



Notes:

The following materials by John Crawfurd have been drawn and organized from his notes to his *Embassy* account.

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**On the Peoples and Cultures of the Kingdom of
Burma**

John Crawfurd

The extensive area of the Burman territory is inhabited by many distinct nations, or tribes, of whom I have heard not less than eighteen enumerated. The most considerable of these are the proper Burmans, the Peguans or Talains, the Shans or people of Lao, the Cassay, or more correctly Kathé, the Zabaing, the Karian, correctly called Karens, the Kyens, the Yo, and the Lawà. These are numerous and civilized, nearly in the order in which I have enumerated them. Differing as they do in language, and often in manners, customs, and religion, they have, with distinctions not always perceptible to a stranger, the same physical type. This is the common type of all the tribes which lie between Hindostan and China. In this respect they differ widely from the Chinese and Hindoos, and approach more nearly to the Malays, although from these also they differ so considerably, that even a stranger may distinguish them without difficulty. Taking the Burmans for this character, they may be described as of a short, stout, and active, but still well-proportioned form. Their complexion is never of an intense black, but commonly brown. The hair of the head, like that

of other tropical nations, is black, coarse, lank, and abundant. There is a little more beard, and generally more hair on other parts of the body, than among the tribes of the same race lying to the south of them,—such as the Siamese and people of Lao. The climate and physical aspect of the countries occupied by the different tribes constituting the subjects of the Burman empire, do not seem to produce any material difference in their physical form. One might expect to find the inhabitants of the dry and elevated country principally occupied by the true Burmans, larger and more athletic than those of the marshy champaign principally occupied by the Talains. This, however, is by no means the case; and if there be any difference, it is in favour of the latter, who are alleged to be a more robust and active race than the true Burmans.

The Burmans are greatly inferior to the Hindoos in civilization, and still more so to the Chinese. They are, as far as a stranger can judge, nearly upon an equality with the Siamese; and to compare them with a more distinct and distant people, they seem to me to approach more nearly to the condition of the inhabitants of the island of Java than to that of any other foreign people. They are, at the same time, more improved than the other civilized inhabitants of the eastern Archipelago. With respect to the whole of this last group, however, it must be remarked that the type of their civilization is of so different a kind from that of the Hindoo Chinese nations, that no fair comparison can well be instituted between them. For example, the country of the Burmans, from its fertility and continuity, is generally more favourable to social improvement than that of the Indian islanders.

The laws and political institutions of the Burmans, bad as they are, are commonly better than those of the Indian islanders; yet the Burmans are greatly inferior to the latter in enterprise, courage, personal independence, and even morality. In one respect they agree; that is, in the comparative absence of religious or political bigotry and freedom from unsocial customs. The brief delineation of their customs, arts, and institutions, contained in the following chapters, will, however, convey a more accurate notion of the actual social condition of the Burmans than any general description.

The first point which I shall advert to is that of dress. One barbarous practice, that of tattooing or staining the skin of an indelible tint, obtains amongst the Burmans and Talains: it is

confined to the men. This operation commences as early as the age of seven, eight, and nine years, and is often continued to thirty-five and forty. The principal tattooing is confined to that portion of the body from the navel to below the knee. What is on this is of a black or blue colour. The tint is given by a mixture of lamp black, procured from the soot of sessamum oil, and the gall of a fish—the *mirga* of India. The figures imprinted consist of animals, such as lions, tigers, monkeys, and hogs, with crows, some fabulous birds, Nats, and Balus or demons. Occasionally there are added cabalistic letters and figures intended as charms against wounds. The figure is first painted on the skin, which is afterwards punctured by needles dipped in the pigment. The arms and upper part of the body are more sparingly tattooed, and generally of a red colour, the tint being given by vermilion. The process is not only painful but expensive. The tattooing of as much surface as can be covered by “six fingers” costs a quarter of a tical, when the operation is performed by an ordinary artist; but when by one of superior qualifications, the charge is much higher. Not to be thus tattooed is considered by the Burmans as a mark of *effeminacy*, and there is no one who is not so more or less. Among the nations to the eastward of the Burrumpooter, the custom seems originally to have been confined to the Burmans and Talains. The nations whom they have subjugated have, more or less, followed their example,—such as the Kyens, the Aracanese, and the Shans. Neither the Siamese, the Kambojans, the people of Lao, generally, the Cassays, or the Aracanese, before their conquest, appear to have practised tattooing.

