

Feature

In His Own Words: Theodor von Bunsen in Japan (1860-61)

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Theodor Philipp Wilhelm Carl von Bunsen (1832-1892) is one of the less clear-cut participants in the Prussian East Asian Expedition (1860-62). Although the oldest of the three attachés who accompanied Friedrich Graf zu Eulenburg on his mission, and the only member of the diplomatic staff in possession of a doctorate, Bunsen still emerges from the published literature of the expedition oddly lacking in ‘individual contours’.¹ Even in the context of his family, Theodor von Bunsen seems to be overshadowed by his formidably intelligent father, the scholar-diplomat Christian Carl Josias von Bunsen (1791-1860), and his four older brothers, Heinrich Georg (1818-1885), Ernst Christian Louis (1819-1903), Carl Eduard Julius (1821-1887) and Georg (1824-1896).²

Instead, the most memorable description we have of Bunsen comes from the unlikely source of Edward Lear, the English artist, illustrator and self-proclaimed ‘nonsense-poet’, who met him in Corfu during the winter of 1857-58. After their first encounters in December 1857, Lear described Bunsen as ‘a good little chap, clever, but talks like 50 thousand million tongues’. Three days into the New Year, however, Lear was complaining that ‘the telegraphic small Bunsen (...) talks as I never never-never (sic) heard anyone talk: – he makes you long to scream.’³

Bunsen’s apparent garrulousness does not manifest itself in the written record. Apart from the entries he occasionally wrote in the official diary of the East Asian Expedition when he was ‘attaché du jour’ – a post that was alternately shared with the younger Graf zu Eulenburg and Max von Brandt – Bunsen leaves a curious-

1 I have borrowed the phrase used by Professor Gerhard Krebs to describe Theodor von Bunsen. Gerhard Krebs: *Marie von Bunsen und Japan*, *Japanstudien*, 2 (1990), 261n.

2 There is no direct connection between this branch of the Bunsen family and Robert Wilhelm Bunsen (1811-1899), the chemist and inventor of the Bunsen burner.

3 Lady Jane Streachey (ed.): *Letters of Edward Lear to Chichester Fortescue and Frances Countess Waldegrave and Others*, London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1907, 73, 74. Lear had visited the Bunsens in Heidelberg a few weeks earlier en route for Greece. His feelings towards Theodor may have been coloured by Frances von Bunsen’s somewhat precious remark to Lear that she would never allow her grandchildren to look at his books, and especially his cartoon illustrations, ‘inasmuch as their distorted figures would injure the children’s sense of the beautiful.’ Vivien Noakes: *Edward Lear. The Life of a Wanderer*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1969, 324.

ly insubstantial paper trail in the documentation of the Prussian mission. As the bilingual product of an Anglo-German marriage, Bunsen was ideally qualified to translate the official correspondence of his chief and colleagues into English when required, and so his apparent gift for languages was employed mainly to communicate other people's words.⁴ In the later published accounts of the expedition, Bunsen is frequently mentioned but seldom described, and even Friedrich zu Eulenburg, whose letters are one of the most valuable and readable sources on the entire expedition, gives us little insight into his oldest attaché beyond remarking at the start of their journey together to East Asia that he 'much improves on closer acquaintance'.⁵ Bunsen's combination of indispensability and invisibility seems fittingly symbolised by his final task in connection with the East Asian Expedition: the uncredited translation into English of the original text penned by the artist Albert Berg to accompany the official portfolio of large-format lithographs, *Ansichten aus Japan, China und Siam*, published after 1864.⁶

The only lasting picture we have of Bunsen during the expedition's stay in Japan is a composite creation formed from other people's writings. Bunsen's appearance in Japanese sources is appropriately foreshadowed during the initial round of introductions the Prussian diplomatic representatives made to the Japanese commissioners in Edo: 'they found it amusing to pronounce the name Bunsen, for this is what they called men of learning (bonzes).'⁷ The fragmentary descriptions left by the *yōgakusha* Ichikawa Kanenori of his meetings with Bunsen in Edo in January 1861 are among the few that portray Bunsen 'off duty' in his preferred milieu of linguistic studies, and they are all too brief – if not telegraphic – to provide any detailed insights.⁸

Earlier this year, I found a group of unpublished letters by Theodor von Bunsen in the archive of the Dutch National Museum of Antiquities (Rijksmuseum van Oudheden) in Leiden.⁹ Addressed to the Egyptologist Conrad Leemans (1809-1893), they

4 One exception seems to be the letter which accompanied the set of type for Lepsius's Standard Alphabet which Eulenburg presented to the British Minister on 23 January 1861. Although bearing Eulenburg's signature, it was almost certainly written by Bunsen, and given the latter's connection with Lepsius and his project, it seems highly likely that Eulenburg gave his attaché a reasonably free hand in its composition. See Eulenburg to Alcock, 23 January 1861, reproduced in Sebastian Dobson: 'A Typographical Error. Count Eulenburg's Attempt to Introduce Lepsius's Standard Alphabet in Japan', *OAG-Notizen*, 01/2012, 42.

5 'Herr v. Bunsen, der bei näherer Bekanntschaft sehr gewinnt (...)' Letter of 13 June 1860. Philipp Graf zu Eulenburg-Hertefeld (Hg.): *Ost-Asien 1860-1862 in Briefen des Grafen Fritz zu Eulenburg, Königlich Preussischen Gesandten betraut mit außerordentlicher Mission nach China, Japan und Siam*, Berlin: E.S. Mittler und Sohn, 1900, 23.

