Monk with acolytes listening to a boy reading from a palm leaf. Note the large awana fans of htan leaf. A circa 1875 photograph

Palm Leaf Manuscripts of Myanmar (Burma)

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Photographs and drawings y the author

Unless otherwise indicated

Asian Art

When Princess Theri Phone Hrut, the favourite daughter of Pindale (1648-1661) died in childbirth, he and her gold and silver jewellery and regalia melted down and shaped into long sheets; these were then engraved and formed the first folios of several palmed leaf volumes of the *Triptaka* (Buddhist Canon). To this day a cavity in the huge **Buddha image** in the Ngahtatgyi Pagota at Sagaig still holds that curious and valuable collection of **manuscripts** enshrined by a grieving father in 1658.

The use of palm leaf began considerably earlier, when together with writing, it was introduced in the early part of the Christian era to the two dominant ethnic groups, the **Pyu** and the **Mon**, by the Hindu colonists. Contacts with Sri Lanka and some of the great monasteries on the Indian subcontinent were later established,

Huge Buddha image in the Ngahtatgyi Pagoda at Sagaing. Gold and silver manuscripts were enshrined within it by King Pindale in 1658

The goddess Tara holding a palm leaf folio. After a painting from the 11th century Abeyadana Temple, Pagan

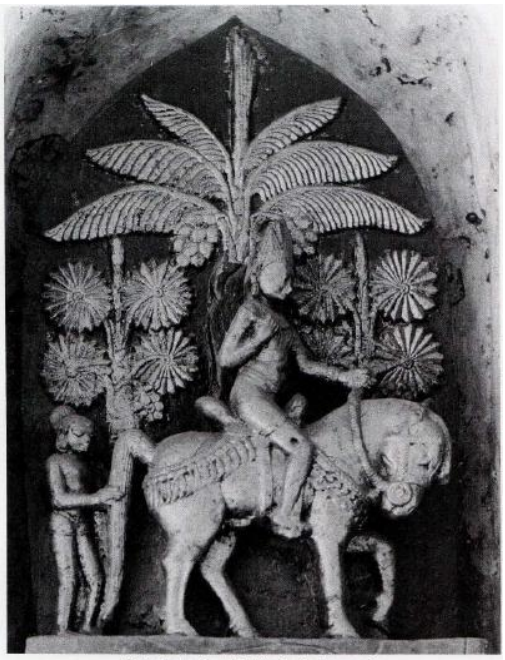
obtaining from those centres of learning manuscripts of the ***Mahayana*** and ***Hinayana*** Schools of Buddhism.

That literacy was already in existence in parts of the country is confirmed by two Chinese pilgrims of the third century A.D. In their accounts of the kingdoms surrounding India, Pi Ch'en in Lower Burma (or Lower Myanmar) was said to have been ruled by a king who, using an Indian script had written a book of three thousand words.

In 1896, two gold sheets shaped like **palm leaves** and inscribed with Pali extracts from the *Abhidhamma* (Higher Doctrine) were found at Sri Ksetra, a paleographic study of the Pyu characters wowing the influence of the fifth century Vengi-Kadamba script of South India. There is some doubt whether palm leaves were in use at so early a date, but as paper was only introduced in the thirteenth century, it must be assumed that those who were literate had access to an easily obtainable material on which to compose secular and religious texts. The leaves of the native palm which grew in profusion would have been the obvious choice.

Inscriptions in Pali, Sanksrit and Pyu discovered in Sri Ksetra would indicate that some of the one hundred monasteries which existed within the city contained manuscripts in all three languages. According to a Chinese historian, even the tattooed court dancers from the Pyu capital who appeared at the Imperial Palace at Hsian-fu in 802 A.D were said to have sung songs containing Sanskrit words and to have grouped themselves at the end to form letters of greeting.

The Candra kings (370-720 A.D) whose people were the forerunners of the present day Rakhaing (Arakanese) also used Sanskrit in their inscriptions. Ananda candra recorded the building of a large monastery complex called Anandodaya in 720 A.D at his capital Vaisali. For this great occasion, the royal donations included sacred texts "which he had caused to be written in large numbers". Although the material used by the scribes is not mentioned with Indic kingdoms, the texts were probably copied in ink on palm leaves.