Another practice, which seems universal with both sexes, and with all the races inhabiting the Burman territories, is that of boring the lobe of the ear, so as to make a very large, and unseemly aperture, into which is stuffed a gold or silver ornament, or in lieu of them a bit of wood, or a roll of paper, gilt, or otherwise. If the aperture in question happen not to be previously occupied, a man or woman, after smoking half a segar, is often seen thrusting the remainder into the ear for future use.

The custom of blackening the teeth indelibly, appears at one time to have been general among the Burmans, but is now grown out of use. Black teeth are not at present considered becoming, but the contrary. Young men and women, before the age of marriage, keep their teeth white and clean; but after that time, it would be

considered an unbecoming affectation of youth in the one sex, and an indication of loose immodesty in the other, to be too nice upon this point. The constant use of the betel preparation, indeed, soon makes the teeth black and ugly enough, when its effects are not counteracted by care and cleanliness, and this is rarely the case.

The Burmans are great consumers of the betel mixture. The preparation, as used by them, consists of the following ingredients :—the leaf of the betel pepper, the areca nut, catechu, lime, and a little tobacco. The betel pepper is produced in great abundance throughout the Burman territory. The areca thrives well in the southern provinces, and yields a nut best suited to the Burman taste; but the produce is inadequate to the consumption, and large quantities are imported from Dacca, Chittagong, and the Straits of Malacca, the last being the lowest priced and least esteemed.

The practice of smoking tobacco obtains universally amongst the Burmans of all ranks—of both sexes—and of almost all ages; for I have seen children scarcely three years old, who seemed quite familiar with it. The mode of smoking is by segars, which are composed of shredded tobacco, rolled up in the leaf of another plant,—I believe, a species of ficus. Sometimes a little of the root of the tobacco is mixed up with the shredded leaf.

With respect to dress, the Burmese are, upon the whole, well, and not unbecomingly clad. In this last respect, however, their costume will bear no comparison with the flowing and graceful garments of the western nations of India; nor does it by any means convey the same notion of comfort and civility as the costume of the Chinese, or even of the Tonquinese and Cochin Chinese. Too, much of the body is left naked, which gives an impression of barbarism; and the texture and pattern of the fabrics worn, although substantial and durable, are comparatively coarse and homely.

The principal part of the male dress is called a Pus'ho. This covers the loins reaching half-way down the leg. It consists of a double piece of cloth composed of silk, cotton, or a mixture of both, about ten cubits long. This is loosely wrapped about the body and secured only by having one portion of it tacked under another, one extremity being allowed to hang down loosely before.

The second part of a man's dress is called an Engi, and consists of a frock with sleeves. This comes down below the knees, and is tied with strings in front. It generally consists of white cotton

cloth; but the great, on occasions of ceremony, have it made of velvet, and occasionally of broad-cloth. In the cold weather, these jackets, when of cotton, are quilted; and a considerable number of them, always dyed black, and highly glazed, are brought to Ava, ready made, from the country of the Shans.

The head-dress is a small square handkerchief, put on in the manner of a turban, but leaving the upper part of the head bare. This is now most commonly made of English book-muslin, or English or Madras printed handkerchiefs.

The principal portion of a woman's dress goes under the name of a Thabi, and is a petticoat, more or less open in front, according to the condition of the wearer. With the lower classes, both for economy and convenience, the breadth is so scanty, that in walking, the knee at least, and often half-way up the thigh, is exposed to view at every step. With the higher orders, this portion of the dress, because ampler, is consequently more decent, but it is also less convenient. Women use an Engi, or frock, somewhat different in form and shorter than that of the men. They generally wear no head-dress. Men and women wear the hair long; the first tying it in a knot on the crown of the head, and the last at the back. Some Burmese beaux tie the knot to a side. Sandals are frequently used by both sexes, but neither shoes, boots, or stockings, under any circumstances. Umbrellas also are in very general use among all classes. These are among the principal insignia of rank or office; and the description of them, from those of plain brown varnished paper, to red, green, gilded, and plain white, the royal colour, distinguishes the quality of the wearer.