6 Sebastian Dobson & Sven Saaler (Hg./Eds.): *Unter den Augen des Preußen-Adlers. Lithographien, Zeichnungen und Photographien der Teilnehmer der Eulenburg-Expedition in Japan, 1860-61/ Under Eagle Eyes. Lithographs, Drawings & Photographs from the Prussian Expedition to Japa, 1860-61*, München: Iudicum Verlag, 2011, 152.

7 'Den Namen Bunsen aussprechend meinten sie lachend, so hießen bei ihnen die Gelehrten (Bonzen).' [Albert Berg (Hg.)]: *Die preußische Expedition nach Ost-Asien. Nach amtlichen Quellen*, Berlin: Verlag der Königlichen Geheimen Ober-Hof-Buchdruckerei, 1864, Bd. I, 348.

8 See Dobson & Saaler 2011, 109-116; Dobson 2012, 35-36.

9 The original letters are still held by Leemans' descendants, but a complete set of photocopies has been deposited at

represent one side of an occasional correspondence that began in March 1860 and continued for almost thirty years. These letters intermittently follow Bunsen's career as a diplomat in the service of Prussia and the German Empire (1860-76) and as a member of the Reichstag (1876-78), as well as most of the years he spent in semi-retirement until his death in 1892. Bunsen's early correspondence with Leemans is of particular interest, since it contains two letters he sent while attached to the Prussian East Asian Expedition, one from Japan dated 23 November 1860 and another sent from China six months later.

Bunsen's letters are given a curious flavour by his dogged insistence on writing to Leemans during the first few years of their acquaintance in Dutch, despite the fact that Leemans himself was quite capable of maintaining a correspondence in German. This was very much a self-imposed obligation on Bunsen's part. Having spent at least two months in Leiden as a guest of Leemans during the winter of 1859-60, Bunsen was anxious to put the fruits of his Dutch language studies on display.

Theodor von Bunsen's letters are reproduced here in full, while letters from other correspondents addressed to Leemans are quoted selectively in order to provide context. Unless stated otherwise, all translations are mine.

It is unclear how or when Bunsen's name was put forward as a possible candidate for the diplomatic staff of the Prussian East Asian Expedition, but it appears that he was already under consideration when Friedrich zu Eulenburg was formally appointed head of the expedition in September 1859. There was still an agonising period of uncertainty to be endured before the appointment of Eulenburg's attachés was officially confirmed, and Bunsen may well have felt that the time could be best employed in improving his knowledge of Dutch and Japanese – and his chances of final selection – by spending a few weeks in Holland. It is an interesting coincidence that, less than two weeks after Eulenburg suggested to the Minister of Foreign Affairs that a native Dutch-speaker could be added to his staff as an interpreter, the following letter was sent by the Egyptologist Richard Lepsius to his friend Conrad Leemans, head of the Museum of Antiquities (Museum van Oudheden) in Leiden.¹⁰



the National Museum of Antiquities, Leiden (hereafter referred to as *Leemans MSS*). I would like to thank the Museum Archivist, Ms. Marieke Kroonen, for her kind assistance.

¹⁰ Eulenburg to Schleinitz, 10 November 1859. III. HA Ministerium der Auswärtigen Angelegenheiten, II Nr. 5067. Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preußischer Kulturbesitz.

Richard Lepsius to Conrad Leemans, Berlin, 22 November 1859.

*(...) You know from the newspapers that we are dispatching an expedition to Japan and China, and its ships are already under way. The diplomatic personnel will not depart until the spring and will join the ships in Singapore. It is very likely that one of Bunsen's sons, Theodor v. B., will go along as an attaché. To prepare for this eventuality, he is thinking of going to Leiden this winter in order to improve his mastery of the Dutch language, with which he is already not unfamiliar, as well as to acquaint himself with your collections. I would hereby take it upon myself to furnish him with a recommendation to you and ask you to give him your friendly advice. He will then bring you the latest paper I gave to the [Berlin] Academy [of Sciences] "Concerning several points of concurrence between Egyptian, Greek and Roman chronology." (...)*¹¹

It is not exactly clear when Bunsen arrived in Leiden, but if he was not already a guest at the Leemans household by early December, the official confirmation of his attachment to the Prussian East Asian Expedition would certainly have hastened his departure for Leiden. Bunsen's father, convalescing in the south of France, wrote ecstatically to one of his sons:

*'Theodore's appointment to the Japanese Expedition removes a weight from my heart. God be thanked! ... He will enter with one leap into the midst of a fine career, without the senseless, time-killing, ultra-Chinese examinations; without fagging in the business of provincial Courts or a government office – mediam in rem – as if we lived under a rational system, based upon division of labour, resting and reckoning upon intellectual cultivation, and not upon the training of a "maid of all work."'*¹²

Leemans was in a position not only to assist young Bunsen in his study of the Dutch language but also to provide him with access to the most comprehensive network of knowledge and expertise on Japan available in Europe at that time. Although Leiden's most famous Japan scholar, Philipp Franz von Siebold, had already left for

¹¹ 'Sie wissen durch die Zeitungen, daß von uns eine Expedition nach Japan und China in Bewegung gesetzt ist, deren Schiffe schon unterwegs sind. Die diplomatische Bemannung wird erst in Frühling abgehen und die Schiffe in Singapore treffen. Es ist sehr wahrscheinlich, daß auch ein Sohn von Bunsen, Theodor v. B., als Attaché mitgeht. Für diesen Fall denkt er nach diesen Winter nach Leyden zu gehen, um sich der Holländischen Sprache, die ihm schon nicht fremd ist, noch mehr zu bemächtigen und auch Ihre Sammlungen kennen zu lernen. Ich würde mir dann erlauben, ihm eine Empfehlung an Sie mitzugeben, und Sie um freundlichen Beirath für ihn zu bitten. Er wird Ihnen dann auch meine letzte Academische Abhandlung: "Ueber einige Berührungspunkte der Aegypt., Griech. und Römischen Kronologie (Alexandrinischer, Dionysischer, Endoxischer Kalenden) mitbringen.' Lepsius to Leemans, 22 November 1859, *Leemans MSS*, 19.5.1/3.

