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Editorial note:

The following account of the induction ceremony for Buddhist monks was included as Appendix V in Michael Symes, *An Account of an Embassy to the Kingdom of Ava, Sent by the Governor-General of India in the Year 1795* (London: W. Bulmer & Co., 496-500). Symes, then a major in the 76th Regiment, made numerous valuable observations on Burmese culture, society, government, and history. While it is clear that he did consult the accounts of other visitors to Burma, most of his material was derived from first-hand observation or from material provided by Burmese acquaintances, and the following account was likely derived from the latter.

M.W.C.

**CAMMUAZA, or the ceremony used at the Induction of a
Birman into the Order of Priesthood, called Phonghi, or
Rhahaan (1795)**

Michael Symes

Previous to ordination the Sabiet¹ and the yellow garment of priesthood shall be delivered to the Candidate; he shall then be enjoined to repeat thrice, with a distinct voice, the following sentence to the Upizeê² that presides:

“Venerable father, I acknowledge you to be my Upizeê, my preceptor, and ghostly guide.”

Having spoken these words he shall approach the Cammuazara, or him who reads the sacred Cammua, who shall say as follows:

“O Candidate, dost thou acknowledge this to be thy Sabiet, and these thy sacred vestments?” to which the Candidate shall audibly answer “Yea.”

¹ Original footnote: A blue lackered box borne by the priests when they perambulate to collect ... provisions. See page 210.

² Original footnote: The chief or principal of the monastery.

The Cammuazara shall then command him to recede to the distance of twelve cubits, and turning towards the audience shall address them as follows:

“Let this sacred assembly of the professors of our holy religion attend to what I now impart. The Candidate who stands in your presence, humbly, and with due submission, implores of the Upizee to invest him with our holy function; and as the present time seemeth good for the purpose, and convenient unto this assembly, I will forthwith duly admonish the Candidate.”

“O thou who seekest admission into our sacred order, be attentive unto my words, and beware lest on this occasion you utter an untruth, or criminally attempt to conceal aught from our knowledge: learn that there are certain incapacities and defects, which render a person unfit to receive the holy induction; moreover, when in this reverend assembly you shall be interrogated respecting such defects, you are to answer truly, and declare whatever incapacities you may labour under, of what nature soever they may be, and how they originated; nor ought you to stand silent, or decline your head when you are interrogated, through shame or fear. Now, even at this time, in the presence of this assembly, may any one of the brotherhood interrogate you at his pleasure.”

“O Candidate, art thou affected with the leprosy, or any impure disease?”

To which the Candidate shall reply, “From such complaints I am free.”

“Hast thou the scrofula, St. Anthony's fire, any schirrous affection, cancer, or itch? Hast thou an asthma or oppression of the lungs? Hast thou any hereditary complaint arising from a tainted source of blood? Art thou sprung from dwarfs or giants, or art thou under the influence of sorcerers, evil genii or the Natt³ of the woods and the mountains?”

“From all these disqualifications I am free.”

— “O Candidate, art thou a man perfect in thy virility, and all thy members?”

“I am perfect.”

— “Art thou legitimate?”

“I am legitimate.”

³ Original footnote: Aerial spirits.

—“Art thou the bounden vassal of any lord, or the slave of any man in power?”

“I am not.”

— “Art thou free from debt?”

“I am.”

— “Have thy parents granted thee permission, and hast thou attained the complete age of twenty years?”

“My parents have consented, and I have attained the age of twenty years.”

— “Are thy vestments and Sabiet ready?”

“They are ready.”

— “O Candidate, by what appellation wilt thou be known?”

“By that of Naca (sinner).”

— “What is the title of thy Upizeê?”

“Assentriit (perfection).”

The Cammuazara shall thus proceed:

“Reverend Divines, I beseech you attend unto my words. The Candidate humbly intreats of his Upizeê admission into our holy order, and him have I duly admonished. Doth the present appear unto this assembly a meet and proper time that he should come forward?”

The Priests reply “Come forward.”

The Candidate having advanced twelve cubits shall then say, “Venerable and holy men, I, a lowly suppliant, with humility implore your aid. Oh! if pity dwell within your breasts, snatch me from the walk of death, from the ways of sinners, and place me in the Holy habitation, the seat of virtue and divine perfection.”