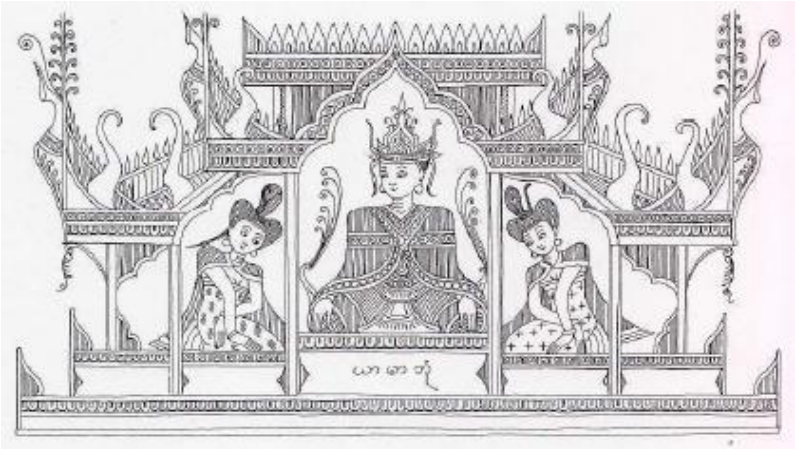


Pay (talipat) and htan (toddy) palms. Sandstone carving from the 11th century Nanda Temple, Pagan

The *Slapat Mula Muloi*, an ancient text of the Mon of Ramannadesa, in Lower Myanmar contains accounts of the creation down to pre-Buddhist times. However, the earliest known example of writing attributable to them is to be found on a fifth century votive tablet, which was discovered in the relic chamber of the Kyaik De-ap Pagoda in Yangone. Some scholars believe that the sixth century Manu Dhammathat, or book of **Buddhist law**, survived until the twelfth when the monk Sariputta, later renamed Dhammavilasa, compiled another based on that work.

In 1287, the intrigues of an adventurer called Wa Row, culminated in his seizure of the throne of Muttimanagara (Martaban). During his reign, research and scholarship was encouraged and new Mon literary works produced. At his instigation, a committee of monks' collated further information for yet another book of law called the *Wa Row Dhammathat*.

During the short spells of peace, between the incessant civil disturbances which followed succeeding reigns, secular works were written by talented courtiers like Bana Drala, while the compilation of the histories of local pagodas sacred texts and the translation of Buddhist Literature from abroad in particular Sri Lanka, were undertaken by the clergy.



Buddhist cosmology. Lord of the Yama Bon, after an incised illustration on an early 18th century palm leaf manuscript. British Library (Or. 12168)

Cesare Fedrici whom in 1566, visited the Mon city of Sri Hamsawati, which was then under the control of the Myanmar king, Sinphyumyashin (1551-1581), saw him at an audience speaking to crowds of supplicants who held palmyra leaves on which their petitions had been written with a stylus. Just before the death of this monarch in 1581, the scribes of the kingdom were summoned to the capital, where they undertook the monumental task of copying the Tripitaka for distribution to heads of state. Among the twenty-eight who received the manuscripts were the royal houses of Ayutthaya and Sukhothai whom he had subjugated.

Dark brown glazed panel depicting two monks recording the proceedings of one of the five Buddhist Councils convened after the death of Gautama. Mingun Pathodawgyi Pagoda, near Mandalay. Late 18th century

The political situation in the country soon deteriorated, resulting in misery for many; even the clergy did not escape the hand of the vandals. Tipitakalanlara (1578-1651), an eminent cleric of great learning, complained in the early part of the seventeenth century that many part of the sacred texts he had studied as a novice were no longer available, as they had been burnt.

When the Myanmar king Augzeya (1752-1760) pillaged Sri Hamsawati in 1757, most of its records and manuscripts perished. Some of the inhabitants escaped to Chiang Mai and Lampun in Thaiiland. For those fleeing south from the terror of the soldiery, the caves near Sadhuim made ideal hiding places for their literary treasures. There, the precious palm leaf volumes called sla-pat, remained concealed and forgotten of over one hundred years, slowly rotting within the damp interiors.

In 1879, search for manuscripts for the Bernard Free Library at Yangone was made by British Government officials in Lower Myanmar; surprisingly, among those collected were over fifty Mon texts on religion and history.

J.S. Furnival, in his History of Syriam, claims that between two and three hundred volumes were taken from the Pagat caves in the 1880s by Dr Forchhammer, Superintendent of Archaeology, but by 1915 it was not known what had become of them. When Taw Sein Kho, the Government Archaeologist, visited the area in 1891, he was informed that large wooden chests containing Mon manuscripts were moldering away in the innermost recesses of the caves. Some were even being used as fuel by Karen villagers living in the locality.