¹² 'Theodor's Anstellung bei der japanischen Expedition nimmt mir einen schweren Stein vom Herzen; er springt in eine schöne Laufbahn hinein, ohne die sinnlose, zeitmörderische Vorbereitung zur Diplomatie bei einem Landgericht oder einer Regierung, *mediam in rem*, als lebten wir in einem vernünftigen System, welches, auf Humanitätsbildung ruhend, auf Theilung der Arbeit eingerichtet sein muß und nicht auf den Beruf eines "Mädchen für Alles".' Frances von Bunsen & Friedrich Nippold: *Christian Carl Josias Freiherr von Bunsen. Aus seinen Briefen und nach eigener Erinnerung geschildert von seiner Witwe*, Leipzig: F.A. Brockhaus, 1868-71, Bd. III, 557. I have used the translation provided in Frances von Bunsen: *Memoirs of Baron Bunsen*, London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1869, Vol. II, 350.

Japan in the spring of that year, his influence could still be felt in the city. Leemans himself had recently completed the herculean task of transferring the contents of Siebold's 'Japanese Museum' to new premises on Breestraat where the present-day Sieboldhuis stands today.¹³ The new 'National Japanese Museum von Siebold' (Rijks Japansch Museum von Siebold) had opened its doors to the public on 18 July 1859, and Leemans, already kept busy with his regular duties at the Museum of Antiquities, was now dealing with the tasks expected of him in his additional (and unpaid) post as its director. Indeed, the distractions created by what his friend Lepsius later called the 'Japanese and other barbarities' were to keep Leemans away from his studies, especially in Egyptology, for the next twenty years.¹⁴ Japan was already claiming much of Leemans' time when Bunsen came to stay with him at the end of 1859, and Bunsen would have found his host busy completing a visitor's guide to the National Japanese Museum von Siebold, setting up a department of comparative ethnology and trying to make sense of the inadequate inventories that Siebold had provided for his collection.¹⁵

When not employing his time in practicing his Dutch with members of the Leemans household and examining the local Japanese collections, Bunsen also met with Leemans' colleague and Siebold's former assistant, Johann Joseph Hoffmann, Professor of Japanese and Chinese at the University of Leiden. Communication between the two native German speakers (like Siebold, Hoffmann was originally from Würzburg) would certainly have been easier, and even Bunsen would probably not have insisted that they use the language of their hosts. A letter from Lepsius to Leemans written after Bunsen's return to Germany indicates that Bunsen was already engaged in 'Japanese studies' before he arrived in Leiden and suggests that Bunsen may have sought some informal instruction during his stay there: 'so what does Hoffmann have to say about [Bunsen's] linguistic talent with regard to Japanese[?]'¹⁶ Bunsen also appears to have acted as an emissary from his father's friend Lepsius and his stay to Leiden may well have been regarded as an opportunity to recruit Hoffmann's support in adapting Lepsius's Standard Alphabet for the transcription of Japanese and Chinese. Less than a year later, Lepsius was delighted to receive news that Hoff-

13 Rudolf Effert: *Royal Cabinets and Auxiliary Branches: Origins of the National Museum of Ethnology 1816-1883*, Leiden: CNWS Publications, 2008, 158.

14 Lepsius wrote to Leemans in 1881 congratulating him on his release from the Museum of Ethnology: 'Ich freue mich, dass Sie sich endlich der Japanischen und anderer Barbareien entledigt haben.' Quoted in Conrad Leemans (W.F. Leemans ed.): *L'Égyptologue Conrade Leemans et sa correspondance. Contribution à l'histoire d'une science*, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1973, 12.

15 The guidebook was published in the following year, the department of comparative ethnology was opened in May 1860, and Leemans' dissatisfaction with Siebold's inability to account for items missing from the collection developed into a long-running dispute which only ended with Siebold's death in 1866. Effert 2008, 151-167.

16 'Was erteilt denn Hoffmann über sein sprachliches Talent in Bezug auf das Japanische[?]' However, Lepsius then goes on to remark that 'it is likely that he [Bunsen] will scarcely be able to make practical use of it ('Praktischen Nutzen wird er wohl schwerlich daraus ziehen können).' Lepsius to Leemans, 14 March 1860. *Leemans MSS*, 19.5.1/3.

mann had formally adopted his scheme.¹⁷

Bunsen's stay in Leiden lasted until the end of February 1860, and his first letter to Leemans was sent shortly after his return to the Rhineland on 3 March. Although not directly bearing upon his attachment to the East Asian Expedition, the last letter Bunsen sent to Leemans before he left Europe is reproduced here in order to give something of the distinctive flavour of his writing.

