014 the museum was closed for an extensive period because of renovation work.

| Name. | Locality. | Donor. |
|---|---|---|
| 61 pieces of sculpture. 86 ornamented bricks. 6 wedge-shaped bricks of a large stupa. 10 green-glazed tiles, found on the pavement of a Daghamban temple of the Indo-Scythian period. 9 terra cotta figures. 6 clay toys. 1 sacrificial spoon of iron. 6 enamelled beads. 10 pieces of old pottery filled with the ashes of some Jaina monks. | Excavated from the Kanakalli Tith, Malabar. | Assistant Archaeo- logical Surveyor, N or S-W of a terna Provinces and Oudh Circle. |

APPENDIX B.

Specimens prepared and placed in the Museum during the month of March 1890.

| Name. | Donor. |
|--|--|
| 1 <i>Manis pentadactylus</i> 1 " " (young). 1 head of <i>Canis aureus</i> . 1 " " pallipes. 1 head of <i>Hymna strinus</i> . 1 head of <i>Ureus lobatus</i> . 1 stuffed specimen of <i>Lutra nair</i> . 1 " <i>Viverra zibetha</i> . 1 " <i>Foxo cristatus</i> . 1 " <i>Crocodilus vulgaris</i> . 1 " <i>Alligator indicus</i> . | W. J. Turnbull, Esq. Purchased. |

(141)



Figure 1. (Left) List of accessions to the Lucknow Museum during the month of March 1890 (A.A. Führer 1892: 141)

Figure 2. (Above) Excavations of the Jaina *stūpa* at Kankālī Tīlā ca. 1889 (Photo: Edward W. Smith 1901, Plate II)

Lucknow⁷ to which the archaeological collections of the former North-Western Provinces and Oudh Provincial Museum, that is, the Lucknow Provincial Museum, were transferred in about 1949.⁸

The mound of Kaṅkāli Tīlā near Mathurā was first identified as a Jain site by A. Cunningham, who found many fragments of Jain sculpture at the western side of the mound in 1871,⁹ following earlier visits and an excavation by Harding in 1870, which yielded only “mutilated Buddhist statues.”¹⁰ (Figures 3 and 4) Further excavations of the northern side of “Jaini Tila,”¹¹ since long ago and even today dedicated to the “goddess Kankali,”¹² took place under F.S. Growse in 1873-74, A. Cunningham in 1882-3, and – on the pleading of G. Bühler¹³ – of the eastern side by J.A.S. Burgess in 1888-89. This was before A.A. Führer’s team discovered on the eastern side the first Jain brick *stūpa*, “two Jain temples,” and “ashes of some Jain monks” in 1889-90, leading to two further explorations in 1890-91, and a final one in 1896.¹⁴ Dates of the *ca.* 110 Jain inscriptions unearthed at the site vary between 150 BCE and 1077 CE (Vikram Samvat 1134¹⁵ or 1234).¹⁶ Thus, uninscribed pots of ashes and bone fragments reportedly excavated at this historical Jain site could plausibly be associated with Jain ascetics, but not clearly dated.

Like G. Bühler (1892a, 1892b, 1894a, 1894b), who published translations of most of the inscriptions,¹⁷ H. Lüders (1912: 157), in the course of his study of the inscriptions of the Jain sculptures at the Lucknow Provincial Museum in 1909, noted that many objects were of “unknown origin.” K.L. Janert (1961: 41), in his concise summary of the history of the excavations and work on the inscriptions of Kaṅkāli Tīlā,¹⁸ highlighted

7 I would like to thank the Directorate of the State Museum, Lucknow for its support of my research in 2014, in particular Mrs. Renu Dubey, who at the time was Assistant Director and Head of the Pottery Department.

8 The previous site, location No. 3 of the collection, is hard to locate and now apparently ruined. Allen 2008/2011: 33f. identified it as a building called the Gulistan-i-Iram, though I was pointed to another, functional, building near the Law Courts.

9 ASI Annual Report 17, 1884: 111; Vogel 1910: 11.

10 Cunningham 1873: 19-21.

11 Growse 1883: 116.

12 Ibid., p. 117. For the site today, see Flügel 2010: Fig. 18.

13 Huxley 2010: 494.

14 Smith 1901b: 6, 40 n. 1, and Janert 1961: 40f. saw no clear evidence for the existence of two Jain temples at the centre of the site to the west of the “Jain *stūpa*” claimed by Führer to be “Śvetāmbara” and “Digambara” respectively because of the nude Jain images found at the latter site.