This intreaty shall be repeated three times, after which the reader of the Cammua thus proceeds:

“Reverend Fathers here convened, the Candidate in your presence, solicits holy orders from the venerable Upizee. It appeals that he is free from all defects, corporeal infirmities, and mental incapacities: he has likewise received the Sabiet, and the sacred vestments, and in the name, and with the sanction of the venerable Upizee, intreats induction. Let those who assent to his admission keep silence, but let such as object, and deem the Candidate a person unworthy to be received, speak out and declare their motives in presence of this assembly.”

These words shall be thrice repeated, and if no person dissent, and all are silent, the reception of the Candidate is determined on; when relinquishing his state of imperfection, he shall be translated into that of purity, and thenceforward be considered as one of the elect.

The Cammuazara shall then proceed:

— “Let the Reverend Fathers present note with precision, under what shade of the foot, what hour, day, and season this ordination has been completed. Let the Candidate attend to the four following duties which it is incumbent on him to observe; and to the faults hereafter enumerated under four heads, which he must carefully avoid.”

“First, a principal duty of our holy function consists in procuring maintenance by perambulation; by laborious and incessant motion⁴ of the muscles of the legs. You must seek gratuitous sustenance by continual motion, and whatever superfluities you collect, shall be daily bestowed by you on those who are in want. Victuals that are offered to you in particular, given to the society in general, sent with letters desiring your prayers, or presented on the hebdomadal festivals of the increasing and decreasing moon, all such, gifts may be accepted and distributed.”

To which the Candidate shall reply, “As I am instructed so will I perform.”

The reader of the Cammua thus proceeds:

—“Secondly, It is part of the duty of a priest through humility to soil his garments with dust, and wear sepulchral vestments. But should the liberality of good men munificently reward your pious labours, it shall be allowed thee to wear cloth called choma; also silk or cotton yellow cloth; yellow woollen cloth; cloth made of the bark of certain trees, or the feathers of certain birds. Such vestments thou mayest use.”

⁴ Original footnote: See page 211 [in Symes 1800].

To which the Candidate shall reply, "As I am instructed," &c.

The reader of the Cammua continues:

—"Thou shalt dwell as becometh our order, in houses built beneath the shade of the trees of the forest; in houses built of wood, or of masonry; houses having a pyramidical roof, of a triangular or quadrangular form, adorned with flowers and figures; houses raised on posts, or built on arches. Such dwellings mayest thou inhabit."

Candidate :—"As I am instructed," &c.

The reader of the Cammua:

—"Fourthly, Thou shalt turn to use such things as men cast away; and thou shalt search for healing qualities in simples, in which no virtue is supposed to exist. The following articles may be used medicinally; sweet and sour milk, oil, honey, sugar and syrups."

Candidate:—"As I am instructed," &c.

Cammuzara:

—"Being now admitted an associate of the virtuous and immaculate, thou shalt not indulge thyself in any gratification either social or solitary, after the manner of seculars; nor shalt thou frequent the company of laymen, or of women. He who acts thus can no longer be numbered among the elect: sooner shall the severed head be joined again to the neck, and life restored to the breathless body, than a Rhahaan, who committeth fornication, recover his lost purity, and be received again within the sacred pale. Beware therefore lest thou pollute thyself with the knowledge of woman."

"Again, It is forbidden thee to steal, or by any unjust means possess thyself of the property of another, even though the amount should not exceed the fourth part of a tackall; for whatsoever Phongi or Rhahaan sinneth even to that small amount, he shall be divested of his sacred character, and be expelled the brotherhood. He who is guilty of such a crime can no more be restored to his pristine state of purity, than the blasted tree can bud anew, and bear fresh flowers and fruit. Remember therefore, O Candidate, and through thy mortal journey beware of theft."

“Again, Thou shalt not deprive any animal of life; such deeds are unlawful and profane. Thou shalt not take away life even from the smallest insect, or the vilest reptile. Sooner shall the cleft rock unite its severed fragments, and become whole, than he who destroys the vital principle in any animal be readmitted into our sacred institution. Avoid with caution this heinous transgression.”

“Again, The holy professors of our religion are strictly forbidden to arrogate to themselves aught on account of the sanctity of their profession, or pretend to be endowed with any supernatural gift or power, such as Meipo, or endeavour to obtain the offering usually given to persons so endowed. Whosoever is actuated by such culpable pride shall fall like the lofty mountain palm beneath the stroke of the wood-cutter. Through life therefore, O my brother, observe these precepts, and act as thou art now commanded.”

To which the Candidate shall with humility reply, “As I am instructed, so will I perform.” --He shall then withdraw.