*Burg Rheindorf¹⁸ near Bonn
Easter Monday, 1860¹⁹*

Dear friend,

Three days ago my fate seemed to be decided – as the song composed by Mendelssohn has it – ‘to part’ and also ‘until we meet again’.²⁰ In fact I intend to leave for Heidelberg on Thursday – where you sent your kind lines to me – and to be in Cannes eight days later to see my parents again. On 11 March [May] I intend to set sail either from Marseilles or from Triest²¹ (whence I can travel via Genoa, Turin, Venice) and probably spend two weeks in Egypt and two more in Ceylon, since on account of the delay to our ships there is no longer any reason to make haste.

I am most indebted to you for the introduction to Mijnheer Coningh²², which, as a friend of yours, must be welcome to me.

The last four days have been the only nice ones since I left you. There have been incessant storms and I was rather worried when my brother²³ left for England to collect his wife and children. But they have arrived safely from there and tomorrow my godchild²⁴ will be baptised. I was staying here in order to have my parents’

17 Lepsius to Leemans, 4 November 1860. *Leemans MSS*, 19.5.1/3. Hoffmann had already endorsed the Standard Alphabet in 1855, but had used a different scheme of romanisation in his most recent work, Donker Curtius's *Proeven eener Japansche Spraakkunst*, published in 1857. Conrad Leemans: *Het Algemeen Alphabet*, Leiden: 1855, 7.

18 Theodor von Bunsen was writing from the estate his brother Georg had bought in 1855.

19 9 April 1860.

20 “‘Te scheiden” en ook “tot wederzien”.’ Bunsen is attempting a Dutch translation of the chorus of Ernst von Feuchtersleben's ‘Es ist bestimmt in Gottes Rat’, the fourth song in Mendelssohn's *Volkslieder* (Opus 47): ‘Wenn Menschen auseinander geh'n, so sagen sie: Auf Wiederseh'n!’.

21 Bunsen left Triest on 26 May 1860. Bunsen 1868, Vol. II, 358.

22 Cornelis Theodoor van Assendelft de Coningh (1821-1890). A Dutch merchant who had already established himself in Yokohama in September 1859. This was his third stay in Japan; he had previously visited Deshima in 1845 and 1851 as commander of the annual ship despatched from Batavia by the Dutch East India Company. He had already published a book on his experiences in Japan in 1856. C.T. van Assendelft: *Mijn verblijf in Japan*, Amsterdam: Gebr. Kraaij, 1856. See F. Smit Kleine: ‘Levensbericht van C. Th. van Assendelft de Coningh’, *Jaarboek van de Maatschappij der Nederlandse Letterkunde* (Leiden), 1891, 155-167 (consultable online at http://www.dbnl.org/tekst/_jaa002189101_01/_jaa002189101_01_0011.php).

23 Georg von Bunsen (1824-1896). See Marie von Bunsen: *Georg von Bunsen. Ein Charakterbild aus dem Lager der Besiegten gezeichnet von seiner Tochter*, Berlin: Wilhelm Hertz, 1900.

24 Marie von Bunsen (1860-1941) had been born in London on 17 January of that year. ‘Although I was christened

furniture moved into their new house. I don't imagine that they will be completely settled in before the middle of July.

I hope that you will all have much pleasure at the marriage of Mijnheer Suter. I am ashamed [not] to write you a long letter, since I have been kept away from my study of Dutch by many trivial matters and make a mass of mistakes. I can play the concertina tolerably well, but it is a very different instrument to the bandoneon.²⁵ The tone is the same whether you pull or press; it very much resembles the human voice. I can already play ten or twelve songs. L.N. [?] improves the digestion of many people by activating their bile. It will soon settle down. Whenever M[ijnheer] Hoffmann²⁶, to whom I beg you to pass on my greetings, has anything for me, my brother Georg will send it to me from here. I will be most indebted to him.

Give my cordial wishes to Mevrouw²⁷ and Wilhelm²⁸ and Maria²⁹ and believe me always your affectionate friend,

Theodor von Bunsen³⁰

Leemans received no further news of Bunsen until a letter arrived from his brother Georg in November.

*Burg Rheindorf near Bonn
7 November 1860*

Dear Sir,

I should certainly have given you, as my brother's gracious friend and patron, news of his journey, and I beg your pardon that my father's arrival and his serious illness have distracted me from doing so.

in Burg Rheindorf, I did not actually come into the world there. My mother intended to time the birth of the annual [!] baby to coincide with her visit to my grandmother in England, and so I, helpless mite, had no choice but to be born in disconsolately dingy lodgings in London in January 1860.' Marie von Bunsen (trans. P.H. Oakley Williams): *The World I Used to Know, 1860-1912*, London: Thornton Butterworth Ltd., 1930, 1-2. See Franka Schneider: 'Marie von Bunsen, die "wissende Reisende"', in Katrin Amelang (ed.): *Völkenskundliches Wesen: Akteure und Praktiken*, Münster: LIT Verlag, 2009, 87-112; Perhaps inspired by the example of her uncle Theodor, Marie von Bunsen later visited Japan in 1911; see Krebs 1990, 259-268 (consultable online at: http://www.contemporaryjapan.org/back_issues/japanstudien_2_zeit/JS_02_Krebs_2.pdf).

25 Invented by Heinrich Band (1821-1860), the bandoneon was an instrument derived from the concertina, and intended originally for performing religious music. It has passed down to the present day as a key instrument in the tango repertory.

