



Manuscripts - Kammavaca book

The earliest manuscript found in Myanmar was in the 5th century Khin Ba mound at **Thayekhittaya**. It is one inscribed with excerpts from the *Vinaya* and *Abhidhamma* (two of the three parts of the Pali *Tipitika*) on 20 gold leaves 16.5 cm in length and 4 cm in width. It had two gold covers bound together by a thick gold wire and its ends were fastened to the covers by sealing wax and small glass beads. Each leaf and corner had two holes through which the gold wire passed. This is stylistically related to two important **manuscript** types, palm-leaf manuscripts and *kammavaca*, both of which may have been produced early in the first millennium. The other important type, the *parabaik*, appears to date from the 14th century.

From at least the classical [Bagan period](#) (11th-13th centuries), specially processed leaves from the palmyra and talipot palms (*Borassus flabellifer* and *Corypha umpracula*) were employed as material on which a scribe incised with a stylus horizontal lines from **Buddhist texts**, plus other treatises. Only rarely were diagrams or drawings inscribed. The leaves were rubbed with oil, earth and soot to preserve them and darken the script. Usually the title was inscribed on the cover while the donor or author's name and the date appear at the end. The leaves, once collated, were placed between two boards to secure them; bamboo rods or string were passed through two holes bored at the center. Size and decoration varied.

[Kammavaca](#) are volumes consisting of one, five or nine extracts from the Theravadin *Vinaya*, each relating to specific ceremonies associated with monks. Noel F Singer writes that the earliest **Kammavaca** consisted of folios made of palm leaves, each of which had four lines of square-linked script; on a gold or silver background (["Kammavaca Texts: Their Covers and Binding Ribbons"](#), *Arts of Asia*, 23, May-June 1993). In the 17th century, folios began to be made of pieces of cloth coated with lacquer and painted with cinnabar, and the square letters were written in thick, black lacquer. On rare occasions, folios were of ivory. Designs in gilt which had been reserved for the ends of folios, and pages and wooden cover boards now began to appear between the lines of the text. By the second half of the 19th century, the lines of script on the folio increased to six or seven and sheets of brass or copper were introduced as folios.

Parabaik are manuscripts created from long strips of accordion-pleated paper processed from mulberry tree bark. Those for everyday use were darkened with a powdered charcoal mixture. Markings made by steatite crayons could be erased and the paper reused. *Parabik*, coated with a chalk mixture and polished, often bear beautifully illustrated Buddhist and other texts and have covers of glass-inset *thayo*.

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