The habit of the priesthood differs entirely from that of the laity, but has been so often described, that I need not recur to it. The head has not only no covering, but is, or ought to be, closely shaved, and the only protection to it when abroad is a small fan of palmyra-leaf. The colour appropriated for the dress of the priesthood is yellow, and it would be deemed nothing less than sacrilege in any one else to use it: so peculiarly sacred is it held, that it is not uncommon to see one of the people pay his devotions in due form to the old garment of a priest on a bush, hung out to dry, or to one after, being washed. At the conferences at Yandabo which led to peace, the Burmese negotiators made a formal complaint to the British Commissioners, that some of our camp-followers had been seen wearing yellow clothes! It may be

considered as rather a curious, coincidence, that yellow is a frequent if not favourite colour in the dress of the lowest outcasts among the Hindus.

The progress made by the Burmese in the useful arts is but very moderate. The whole process of cleaning cotton, of spinning, weaving, and generally of dying, are performed by women; the only men who are weavers being the captive Cassays. The loom is very rude, commonly resembling that used in India; but the artisans are much inferior in dexterity to those of that country, and such a thing as fine linen of native manufacture is never seen among the Burmese. Cotton cloths are manufactured for sale all the way along both sides of the Irawadi, from Ngamyagyi to Shwe-daong;—where-ever, in short, the raw material is cheap and abundant. All the cottons fabrics manufactured by the Burmans are comparatively high-priced; and in general, British piece-goods can be sold cheaper, even in the interior of the country, than the domestic manufacture.

The best raw silk is brought from China, an inferior kind from Lao, and some is prepared in different parts of Pegu, especially at Lain and Shwe-gyen. The principal places for manufacturing silk cloths are Ava, Monchabo, Pakok'ho, Pungan, and Shwe-daong. The finest fabrics of silk are made at Ava, or rather Amarapura, where Chinese raw silk is the material; and the coarsest at Shwe-daong, where it is the produce of Pegu. The women are the manufacturers of silk cloths as well as of those of cotton. In general, Burman silk manufactures are coarse, high-priced, but durable. A few silks are imported into the country by the Shans and Kyens: and satins and velvets, in small quantities, by the Chinese, chiefly for the use of the Court. I may notice it as rather a remarkable fact, that such of the silk fabrics of the Kyens as we saw, were of a much finer and better texture than those of their more civilized masters the Burmans: they consisted of rich and heavy crimson scarfs, or narrow shawls, occasionally embroidered with gold, and not destitute of beauty.

The prevailing colours in silks and cottons are blue, red, yellow, green, brown, and black. Blue is invariably given by indigo; red by sasflower, partly produced in the country, but mostly imported from Bengal; yellow by turmeric, and by the wood of the jack-tree, (*Artocarpus integrifolia*). The common mordant is alum, which is imported from China. Burman colours are generally very fugitive,

especially with cottons. The patterns are all stripes and checks, a decided mark of rudeness. Printing is unknown to them.

The common coarse unglazed earthenware of the Burmans is the best of the kind which I have seen in India, and is very cheap. It is used for cooking utensils, and for keeping grain, oil, salt, pickled-fish, and similar commodities. A better description of pottery, strong and glazed, has been manufactured at Martaban, Pagan, Sengko, Senkaing, Monchabo, and Tharet. Some articles of this description, which have been long well known in other parts of India under the name of "Pegue jars," are so large as to contain two hundred viss of oil, or about one hundred and eighty-two gallons. A few of them are even of such magnitude, that it has been alleged, that the children of Europeans, born in the country, have been smuggled away in them, in former times, to elude the Burman law. The Burmans are unacquainted with the art of making any kind of porcelain, however coarse. What they use is Chinese, imported by junks into Rangoon from the European settlements in the Straits of Malacca, this being too bulky an article to be imported by land-carriage direct from China.

Iron-ore is obtained, and smelted in the vicinity of the mountain Paopa and the district of Mreduh. It costs at Ava, according to quality, which is very various, from eight ticals to fifteen per hundred viss, or three hundred and sixty-five pounds; This loses, when forged, from thirty to fifty per cent. in weight. The Burmans cannot manufacture steel, which, as well as some iron, is imported from Bengal in considerable quantity. The principal places where cutlery, always coarse and rude, is manufactured, are Ava and Pagan: here swords, spears, knives, scissors, and carpenters' tools are fabricated: muskets, or rather matchlocks, are also made at Ava. The best-tempered swords are imported from the country of the Shans. A Burman matchlock is generally sold for ten ticals of flowered silver, or about twenty-five shillings; and an old English musket at from fifteen to twenty ticals, or from thirty-seven shillings, and sixpence to fifty shillings.