15 Growse 1883: 119; Führer, in Smith 1901b: 3f., 5, 54: “The image dated V. S. 1080, A. D. 1023, previously described (Plate XC, figure 3), was dedicated by the Digambara sect, and was found near their temple to the west. These two colossal images, dated 1038 and 1134 were found in December 1889 near the more central temple, which seems to have belonged to the Śvetāmbara sect.”

16 Vogel, in Janert 1961: 42 n. 6. Smith 1901b: 5 dated the inscriptions at Kaṅkāli Tīlā between 52 BCE. and 1077 CE.

17 See also: R.D. Banerji (1909-10) and H. Lüders (1904, 1909-10, 1912, 1937-38, 1961), F.S. Growse (1874/1880: 108, 1883: 117), V. Smith (1901b: 2) and J.P. Vogel (1910: i, 10, 6f., 66, 166).

18 Growse 1883: 117: “There is no doubt as to the inscriptions, and this is the only point of any importance.” His report still reflects early confusion of Jain and Buddhist objects: “Another inscription, containing the name of King Kanishka, with date ‘Sambāt 9,’ was

that “no record of all these operations has ever been published, so there is almost no proof as to the exact finding places of the objects of the Kaṅkāli Tīlā.” There are also no records about the exact locations of objects excavated at Kaṅkāli Tīlā under A.A. Führer in 1888-91.¹⁹ Certain is only that most of the objects found by him at the site were moved to the Lucknow Museum and that, according to Vogel (1910: 5), “the bulk of sculptures in the Lucknow Museum are from one site, namely, the Kaṅkāli Tīlā,” that is, “more than eighty pieces [...] mostly broken or defaced” (p. 41, cf. pp. 66-82).

In his chapters on “Kaṅkāli Tīlā” and “Antiquities in the Lucknow Provincial Museum,” Janert (1961: 39, 196-8) detailed the “uncertain” sites of origin of individual inscriptions and reproduced several of the surviving fragments of Lüders’ translations and comments on the inscriptions under “Antiquities lost” (pp. 210ff.), concluding:

In the Museums, especially in Lucknow and Mathurā, there are numerous (often inscribed) Jain antiquities from Mathurā of more or less uncertain origin which may belong in the majority of instances also to the sanctuary of the Kaṅkāli Tīlā site. They may partly have been excavated in the course of the above-mentioned operations, partly carried off by the inhabitants of the region (after the decay of the ancient sanctuary) from the Kaṅkāli Tīlā to their recent places of discovery in the City or in the environs of Mathurā. Examinations of the collections especially of Lucknow and the Mathurā Museums yielded several inscriptions just characterized (ibid., 43f.).

discovered the same day on the mound itself below a square pillar carved with four nude figures, one on each face. This is of special interest, inasmuch as nude figures are always considered a distinctive mark of the Jain sect, which was supposed to be a late perversion of Buddhism; an opinion, however, which most scholars have now abandoned” (ibid.).

19 “On these important excavations no other information is available than the brief notes contained in Dr. Führer’s Annual Progress Reports and in the Museum Reports for those years” (Vogel 1910: 16). The latter are reproduced in Smith 1901: 2-4.



Figure 3. Pedestal of Mahāvīra image from Kaṅkāli Tīlā, *ca.* 114-115 CE, Lucknow Museum J.2 (cf. Quintanilla 2007: 246-8, 265, Fig. 309-310) (Photo: Peter Flügel, October 2014)

C. Allen (2008/2011: 69, cf. 242) suspected lack of funds to be the main reason for the absence of archaeological records. The fact that accurate recording was not common practice at the time is illustrated by the lively report of F.S. Growse (1874/1880: 108, 1883: 117) on his excavations at Kaṅkāli Tīlā in 1873/4.²⁰ It offers an eyewitness account of the frequently forgotten practical reasons for the inability of allocating individual finds to one or other of the many mounds in the vicinity, given that “the adjoining fields for a considerable distance were strewn with fragments applied to all sorts of vile purposes” (p. 119).²¹ Growse’s narrative, rich in fertile speculations and old-fashioned cross-cultural comparisons, contains the only vivid description of the site before the discovery of the foundations of the Jaina *stūpa* by Führer’s team in 1889-90:

It is worthy of remark that no definite line of foundation has ever been brought to light nor any large remains of plain masonry superstructure: but only a confused medley of broken statues without even the pedestals on which they must have been originally erected. This suggests a suspicion that possibly there never was a temple on the site, but that the sculptures were brought from different places in the neighbourhood and here thrown into a pit by the Muhammadans to be buried. They clearly belong to two very different periods. The more ancient are roughly carved in coarse red sandstone and whenever there is any lettering, it is in Pāli; the more modern display much higher artistic skill, are executed in much finer material, and all the inscriptions are in the Nagari character, one being apparently dated in the twelfth century after Christ. But upon the whole I conclude that the discovery of no foundations in situ is rather to be explained by the fact that the mound has long served as a quarry, and that bricks and small blocks of stone, being more useful for ordinary building purposes, would all be removed, when cumbrous and at the same time broken statues might be left undisturbed. [...] Unless the object be to discover the relics, it is ordinarily a waste of labour to cut deep into its centre; for the images which surmounted it must have fallen down outside its base, where they have been gradually buried by the crumbling away of the stupa over them and will be found at no great depth below the surface. But, in the case of a temple or monastery, the mound is itself the ruined building; if Muhammadans were the destroyers, it was

generally utilized as the substructure of a mosque. The Upagupta monastery, it is true, is said to have comprised a *stūpa* also, but it would appear – from the way in which it is mentioned to have been comparatively a small one: it may well have formed the raised centre of the KankaliTila, into which I dug and found nothing.²²

The great significance of Führer’s subsequent discoveries at Kaṅkāli Tīlā is beyond doubt,²³ despite the ongoing debate on the authenticity of some of the inscriptions published in his name²⁴ and in the case of Kaṅkāli Tīlā of the translator G. Bühler’s, resulting in Führer’s premature release from Government Service in 1898.²⁵ Interestingly enough, though his audacity is well documented, Führer never publicly claimed to have uncovered bone relics in Kaṅkāli Tīlā. His record of pots of funerary relics of Jaina mendicants excavated in Mathurā hidden in the difficult-to-access accession lists of the Lucknow Provincial Museum therefore comes as a surprise. At the time the discovery of such evidence for Jaina relic veneration would have caused great excitement in scholarly circles, who already accepted that Jains must have built and venerated *stūpas* early on, but assumed they rejected relic worship, because no Jaina relic casket had ever been found.²⁶ The question remains why Führer did not present this new evidence to a wider academic audience. His focus was clearly

²² He also notes: “It is possible that here may have stood the Upagupta monastery, mentioned by Hwen Thsang. As there is no trace of any large tank in immediate proximity, it was more probably the site of a monastery than of a *stūpa*. For a tank was almost a necessary concomitant of the latter: its excavation supplying the earth for the construction of the mound, in the centre of which the relics were deposited. Hence a different procedure has to be adopted in exploring a [119] mound believed to have been a *stūpa* from what would be followed in other cases.” Ibid.

²³ Huxley 2010: 495.

²⁴ See BL documents: IOR/Q/2/8/ & IOR/V/24/3049, Smith 1901a: 3ff., Lüders 1912: 161ff., Allen 2008/2011: 176-8, Huxley 2010, Falk 2013: 44f., 67, and others.

²⁵ Cf. Natu’s 2019: 42f. comments on Allen 2008/2011: 173ff., Falk 2013: 68.

²⁶ Bhagwānlāl 1885: 143f.



Figure 4. Pedestal of a Mahāvīra image, ca. 2nd century, Lucknow Museum J.53 (Photo: Peter Flügel, October 2014)

²⁰ See also Smith 1901b: 2 on the finds of Cunningham at the site in 1882-3: “Unfortunately the collection in the Museum at Mathurā has never been catalogued or properly arranged, and no record was kept of the spot where each object was found.” Cunningham 1885: 35 noted: “Amongst the sculptures collected at the Mathura Museum, there is one of undoubted Jaina origin, which is believed to have been brought either from the Kankali mound, or from one of the mounds in that direction.” See the later catalogues of Vogel 1910, 1913-14/1971, Agrawala 1950. ²¹ Cf. Flügel 2021: 214 on comparable sites in M.P.

set on inscriptions, which greatly interested his mentor G. Bühler, and he planned to publish a larger study and the relics of the Buddha, and the uncertain Jaina evidence seemed less significant by comparison. These circumstantial factors may indicate the reasons for not making more of this discovery. Or, was he in doubt about his record or attribution?