Major Richard Temple, who travelled the same route the following year, made further discoveries at the Pabaung, Sa, Yate and Dhammathat caves. Considering comments made by these eminent men that such material was extremely rare and valuable, it seems incredible that none of the volumes were examined and not a single one removed for safekeeping.

In the same year, Dr Blagden of London University, received a rare palm leaf manuscript entitled *Slapat rajawun datow smin ron* on the histories of the Kyak Lagun (Shwe Dagon) Pagoda and those of the kings of Sri Hamsawati, the original, now lost, had been written in 1766 by the Aboot of Aswo, one of the leading Mon literary figures of the eighteenth century. Fortunately, and official called Bala Theikti later came across the manuscript in Bangkok and brought it back to Myanmar, where his son took the precaution of having a copy made in 1846.

This valuable document also contains accounts of the Myanmar atrocities committed ad Sri Hamsawati when three thousand Mon ecclesiastics who had gathered for a religious ceremony were caught up in the siege of 1757 and massacred. Among the victims were men of learning and those skilled in the art of healing, for monks were said to have been the chief physicians in the kingdom.

Despite the burning of ***manuscripts*** at the capital, which fortunately was not a prolonged policy of the Myanmar, enough examples have survived to suggest that texts one existed in large numbers in thirty two districts of the Mon country.

A wungyi (minister) with gilded fan made from a htan palm leaf. From Syme's Embassy to Ava, 1795

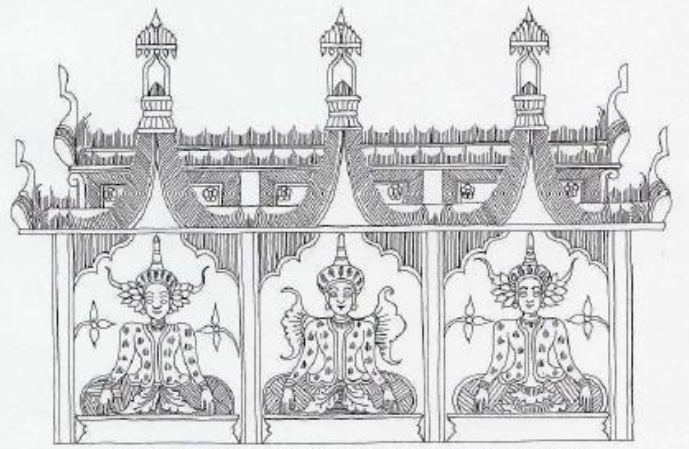
The Myanmar race owes its script to the culturally advanced Mon of the city Sadhuim, which was sacked by one of their kings, Aniruddhadeva, in 1057. If we are to believe the chronicles, the library of the vanquished monarch Manohor must have been vast, as thirty-two white elephants were said to have been used to carry away its contents, together with some relics to Pagan.

Fragments of early ***palm leaf manuscripts*** which have survived, show that they were written in ink using a square script. Although one cannot be sure at what point in time he Myanmar began inscribing with the stylus, its use in the ecclesiastical establishments within the city was already being mentioned in inscriptions of the thirteenth century. Sculptors and artists of the period often employed palm trees as a background in their works, suggesting that these were a familiar sight in and around the capital. One of the earliest examples being the bas-relief in the Nanda temple of 1901 A.D which whows the two best known varieties called *pay* (talipat) and htan (toddy) palms.

Religious fervor was high and donors of monasteries thoughtfully organized a constant supply of writing material by planting these trees in the grounds and by giving slaves whose main duties were the preparation of the leaves. The ruins of one of these buildings, known as Paybin Kyaung, or the Monastery of the Pay Tree, can still be seen. Pagan had become a centre for learning with Pali works composed by monks and lay persons, among whom were King Kyaswa (1287-1298), author of Saddabindu and his daughter the Princess of Than Pyi.

An inscription of 1273 states that it cost 2300 ticals of silver to build a monastery; 3000 ticals for set of the Tripitaka and 215 ticals for an ornamented chest to store them in. Since an acre of land could be

bought for just one tical, this was an example of the prodigious amounts the upper classes were prepared to spend in their quest for merit. Others built temples and decorated the interiors with religious paintings which show a strong affinity with the Pala era art of Bengal, Bihar and Nepal.