Brass-ware is not very extensively used by the Burmans in their domestic economy, earthen and lackered wares being, in a good measure, substituted for it. Still, however, there is a considerable consumption of it for such articles as candlesticks, spit-pots, vessels for carrying water to the pagodas, &c. We saw a considerable manufactory of such articles a few miles from

Sagaing. The copper which is used for this purpose is brought from China, and the zinc from Lao. Bells are very frequent in the temples and monasteries. The tin made use of in the composition of these is brought from Tavoy and Lao. I may here notice, that we found in the market of Ava, without ascertaining to what purpose it was put, a considerable quantity of antimony, reduced to the metallic state, and said to be brought from Lao. As the process of preparing this article is one of considerable difficulty, the possession of it by the Shans would seem to imply a considerable share of skill in metallurgy. I remember, that when an ore of this metal was brought to Singapore, the Chinese at that place; seemed wholly unacquainted with the art of reducing it.

Gold and silver ornaments are manufactured in every considerable place in the country, but particularly at the capital. Some of the gold ornaments which we saw at the latter were massive and rather handsome, particularly the different vessels for holding the various materials of the betel preparation. In general, however, the jewellery of the Burmans is not only inferior in taste and workmanship to that of several other parts of India, but decidedly clumsy and rude.

Three descriptions of paper are used by the Burmans. The first is a domestic manufacture, made from the fibres of the young bamboo. This is a substance as thick as pasteboard, which is rubbed over with a mixture of charcoal and rice-water. Thus prepared, it is written upon with a pencil of steatite as we write on a slate. The impression may be blotted out with the moistened hand, and the paper is again fit to be written upon. This process, if the paper be good, may be often repeated. Another description of paper is imported from Mainkaing, one of the tributary states of Lao. This is a strong, white, blotting-paper, and is universally used for packages, for the decorations of coffins, and for making ornaments offered to the temples and exhibited at festivals. The Chinese import stained paper, also used for ornaments offered to the temples and for decorating coffins.



The State of Burmese Knowledge

In reference to the state of Burman knowledge, I ought not to omit an intense passion for alchemy, of which the object is to

transmute the baser into the precious metals. [The search for an elixir of immortality forms no part of Burman alchymy. This would be contrary to their religion; for, according to their system, immortality, or even longevity, would be a misfortune and not a blessing.]¹ From our earliest acquaintance with the Burmans, they seem to have been tainted with this folly; persons of all ranks, who can afford to waste their time and money, engage in it; and even his present Majesty and his predecessors have not disdained thus to occupy their leisure hours. A question frequently put to us was, whether we, the English, did not understand the art of converting iron into silver, and copper into gold. They observed our comparative wealth, and thought they could not so rationally account for it, as by imagining that we were adepts in the art of transmuting metals. A similar question, "Can the English convert iron into silver?" was put by the Burmese courtiers to an intelligent Armenian merchant who had long resided among them; and who understood their language perfectly. His reply was, that the English understood the art perfectly, but not in the sense in which they meant it. He took an English penknife out of his pocket, and threw it down on the table before them, observing, that it was worth more than its weight in silver, and that this was an example of the skill of the English in converting the base into the precious metals. [When the Burmese perceived us collecting minerals and fossils, they pronounced at once, both chiefs and people, that our certain object was to convert them into gold and silver. That our object was nothing more than the gratification of a rational curiosity, was a notion so strange and foreign to their own habits and ideas, that no reasoning could convince them. of the sincerity of our assurances.]²

A smattering of education is very common amongst the Burmans; perhaps more so than among any people of the East. This is chiefly owing to the institution of monasteries, and it being considered a kind of religious duty in the priests to instruct youth. Boys begin to go to school from eight to ten years of age, but generally at the latter. The monasteries are the only schools, and the priests generally the only teachers. Education is entirely eleemo-synary, and the children even live at the Kyaongs, the parents only making occasional presents to the priests. In return

¹ The sentence within brackets is introduced from Crawford's note at this point.