The present whereabouts of the pots, if ever they existed, are unclear. In 2014, the Lucknow Museum had no copy of Führer's (1892) "Curator's Report for March 1890" and even after receipt of a scan was not able to identify pots of this kind, because the report "does not contain accession numbers." Assistant Director and Head of the Pottery Department R. Dubey concluded: "Such type of pottery and ashes of a Jain monk is not in this Museum. If you can provide the Accession no. of this, it will help to trace that whether it is in this Museum or not."²⁷ In fact, it seems that no such accession numbers ever existed.²⁸

The inspection in 2014 of the two vaults at the Lucknow Museum holding Führer's surviving archaeological discoveries from excavations at Kaṅkāli

²⁷ E-mail communication from R. Dubey, 23.8.2014.

²⁸ V. Smith 1901, *Preface*, did not investigate the Lucknow collection, because: "Unfortunately no catalogue of the valuable Archaeological collections in the Lucknow Museum exists. The collection is housed in a dark crypt and very inadequately displayed." On the collection see Agrawala 1940, Trivedi 1997. For the documentation system of the Museum today, see Zarrin 2016.



Figure 5. Pottery found at Kaṅkāli Ṭilā (Photo: Peter Flügel, October 2014)



Figure 6. Storeroom of sculpture from Kaṅkāli Ṭilā, Lucknow Museum (Photo: Peter Flügel, October 2014)

Ṭilā, one for sculptures the other for pottery, eventually agreed by the Director, revealed the pottery collection to be in disarray. (Figure 5) Because of the lack of labels, it can probably never serve as a source of reliable data other than for carbon dating and similar investigations of the materials used. None of the preserved pots contains ashes or other objects, nor can the pots be clearly linked to the excavated Jaina *stūpa* at Mathurā. The dislocation of the collection from the old site of the Provincial Museum to its new site near the Lucknow Zoo around 1949 may have involved some loss of records and objects. Sadly, no information is available at the Lucknow Museum about the exact date and circumstances of this shift of location, and no further details could be discovered elsewhere to date.

The best pieces from Kaṅkāli Ṭilā are displayed in the publicly accessible part of the Lucknow Museum and do not feature Jaina relic vessels. The room in the basement of the Museum dedicated to fragments of sculpture from Kaṅkāli Ṭilā is in a good condition. (Figures 6 and 7) The objects are numbered and thereby linked to the local register referred in the literature. The fact that some of the fragments of Jina status with inscriptions²⁹ have been mounted on wooden bases with labels conveying information on whereabouts and dates, indicate that they had once been on display but were subsequently removed from public view.³⁰

I draw the following conclusions from my investigations of the whereabouts of the “10 pieces of old pottery filled with the ashes of some Jaina monks” mentioned by Führer in the “List of accessions to the Lucknow Museum during the month of March 1890”: (i) there are no pots with ashes and bones in the store rooms dedicated to the finds at Kaṅkāli Ṭilā at the Lucknow Museum; (ii) there are no pots inscribed with the names of Jaina monks; (iii) if in future such pots could ever be identified at the Museum, because of the lack of labelling, only the number of “10 pots” could possibly indicate that Führer’s record was accurate; (iv) if they existed, it could not be established with certainty that they actually came from Kaṅkāli Ṭilā; (v) in my view, it is likely that they have never existed, and that Andrew Huxley’s suspicion was right as far as the “Jaina” bone relics from Kaṅkāli Ṭilā are concerned:

The more I read about the Mathura ‘Jain stupa’ the less persuasive I find the ‘built by the Gods’ description. I’m presently digging up the records of [the] Lucknow Museum for the 1898-1910 period. My hunch is that many scandals were

buried there, many more than Lueders exposed in his 1912 article.³¹

Given the significance of the site, it may be worthwhile re-investigating Kaṅkāli Ṭilā with modern archaeological tools.

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31 E-mail communication from Andrew Huxley, 3 March 2012.

29 Whether or not some of the inscriptions are fabrications is still being discussed on linguistic grounds, though it is widely acknowledged that ancient inscriptions are not always syntactically sound.

30 Interesting in the context of current research is sculpture No. S4,155 portraying a woman with flower and (male) child, as commonly placed on door-jambes of medieval Jaina temples. On the “female with flower and child motif” see Flügel 2021: 278-82. Cf. Smith 1901: Plate LX and LXI on a variant motif, which could be called “women under tree standing on a dwarf”: – “The trees under which the women stand are in each case of a distinct kind. I cannot venture to identify the trees” (p. 38). Quintanilla 2007 speaks of “yakṣis.”

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Figure 7. Inscribed pedestal of a broken Jaina sculpture from Kaṅkāli Tīlā, Lucknow Museum (Photo: Peter Flügel, October 2014)