

Cunningham's 'Lost' Treasures

by

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SIR ALEXANDER CUNNINGHAM (1814-93) is rightly hailed as the 'Father of Indian Archaeology.' As the first Archaeological Surveyor (1861-65), and later as the first Director-General of the Archaeological Survey of India (1871-85), he laid the foundations of a systematic and methodical study of the material remains of India's past.

During his chequered career in India Cunningham amassed an impressive collection of coins and other antiquities. While most of his gold and silver coins were sold to the British Museum during his own lifetime, it is generally believed that much of his other collection comprising 'coins, seals, stone implements and other objects including smaller objects and relic caskets,' and more importantly the sculptures from Bharhut, 'unfortunately went down to the bottom of the sea as a result of the shipwreck.' [Abu Imam 1966: 232]

In the light of some hitherto unnoticed archival material, the lecture will revisit the episode of the loss of *SS Indus* - the 'steamer' belonging to the P&O Shipping Company, which was wrecked on Sunday, the 8th November 1885, near Trincomalee in Sri Lanka.

Reference:

Abu Imam, 1966. *Sir Alexander Cunningham and the Beginnings of Indian Archaeology*, (Dacca).