² The section within brackets is introduced from Crawford's note at this point.

for education, the children serve their tutors in a menial capacity which, whatever their rank, is considered no discredit, but the contrary. They are instructed for about six hours in the day. Education consists in reading, writing, and a slight knowledge of the four common rules of arithmetic. A little reading is so frequent, that there is not one man in ten who is not possessed of it. Writing is less common, but this also is pretty general. The nuns, or female priestesses, instruct girls in reading; but few females are taught to write: even reading is not general among them. My friend Mr. Judson, after a long experience, gives the following account of the state of education amongst the Burmans:

Scholars are considered capable of reading and writing, when able to repeat and copy the *Then-pong-kyi*, or "spelling-book," and the *Men-ga-la-thok*, or "moral lessons." Their arithmetical knowledge is almost confined to the multiplication table. A few who aspire to the character of "learned," advance from the elements of knowledge to the study of *Baden* or astrology, and that of the Pali language. This last is studied in the *Thaddu-kyau*, or grammar in eight divisions, and in various parts of the Budd'hist scriptures. The *ne plus ultra* in Burman education is the study of the *Then-gyo*, or "book of metaphysics."



Geography of the Burmans

Of navigation, or geography, the Burmese are, of course, supremely ignorant. Nearly the whole extent of their foreign adventures is bounded to the south by Prince of Wales's Island, and to the north by the Hoogley. To these places, but especially to the latter, they make annual voyages in the fine season, creeping all the while along the coast, and in sight of it; and in their adventures to Calcutta, commonly seeking protection from the open sea in the internal navigation of the Sunderbunds.

The possession of a sea-coast, comprehending at least one-third of the Bay of Bengal, with five good harbours and several navigable rivers, it might have been expected, would have been sufficient to have converted the Burmese into a maritime and

commercial people; but the badness of their political institutions far more than outweigh all these natural advantages. Of their acquaintance with foreign countries, an anecdote related by the late Major Canning will show the extent. This officer was deputed by the Government of Bengal, in 1813, to explain to the Court of Ava the nature of our system of blockade. In a conference which ensued, one of the Burman Ministers put the following question to the Envoy:—

Supposing a Burman ship, in her voyage to China, should happen to be dismasted off the island of Mauritius, would she be allowed by the British blocking squadron, to enter that port?

I have mentioned in my journal, that they possess rude maps of several portions of their own country, the only favourable deduction to be made from which fact is that they are not insensible to the utility of such documents; Notwithstanding this, however, we found the persons who negotiated with us, and they were undoubtedly among the most intelligent of the Burman courtiers, extremely ignorant, even in regard to the topography of those portions of the country which became the immediate subjects of discussion, and concerning which it was their particular duty at the time to have informed themselves.



Astronomy, Time, and Measurements

In the higher branches of knowledge, the attainments of the Burmese, as may well be expected, are extremely limited: their astronomy and astrology, such as they are, are, for the most part, borrowed from the Hindus. Indeed, from the earliest times, the court has always maintained a number of Bramins from Bengal, who have the exclusive direction of such matters. The Burmese kalendar [sic] is as follows: A common year consists of twelve months, each month being alternately of twenty-nine and thirty days: the year, therefore, consists of three hundred and fifty-four days, or is a lunar one. In order to preserve the solar time, the