26 Johann Joseph Hoffmann (1805-1878). Since 1855, Professor of Japanese and Chinese at Leiden University. *His Proeve eener Japansche Spraakkunst* (1857) was Bunsen's main reference for studying Japanese. Reinhard Kammer: 'Hoffmann, Johann Joseph', in Otto zu Stolberg-Wernigerode: *Neue deutsche Biographie*, Berlin, 1972, Bd. IX, 426-27; H. Kern: 'Levensbericht van J.J. Hofmann', *Jaarboek der Koninklijke Akademie van Wetenschappen* (Amsterdam), 1878, 1-20.

27 Cornelia Maria Leemans, née de Virieu (1818-1904).

28 Wilhelm François Leemans (1841-1929).

29 Maria Hillegonda Leemans (1851-?).

30 Theodor von Bunsen to Leemans, 9 April 1860, *Leemans MSS*, 19.5.1/17.

From Triest, Alexandria, Cairo, Suez, Aden, Galle and finally Singapore we have received detailed and very gratifying reports from him. Surrounded by friendly travelling companions, wallowing in the bounty of nature and bygone generations, favoured as seldom a traveller is by the weather, by quiet sea, by the absence of oppressive heat in the Red Sea, he approaches a great and important undertaking by which he can reveal whether he is capable of accomplishing something in this world.

*I will not fail to pass on your gracious wishes when we next have news of him. (...)*³¹

Georg von Bunsen wrote again the following month.

Bonn, 26 December 1860

Dear Sir,

*An incoming letter from my brother Theodor in Japan concludes with words something like the following: 'I am no longer able to carry out my cherished wish to write to Herr Dr. Leemans this time. Perhaps he will forgive me for this, if Georg expresses my regret to him and gives him a report of our journey, which thus far has proceeded so well.' (I am quoting entirely from the memory of someone else, since, following the rapid dispatch of the letter, these closing words could no longer be read out to me). All things considered, Theodor's report is an exceedingly favourable one in any respect pertaining to his personal situation and activity. He was given the task of keeping the journal on which official reports were based concerning a terrible typhoon storm; he has been present at all the [official] presentations, and since their arrival in Yedo he has had [responsibility for] the 'commissariat'³², as it is called in English. As regards a trade treaty with the Zollverein, the initial responses have varied, as one would understand. Count Eulenburg seems determined, however, to have his way. I must not forget to mention that following its departure from Singapore the expedition sailed directly to Japan without touching at China or Siam. As soon as Theodor's letter has completed its circuit among his brothers and sisters, it will be sent to you, dear Sir. (...)*³³

The promised letter does not appear to have been sent, but the New Year finally brought a letter from Japan.

³¹ Georg von Bunsen to Leemans, 7 November 1860, *Leemans MSS*, 19.5.1/17.

³² Eulenburg described the division of responsibilities among the three attachés in his letter dated 12 September 1860: 'Ich habe Brandt zum Oberstallmeister, Bunsen zum Oberkitchenmeister, August zum Privatsekretär und Kommandanten der Leibwache ernannt. Ausserdem hat für die diplomatischen Arbeiten Jeder einen Tag *du jour* bei mir.' Eulenburg 1900, 70-71.

³³ Georg von Bunsen to Leemans, 26 December 1860. *Leemans MSS*, 19.5.1/17.

Kanagawa, 23 November 1860

Esteemed friend,

I hope that my father³⁴ or brother has passed on my greetings to you, and explained why I have not yet written to you. I would very gladly have done so, not only in order to keep my promise, but also as a token of my grateful recollection of your friendship during my stay in Leiden (and I hope since that time? Or has my muteness had the effect that you have forgotten me?).

Whenever one comes to a new land during a great journey, he wishes to use the few days which he spends there to see as much as possible and acquire knowledge. Thus in Egypt, Ceylon and Singapore I have only been able to write short letters to my parents; and on board a ship – where one finds less pleasure in working than when on land – one is busy keeping a diary. Finally I have had – on account of my limited knowledge of the Dutch language – acquired through you and M[ijnherr] Hoorberg – so much to do here in Japan, through written and spoken translations; dealing with Japanese interpreters and yakunin (officials) and because I am responsible for all the things connected with house-running (“Haushalt” – I have left my dictionaries behind in Yedo), in particular buying all the food for twenty to thirty people etc. – that I had no time to write. Three weeks ago I became unwell, and I have been here for ten days in order to recuperate.³⁵ Now I am completely recovered and will shortly return to Yedo. When I wanted to deliver your letter to M[ijnherr] de Coning[h], I heard that he had already departed, but his colleagues gave me a friendly reception. – The Japanese government is very fearful that more foreigners will arrive and has very little inclination to conclude a new treaty with Prussia. They say that when they concluded the treaties with the United States and the other powers, they were under the impression that Japan and its people would gain numerous advantages from trade with the outside world. But now they have seen and realised that there are also many disadvantages involved and nothing in the way of advantages. From

34 Bunsen was unaware of his father's final illness. On the same day that this letter was sent, Bunsen's mother wrote to Leemans from Bonn describing her husband's declining health: 'as he is now, a look and smile of recognition of those nearest to him are all that is possible'. Frances von Bunsen to Leemans, 23 November 1860. *Leemans MSS*, 19.5.1/17. Christian Carl Josias von Bunsen died five days later in the family home in Bonn, and as the widowed Frances von Bunsen wrote to her son afterwards, 'many and many, during the last days, were the times of uttering your name: – “Theodor! Theodor!” in tones of affectionate sadness not to be described.' Frances von Bunsen to Theodor, 4 December 1860, in Augustus J.C. Hare (ed.): *The Life and Letters of Frances Baroness Bunsen*, New York: G. Routledge & Sons, 1879, Vol. II, 280.