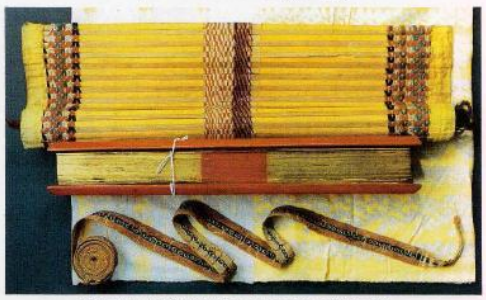
The gods of Tavatimsa (Buddhist heaven). After a folio from a 400 years old palm leaf volume with incised illustrations. Myanmar Archaeological Department

It is possible that palm leaf texts were also illuminated and although examples have not yet been found in Burma, and eleventh century manuscripts from the Nalanda monastery exists in the Bodleian Library, Oxford; the bodhisattvas with which some of the folios are decorated are believed to be the work of an artist from Pagan.

Some may question the existence of such an art-form at the Myanmar capital, since visually stimulating illustrations in sacred texts were considered distracting by Theravada monks. Nevertheless, as manuscripts intended for a monastery were usually commissioned by lay persons, the decorative contents naturally reflected their tastes.

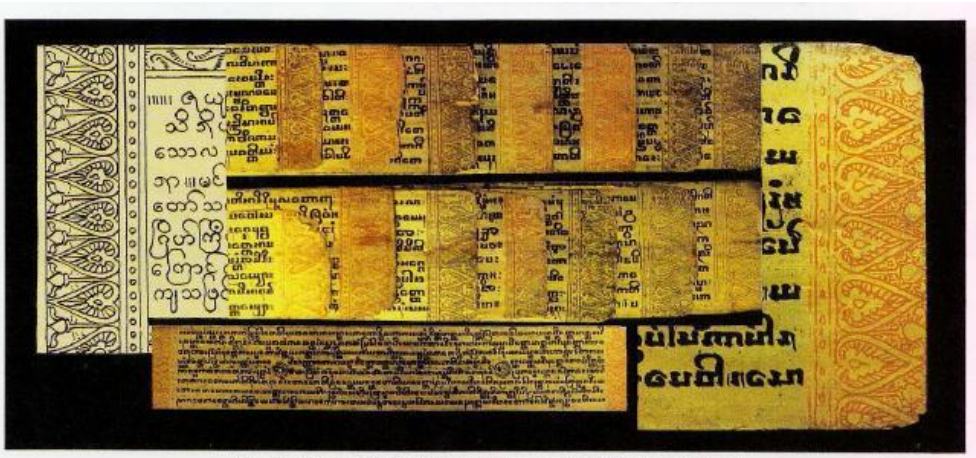
If there was indeed a small group of painters of miniatures at Pagan, requests for their services would have declined with the introduction in the fourteenth century, by the Shans, of the folding paper books which they called *puleikpeik* and on which artists subsequently demonstrated their skills.

A Buddhist heaven. Incised illustration from an early 18th century palm leaf volume. British Library (Or. 12168)



Palm leaf manuscript with stylus, wrapping cloths and binding ribbon

Palm leaves were sometimes illustrated with a stylus, as can be seen in an early eighteenth century volume (Or. 12168) now in the British Library. The folios which are hinged with thread depict scenes from Buddhist heavens and the Maha Avici hells, each ruled by a personage attended by ladies with supple limbs. The observant artist has captured for us an affection of the period when it was considered chic by young Myanmar women of the upper classes to sit with the forearm bent outwards. This posture first appeared in the murals of the Lawkahmankin Temple, Sagaing, built in the 1670s, and continued to be used until well into 1880s.



Part of the dedicatory folio of the Minyekyawdin manuscript of 1688, together with recently discovered gilded palm leaves with margins decorated in a similar style. Private collection

It was thought that earlier manuscripts of this type had not survived, but in the late 1950s a volume dated 1692 was discovered b the curator of the museum at ***Taungdwingyi***.

Another, believed to be four hundred years old, was found in a temple at Pagan. Like the example in London, these too portrayed celestials of ***Tavatimsa*** and the demonic forces of hell, but depicted in costumes of the sixteenth and seventeenth century respectively. Although produced at different periods in time all three works still contain echoes of the Pala style of representing divinities, seated within multi-tiered shrines.