fourth month of every third year is doubled, which brings the year to three hundred and sixty-four days: the additional day and hours are supplied as occasion demands by a royal edict, under the advice of the Bramins. These, by custom, are added to the third month of the year. The names of the Burmese months are as follow; viz. Ta-gu, Ka-chon, Na-yon, Wa-cho, Wa-gaong, Tau-thaleng, Tha-den-kywot, Ta-chaong-mon, Nat-dau, Pya-tho, Ta-bodwai, and Ta-baong. The Burmese do not, like us, and the western nations of Asia, enumerate the days of the entire month; they divide each month into two parts, an increasing and a waning moon; and it is of these subdivisions that the days are enumerated. The first day of a month, for example, will be the first of the increasing moon; and the sixteenth, the first of the waning moon. In each month there are four days of public worship, when the people repair to pay their devotions at the temples; namely, the new moon, the eighth of the increase, the Full moon, and the eighth of the wane. By far the most important of these holidays are those of the new and full moon. The Burmese have, a week of seven days; of which last, the names correspond in sense, although not in name, with those of our own and the Hindu week. The native terms are, Ta-nen-ga-nwa, Ta-neng-la, En-ga, Bud-da-hu, Kya-tha-ba-da, Thaok-kya, and Cha-na; These may be translated, the days of the Sun and Moon, and of the planets Mars, Mercury, Jupiter, Venus, and Saturn. The natural day is divided by the Burmese into sixty parts, called *Nari*. Thus subdivided, it commences with the dawn, and according to the season of the year, more or fewer of the divisions in question are allotted, respectively to the day or the night. The longest day or night consists of thirty-six *Naris*, and the shortest of twenty-four. A popular division of the day is into eight watches, of which four are allotted to the night, and as many to the day. Each watch consists of three hours; and the day, thus reckoned, commences with the dawn. The time-keeper employed by the Burmese is a copper cup, perforated at the bottom, and placed in a vase of water, which sinks to a particular mark at the close of each *Nari*, when a great bell, suspended from a tall belfry close to the palace, is struck. This mode of keeping time is evidently derived from the Hindus. There is a regular establishment at Ava for this particular service; in reference to which there is a curious custom observed from time immemorial among the persons employed in this service. If the

person in immediate charge of the time-keeper commit any error, his companions are at liberty to carry him off and sell him at once in the public market. The sale, however, is merely a mock one, the price being always fixed at a very trifling amount, so that the offender may easily ransom himself without much difficulty; and, in fact, he does so, by making his companions a present of some rice, fish, and other necessaries. The Burmese have, at present, no division of time into cycles, like their neighbours the Siamese, Kambojans, and others. Such however seems in remote times to have prevailed as appears by the evidence of some ancient inscriptions.

The Burmese have no less than four epochs: the first of these, called the grand epoch, corresponds with the year 691 before Christ. This is alleged to have been founded by King An-ja-na, the grandfather of Gautama. The second is the sacred epoch, which dates from the death of Gautama, and corresponds with the year before Christ 543. The alleged founder of this was a king named by the Burmese Ajatasat. The third epoch is called the era of Prome, and is said to have been established—by a king named Sumundri, (of the sea). This corresponds with the year of Christ 79; and although supposed by the Burmese to be of native origin, there is no doubt but that it is the era of Salivana, or Saka, borrowed from the Hindus of the southern peninsula of India. The fourth and last epoch, is the vulgar and Burman one—that in most frequent use. It corresponds with the year of Christ 639, and is said to have been established by a king of Pagan, named Pup-pa-chau-ra-han. In a manuscript chronological table, of which a translation will be given in the Appendix, all these four epochs are included.

The following is a sketch of the measures and weights in use amongst the Burmans. The measures of distance are these; viz.

10 Cha-k'hyis, or hair-breadths=1 N'hon (sesamum-seed)
 6 N'hons=1 Mo-yau
 4 Mo-yaus=1 T'hit (finger-breadth)
 8 T'hits=1 Maik (hand-breadth)
 1 ½ Maiks=1 T'hwa (span)
 2 T'hwas=1 Taong (cubit)
 4 Taongs=1 Lan (fathom)
 7 Taongs=1 Ta (bamboo)
 20 Tas=1 Ok-tha-pa

20 Ok-tha-pas=1 Kosa
 4 Kosas=1 Gawot
 40 Gawots=1 Ujana
 7000 Taongs, or cubits= 1 Taing

The finger-breadth, above alluded to, is that of the fore-finger taken at the middle point. The hand-breadth includes the extended thumb. These two, with the span, the cubit, the bamboo, and the taing, are the measures in most frequent use. The royal cubit, which is the standard, was exhibited to us at the conferences, and, upon being carefully compared, was found to measure exactly $19 \frac{1}{10}$ English inches. According to this, the Burman finger-breadth is $\frac{99}{100}$ of an inch; the fathom $76 \frac{4}{10}$ inches; the bamboo $133 \frac{7}{10}$; and the taing, 2 miles, 193 yards, 2 feet, 8 inches. The Kosa and Ujana are, in all probability, from their names, borrowed from India; they are not in use.