35 According to Eulenburg, there was a direct connection between Bunsen's household responsibilities and his illness: 'Bunsen has become quite ill on my account: the poor young fellow has worn himself out so much with worry in the course of his errands on domestic transactions that he fell into an anxious state of agitation. For a short time, Dr. Lucius feared that he would get nervous fever. Fortunately, however, the danger now seems to have passed.' ('Bunsen ist mir recht krank geworden: der arme Junge hat sich durch den Aerger bei Besorgung der häuslichen Geschäfte so aufgerieben, daß er in einen ängstlichen Zustand von Erregtheit verfallen ist und Dr. Lucius eine Zeit lang fürchtete, er würde das Nervenfieber bekommen. Diese Gefahr scheint doch nun glücklicherweise beseitigt.') 5 November 1860, Eulenburg 1900, 103.

abroad, nothing comes inside but silver [currency], and that, “they say”, cannot be of any help to us; on the other hand, our silk and the entire produce of our country goes out; everything is becoming more expensive, and at the same time much strife with the foreigners results, for they do not have the custom of associating with them and the customs and usages of Europe and Japan differ too greatly. So far, it has not been possible for us to change their opinion, but I hope that we will soon have better luck with this. In the meantime, affairs in China have been such that it has been unthinkable for any negotiations on our side with the “Celestial Empire”. But you certainly want to hear more about my journey and about this curious land. From the Great Pyramids, I have watched the sun rise over Cairo and Wilhelm will get his desert stones – I have smoked with the fat Said Pasha³⁶, and in the grave (...) [text missing] (...) ridden on a cart through the wilderness; I have chatted with Buddhist priests in Ceylon and seen the golden cover beneath which the tooth of the Buddha (ten times bigger than a human tooth!) is preserved in Kandy; I have seen elephants build bridges and carry the largest stones into place with their feet and heads. At Palo Pinang³⁷ I have seen a beautiful landscape such as I hope to see many times again in Java; in Singapore I almost encountered a tiger. There we found our ships and from 13 August to 4 September we were under sail for Yedo; there the Japanese gave us a house to dwell in and we have frequently ridden throughout and around the entire city; [Yedo] is filled with gardens and parks; it is still green outside, and everywhere the country is like a beautiful garden; every planting of rice etc. is planted on its own, and all the other fields are not sown, but planted in the same way.

I beg you to give my best wishes to Mevrouw Leemans and Wilhelm and Marie, as well as your brother and sister-in-law; and if you don't take it amiss, that I send you such a letter as this, then I will be assured of your friendship towards me. *Ánata Sáyunarà!*³⁸

Your sincerely affectionate friend

Theodor von Bunsen

[Postscript]

(...) [text missing] (...) my homecoming; but it is difficult to obtain good books.³⁹

36 Muhammad Sa'id Pasha (1822-1863), *Wāli*, or governor, of Egypt and Sudan which he ruled ostensibly in the name of the Ottoman Sultan.

37 Penang.

38 'Farewell!' Bunsen uses a system of transcription which differs from the Lepsius Standard Alphabet: as later transcribed by Hoffmann the same text would read '*ánata sa-yoo-narà*'. J.J. Hoffmann, *Japansche spraakleer*, Leiden: A.W. Sijthoff, 1867, 103, 341.

39 Theodor von Bunsen to Leemans, 23 November 1860. *Leemans MSS*, 19.5.1/17.

Bunsen's next, and, as it turned out, only other letter to Leemans from East Asia was forwarded from Bonn at the end of July by Frances von Bunsen, Theodor's recently widowed mother.⁴⁰

Tientsin, 23 May 1861

Dear friends,

I should be able to give my forgetting the Dutch language as an excuse for my lengthy silence, but since I am writing to you now, however bad and clumsy this letter in Dutch is, it will definitely require you to be kind enough to invent some better excuses on my behalf, such as being kept busy; in any case, don't think ill of me, and don't imagine that your letters to me of 3 January gave me anything other than the utmost pleasure. And the good Maria has been so ill and [yet] she also remembered my birthday? I do hope, however, that she and her parents have long forgotten that illness and that there is no other indisposition to worry them. I am truly sorry to hear that [her] father and brother have also followed such a bad example, but I am sure that with the warmth of spring (printemps?) the whole house[hold] will have become healthy again. How greatly saddened I was when I found references in the newspaper reports to the terrible consequences of the flooding in the Netherlands. But what must you have felt, being so close and perhaps also acquainted with many of those involved in the disaster!

Since I wrote to you on 14 December from Kanagawa,⁴¹ we were so fortunate as to conclude a treaty of friendship and trade with Japan on 24 January (I believe that Frederick the Great was born on this day). However, a terrible misfortune had recently befallen our good friend Mijnheer Heusken⁴², who was murdered in a gruesome manner by [some] Japanese.⁴³ On 15 January this gentleman, a Dutchman [and] Secretary of the American Legation, had taken dinner with us as he usually did, since he was serving as our interpreter as a courtesy. At 9 o'clock I shook hands with him and wished him good night.⁴⁴ Two minutes later he was attacked by

40 Frances von Bunsen to Leemans, 30 July 1861. *Leemans MSS*, 19.5.1/17.

41 No letter bearing this date appears in Leemans' collection.

42 Henricus ('Henry') Coenradus Johannes Heusken (1832-1861). Born in Amsterdam, Heusken moved to the United States in 1853. In October 1855, he was employed by Townsend Harris, the American envoy to Japan, as his interpreter and secretary.