Burmese weights are as follow:--

2 Small Rwés=1 Large Rwé
 4 Large Rwés=1 Bai
 2 Bais=1 Mu
 2 Mus=1 Mat'h
 4 Mat'hs=1 Kyat
 100 Kyats=1 Paiktha

The small rwé here named is the *Arbrus precatorius*, and the larger bean that of the *Adenantha pavonina*. The kyat is the weight which we have called the tical, and the paiktha is our vis. I believe both words are corruptions borrowed from the Mohammedan merchants of India, sojourning in the Burman country. The origin of the word tical I have not been able to ascertain. That of the other is sufficiently curious. The *p* and *v* are commutable consonants. The Mohammedan sojourners cannot pronounce the *th* of the Burmans, and always substitute an *s* for it. The *k* is mute even in the Burman pronunciation, and the final *a* is omitted by Europeans only. Thus, we have the word Paiktha commuted into Vis! This measure is equal to 3 lbs. $\frac{65}{100}$ Avoirdupois.

The representations of the different Burmese weights are uniform and well regulated. They consist of masses of brass, of

which the handle, or apex, represents the fabulous bird which is the standard of the empire.

The measures of capacity are as follow:—

2 Lamyets = 1 Lamé.

2 Lamés = 1 Salé.

4 Salés = 1 Pyi.

2 Pyis = 1 Sarot.

2 Sarots = 1 Sait.

4 Saits = 1 Ten.

This last measure is what is usually called by us “a basket,” and ought to weigh 16 viss of clean rice, or 58 $\frac{2}{5}$ lbs. Avoirdupois: it has commonly been reckoned at half-a-cwt. All grains, pulses, certain fruits, natron, salt, and lime, are bought and sold by measure—other commodities by weight.



Notes on the Burmese Religion

The Budd'hist religion, as it exists amongst the Burmans, does not appear, in any essential respect, to differ from the same worship as practised in Ceylon, Siam, and Kamboja. Its doctrines, the institution of the priesthood, and the external forms of devotion, appear to be the same. [quoted account of Judson published separately in the SBBR] In my account of Siam, I stated that I had not heard in that country of any heresy, or of the existence of any religious opinions above the level of the vulgar superstition. This is not the case in Ava. Of late years several individuals in this country have broached heretical doctrines,—attempted to reform the popular worship, and gained a considerable number of followers. The *absolutism* of the Government, however, has generally silenced these schismatics, or at least prevented any overt expression of their opinions. A few years ago, one of the leading reformers was sent for to Ava, and not being able to render a satisfactory account of his doctrines, suffered decapitation. I do not understand that the propagation of a new

religion was the object of any of these parties, but simply a reform of the old one. The reformers were generally, or I believe always, laymen. They principally decried the luxury of the priesthood, and ridiculed the idea of attaching religious merit to the building of temples, or, as they described it with some justice, "heaping together unmeaning masses of brick and mortar." The most noted of the Burmese sectaries are known by the name of Kolans. I do not know what their particular tenets are, but their doctrines have been repeatedly proscribed, and some of themselves put to death. The spirit of persecution in Ava, however, is rather political than religious. Innovation of any kind is considered dangerous to the State; and the "Lord of life and property" cannot endure that any subject should have the presumption to differ with him in opinion.

Among the Burmese, neither the Christian nor Mohammedan religions have made any progress. These forms of worship have the amplest toleration as far as strangers are concerned; but any attempt to convert, the natives soon creates insuperable difficulties, chiefly because it is viewed in the light of withdrawing them from their allegiance. The American missionaries, of late years, attempted the propagation of Christianity amongst the Burmans; and although they brought to their task a share of zeal, information, and sound judgment, which has rarely been equalled in such undertakings, and from which better hopes might have been entertained, their project failed of success. The result of this experiment, however, would seem satisfactorily to show, that bigotry, on the part of the lower orders, seems to afford little obstacle to their adoption of a new religion. Mr. Judson and his companions have now established themselves within the British possessions at Martaban, where a fair field is open to them for bestowing moral and religious instruction upon a people who certainly stand much in need of both, and are not without capacity to receive them.

As connected with the subject of religion, and forming indeed a material part of it, I may refer for a moment to what is peculiar in the funerals of the Burmese, as far as they have not been described in the Journal. In Siam, the practice of enbowelling the dead, and preserving the body embalmed, for an extravagantly long period before it is consumed on the funeral pile, is followed in regard to laymen of rank as well as to the priesthood. In Ava it is confined to the latter. The funeral pile in this case is a car on

wheels; and the body is blown away, from a huge wooden cannon or mortar, with the purpose, I believe, of conveying the soul more rapidly to heaven! Immense crowds are collected on occasions of these funerals, which, far from being conducted with mourning or solemnity, are occasions of rude mirth and boisterous rejoicing. Ropes are attached to each extremity of the ear, and pulled in opposite directions by adverse parties; one of these being for consuming the body, the other for opposing it. The latter are at length overcome, fire is set to the pile amidst loud acclamations, and the ceremony is consummated.



Burmese Sounds

The Burman alphabet follows the arrangement of the Deva-nagari. It reckons twelve vowels and thirty-three consonant characters. The first six vowels correspond exactly with the first six of the Sanscrit alphabet, and represented in Roman letters, according to the orthography of Sir William Jones, are as follow[s]: a, á, i, í, u, ú. The seventh vowel corresponds with the eleventh Deva-nagari, and is represented by e. The eighth vowel is intended to correspond with the diphthong ai of the Deva-nagari alphabet, but, in truth, is a simple vowel expressing a very different sound, and which will be found in the English word *hair*. Although a simple vowel, I can find no better substitute for it than ai, and accordingly have written it so. The characters corresponding in the Burman alphabet to what are called in the Sanscrit the diphthongs o and au, are simple vowels, of which the second is but the long sound of the first. They are found respectively in the English words *paucity* and *audience*. Another vowel, not enumerated as such by the Burmans, is of not unfrequent occurrence. This corresponds with the sound of o in *note*. In writing, it is a compound character, formed from the vowels a, i, and u. A twelfth vowel sound, corresponding with the short sound of e in pen, is of frequent occurrence, though not written. The true diphthong sounds in the Burman language are the combination of the Roman vowels ai and au, according to Sir William Jones's orthography.

The first, or guttural class of consonants corresponds exactly with that of the Deva-nagari, viz. k, k'h, g, g'h, n. These would be pronounced nearly the same by a Burman and a Hindu. Most of

the letters of the second, or palatal class, however, are pronounced very differently. The *ch* and its aspirate have a pronunciation approaching to *s*. The *j* and its aspirate approach nearer to the sound of *z*. The Burmans, in pronunciation, make no distinction between the cerebral and dental classes of consonants, pronouncing them both as dentals, and writing the former, in words derived from the Sagnscrit [sic] only. The labials correspond exactly with the same series in the Sanscrit. The greatest deviation from the Hindu pronunciation exists in the liquids and sibilants. *R*, although frequently used in writing, is almost invariably pronounced as *y*. *S* is invariably pronounced as the common *th* of English orthography; thus the Sanscrit word *desa* is always pronounced in Burman *detha*. The Deva-nagari sibilant, corresponding to the English sound of *sh*, has no existence in the Burman alphabet. The aspirate differs in no respect from that of the Deva-nagari. The last letter of the Burman alphabet corresponds with the Welsh *l* of the Sanscrit. It is seldom written, and when it is, its pronunciation differs in no respect from that of the common liquid.



Burmese Literature

Of the character of Burman literature, I can only speak from report. The greater part of it is metrical, and consists of songs, religions romances, and chronological histories. Versions of some of the first of these were made for me; but the spirit, if there really was any, in the original, so completely evaporated in translation, as hardly to leave the germ of thought or sentiment behind it. The *Wutus*, or religious romances, appear to be compositions of a more respectable order; and Mr. Judson, who had read many of them, assured me that a few were works of considerable interest and merit. A native of Mon-cha-bo, or Mok-so-bo, the birthplace of Alompra, he stated to me, if I remember well, to have been the author of the best of them. This Burmese writer had not been dead above forty years—a proof that Burmese literature is at least in no worse state than in former ages. Of the historical compositions of the Burmese I shall speak in another place. Before closing this brief notice of the language and literature of the Burmese, I should add that the language may now be easily acquired by Europeans,

from our possession of a copious dictionary and valuable grammar of it, compiled by Mr. Judson, of which an edition has been printed with the native character annexed, at the missionary press at Serampore.