43 See Reinier H. Hesselink: 'The Assassination of Henry Heusken', *Monumenta Nipponica*, 49: 3 (Autumn 1994), 331-351.

44 Other members of the expedition give slightly earlier times for Heusken's departure. Dr. Robert Lucius, who was serving as medical officer to the Prussian expedition and attended to Heusken in his final hours, times the attack at around 8.45 pm. 'Report of R. Lucius M.D. on the death of Mr. H. Heusken', 18 January 1861. Records of the United States

seven assassins and wounded on all sides. His murderers took flight and Heusken had to dismount from his horse and was afterwards carried back home by the Japanese officials (*yakunin*) and stable boys (*betto*) who were accompanying him. Why they dallied for one hour – or so it appeared – instead of immediately taking him to our legation or that of the Americans is impossible to understand. Nevertheless that might certainly have been better for the poor fellow, since the wound in his stomach was too deep for him to recover and as a result of the loss of blood [he suffered] before the doctor arrived, death came to him quickly and painlessly.⁴⁵ He was a fine and decent man. Son of a widow in Amsterdam, he went to America with a trading company. A certain 'Portman'⁴⁶, with whom he was acquainted, was engaged at that time by Mr. Harris⁴⁷ to accompany him to Shimoda as an interpreter. However, before the departure, they exchanged places.⁴⁸ Portman stayed behind and Heusken went with Harris.⁴⁹ A few days later, the trading house in which H[eusken] had been employed and which P[portman] had entered, went bankrupt, and Portman probably thought that Heusken had tricked him, or in any case had had greater luck. Now, however, Portman is Mr. Harris's secretary and young Heusken is murdered! Just before he died, it had been arranged for Heusken to transfer to Dutch service. Certain characters, completely ignorant of the state of affairs in Jedo (sic), have suggested that the murder was committed from motives of revenge or such like. As far as we are concerned, however, there is no doubt about the political character of the murder.

On the evening of 31 December, Mr. Harris was warned, and the other ministers on 1 January, by the Governor of Foreign Affairs that a conspiracy of 500 ronin (former princely soldiers or civilian officials) had just been uncovered which had the object of murdering the Europeans, and principally the staff at the legations, burning

Legation in Japan, 1855-1912. Roll 38 – 'Miscellaneous Letters Received, January 22 – December 30, 1861' (T-400). Copies consulted at Yokohama Archives of History.

45 Dr. Lucius was only summoned at 10.30 pm and Heusken died shortly after midnight.

46 Anton Lodewijk Christiaan Portman (1826-1873). Born in Amsterdam, Portman moved to the United States in 1851. He had originally accompanied Commodore Perry's expedition to Japan in 1854 as a Dutch interpreter and he was employed in the same capacity six years later when the first Japanese Embassy visited the United States. He returned to Yokohama with the Japanese Embassy in October 1860 that year and was employed to replace Heusken after the latter's murder. Portman's subsequent career at the United States Legation in Japan was marked by frequent conflicts with his superiors and was ultimately blighted by his lack of political sponsors in Washington. He was eventually dismissed from his post in 1871. Jack L. Hammersmith: *Spoilsmen in a 'Flowery Fairyland': The Development of the U.S. Legation in Japan, 1859-1906*, Kent (OH): Kent State University Press, 1998, 53-54, 88-89.

47 Townsend Harris (1804-1878). United States Consul General in Japan since 1856.

48 The original text reads 'voor de afrijis hebben zij "échangés"'.

49 There is no evidence to support Bunsen's claim that Portman was Harris's first choice as Dutch Interpreter at the United States Legation. Portman had been recommended to him by Commodore Perry in 1855, but Harris appears to have chosen Heusken instead after consulting with the Reverend Thomas de Witt Talmage of the North Reformed Dutch Church in New York. William Elliot Griffis: *Townsend Harris: First American Envoy in Japan*, Boston/ New York: Houghton, Mifflin & Co., 1895, 20. It is not entirely clear why Harris passed over Portman. Statler suggests Portman's tendency to parade 'his experience and his own ideas about how to deal with the Japanese' and his desire 'to improve his knowledge of Japanese women' as two possible reasons. Oliver Statler: *Shimoda Story*, Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle Co., 1971, 29-30.

down their houses and making off with their property. Even though the government now admits to knowing that a conspiracy of this kind existed and has also captured one or two conspirators, they still said that the danger to us was great and that every precautionary measure had to be taken. A large number of soldiers was posted around the legations and in the guardhouses, and anybody who did not belong in Yedo was not allowed to spend the night there. Whenever we went out for a ride there were always numerous yakunin following us on horseback, and with the exception of Heer Heusken nobody in Yedo went out in the evening.⁵⁰ It is difficult to comprehend the entire affair, and perhaps it only has the object of frightening the foreigners away from Yedo, thereby making them so afraid that they will not return to Yedo at a later date (1 January 1863) to conduct trade, and enabling the Japanese government at the same time to reduce its expenditure and responsibility by lodging the [foreign] ministers together. Perhaps it was the beginning of a plan to expel all the Europeans from Japan by violence or by frightening them. It is also possible that the opposition to the Taikun, especially the Prince of Mito's men, wished to provoke a war by murdering foreigners and overthrow the government in the confusion which would follow.

On 17 February, after a stormy voyage lasting 18 days, we sailed into the magnificent bay of Nagasaki where we stayed for one week. The views from the highest mountains around Nagasaki are among the most beautiful in the world. The Vice-Consul for the Netherlands, Metman⁵¹ (General-Consul De Wit⁵² was still in Yokohama) and Dr. Pompe van Meerdevoort⁵³ treated us to a very pleasant party in Mogi, a few miles distant from Nagasaki, and we were befriended by the Dutch everywhere, with the officers from the brig Cachelot, with Consul Polsbroek⁵⁴ in Kanagawa as well as with General-Consul de Wit. On 28 February the pilot ran our [ship] Arcona onto a sand bank in the Yangtse-kiang and it was only with the greatest difficulty that we were able to extricate ourselves on 1 March and moor in Shanghai. There we made the necessary preparations to enter into negotiations here which, so I hope, will end favourably.

50 Heusken's normal routine was to dine with the Prussians at Akabane and then return to the United States Legation at Zenpukuji at around 8.30 pm. Eulenburg 1900, 150.

51 Johannes Petrus Metman (1835-1897).

52 Jan Karel de Witt (1819-1884).

53 Johannes Lijdius Cathrinus Pompe van Meerdervoort (1829-1908). From 1857 to 1862, he served as medical officer at the Dutch settlement in Deshima and taught western medicine at the Kaigun Denshūjo in Nagasaki. See J.L.C. Pompe van Meerdervoort: *Vijf jaren in Japan (1857-1863). Bijdragen tot de kennis van het Japansche Keizerrijk en zijne bevolking*, Leiden: Van den Heuvell & Van Santen, 1867-68, 2 deelen. A partial English translation has been published: Elizabeth Pino & John Zimmerman Bowers (trans.): *Doctor on Deshima: Selected Chapters from J.L.C. Pompe van Meerdervoort's Vijf jaren in Japan*, Tokyo: Sophia University, 1970.

54 Dirk de Graeff van Polsbroek (1833-1916). See Herman J. Moeshart (ed.): *Journal van Jonkheer Dirk de Graeff van Polsbroek, 1857-1870: Belevenissen van een Nederlands diplomaat in het negentiende eeuwse Japan*, Assen: Van Gorcum, 1987.

I send my warmest greetings to Wilhelm and Maria. Perhaps Wilhelm will have already completed his examination. I thank you warmly for your friendly condolences for our family misfortune last year.⁵⁵ Your flowers gave much pleasure to my mother. God grant you many good things during this year!

Believe me always to be your affectionate friend

Theodor von Bunsen

P.S. I wish that the bad [quality of the] ink was also a good excuse for the numerous mistakes in this letter!

Please pass on my best wishes to Mijnheer Hoffmann etc.⁵⁶

Leemans was not to hear from Bunsen again until after the East Asian Expedition returned to Berlin in May 1862. A letter to Leemans from Frances von Bunsen on 22 November 1861 provides a brief sighting of her son at the end of his stay in Tientsin:

'I have not heard from Theodore for more than a month: the last letters were still from the dreadful climate of Tientsin, the end of August, when the heat had diminished, & my son had happily escaped without illness, & was in the hope of speedily embarking, though uncertain whether the voyage to Nangasaki was to be by way of Pekin or not. Afterwards I believe the point in view to be Siam. I am not aware whether the Expedition would be commissioned to touch at Batavia or not.'⁵⁷

The next letter Leeman received from Bunsen is dated 1 February 1863 and reveals the effort it now required on the latter's part to conduct their correspondence in Dutch:

'Now that I can no longer speak Dutch to the Japanese,⁵⁸ I have completely forgotten it, and since I gave my dictionaries to them as a present, you must not be surprised at the mistakes that are contained in this letter. I would rather have written in German in order to be understood by you, but I thought it would appear as if I had completely forgotten everything that I learned in Leiden, and this I must avoid.'⁵⁹

⁵⁵ Further misfortune was to afflict the Bunsen family during Theodor's absence, when his twin sister, Theodora von Ungern-Sternberg, died on 26 March 1862.

⁵⁶ Theodor von Bunsen to Leemans, 23 May 1861. *Leemans MSS*, 19.5.1/17.

⁵⁷ Frances von Bunsen to Leemans, 22 November 1861. *Leemans MSS*, 19.5.1/17. The original text is in English.

⁵⁸ Bunsen may be referring to the Japanese scholars with whom he came into contact during 1860-61, or to members of the Japanese Embassy to Europe, whom he and August zu Eulenburg escorted during their official visit to Prussia in the summer of 1862.

⁵⁹ Bunsen to Leemans, 1 February 1863. *Leemans MSS*, 19.5.1/17.

However, as the memory of what he had learned in Leiden began to fade, it became increasingly unavoidable for Bunsen to resort to his native language, and after 1863 he conducted the remainder of his correspondence with Leemans in German.

One is left with the feeling that Bunsen's letters to Leemans during the expedition to East Asia would have been more frequent – and less ungainly – if he had not placed himself under the burden of writing in a language in which his fluency was gradually diminishing, especially as the opportunities to practice Dutch became significantly less frequent after the Prussians left Japan in February 1861. While it is regrettable that Bunsen did not furnish Leemans with any reports of the subsequent activities of the East Asian Expedition in China and Siam, he has at least left us with a distinctive and personal account of the Prussians' stay in Japan which can now be added to those provided by many of the other participants. Through his own words – though not in his own language – Eulenburg's second attaché gains a few more contours.