Horoscopes made from palm leaves. Second half of the 19th century

Satpalwar wrapping cloth reinforced with strips of bamboo. Early 19th century. Royal Asiatic Society

Gilded manuscript with binding ribbon. 19th century

After the depredations of the early part of the seventeenth century, the second half saw a surge in the translation of Pali works into the vernacular; the first Myanmar law book, written by the minister Kaingsa and called the Mahayazar Dhammathat, also made its appearance. Following the founding of the Konbaung dynasty in 1752, literary works from neighboring countries continued to be translated and new ones composed. In 1762, a monk named Shin Nyana obtainedfrom a scholar known as the Padee Sayagyi, manuscripts among which were edicts and reports compiled during the previous Nyaungyan dynasty, the Crown archives of which had been destroyed in the Mon invasion of 1752. Collectively called *Zabudipaushaung kyan*,these documents later became the basis for guidelines needed by the new administration for setting up a stable government and stamping out corruption among the privileged classes.

By 1782, the number of volumes in the royal collection increased considerably, necessitating the uilding of a library at **Amarapura**, called the Yadanabon Pitaka Taik. A *Pitakataik Soe*, or royal archivist, was also installed and assisted by his scribes and forty monks was “employed in translating, copying and in the preparation of manuscripts on a variety of subject, the texts which were either incised, written in black ink, gold, silver or lacquer.”

Michael Symes, who visited the building in 1797, said that the outer galleries alone contained about one hundred storage chests. Myanmar records claim that some of these held sacred texts brought back from Sri **Hamsawati** by Aungzeya in 1757, and that the accusations made by the Mon of the eradication of their literary works by this king were unfounded.

Newly crowned Myanmar kings were compelled by tradition to commission a set of the ***Tripitaka*** for presentation to a monastery of enshrinement within a pagoda. Scrupulously following ancient precedent, a temporary building was constructed for the monks and scribes. Ink for the text, which was always written in a square script with a bamboo pen, was obtained by burning the robes of the parents of the monarch, a form of filial piety practiced by the royal family. The ashes were then mixed with water, resin of the ***tammar*** *(Azadirachta indica)* and the gall of the ***ngyagyin*** fish (*Cirrhina morigala*) which ensured a glossy finish.

A committee of monks headed by the Rajaguru, the king's preceptor, confirmed the texts of the originals to be copied, while a relay of scribes worked throughout the day.

Boy reading from a palm leaf manuscript. A circa 1893 photograph

As each page was completed, it was checked and stored in the library to await the dedicatory ceremony. All who took part in the preparation of the manuscripts were fed with food prepared within the women's quarters of the palace and brought to the site in huge red and black lacquer containers. Festivities, which curious included boxing, were held for seven days.

Pannasami, the nineteenth author and *sangharajah* (archbishop) of Upper Myanmar, claims in his *Sasanavamsa* (History of Buddhist Religion) which he composed in 1861, that the method of enhancing the beauty of palm leaves by gilding, before inscribing the text, was introduced by King Minyekyawdin (1673-1698). In 1933, one of the original documents which corroborated this statement was traced t o a bookshop in London. It was a Pali manuscript which had been commissioned by Siri Pavara Maha dhamma Raja (Minyekyawdin) stating that he and his queen, Atulasiri Mahadevi, had decided in 1680 to break from the traditional method of using plain palm leaves by first having them gilded.

Inspection of the first folio revealed that the scroll-work in red lacquer and the large gilded square characters of the title resembled those of a **Kammavaca** (monastic ceremony and higher ordination text). The dedicatory inscription on the back, in a round hand, bore the date 1683. As examination of the rest of the volume has not been possible since the early 1930s, one can only assume that the inked text was written in a square script in the time-honored way. Until the sixties, the manuscript which is of importance to students of Myanmar calligraphy, was thought to be the earliest extant example of writing on palm leaf; originally part of a series, it is probably the only one to have survived, and is now in a private collection in America.

In 1984, fourteen gilded leaves with inked Pali texts in a square script, with marginal decorations similar to the above folios, were also found in London. The title on each indicates that they had been removed from five different works. Photo sent to the **Department of Manuscripts** in the *Universities' Central Library*, Yangon, elicited the statement that because of the style of the script that they were possibly from the first half of the seventeenth century or earlier.

Although Pannasami credits Minyekyawidin with being the first to use gold on palm leaves, the recent discovery of a fourteenth century gilded Kammavaca at Pagan, and the examples in London, nullifies this claim.

After 1680, it became the standard royal practice when commissioning copies of the Tripitaka, to gild leaves of the largest variety, called *pitaka pay*, which still grow in an area called Tibayin, near Shwebo. For other works, the folios were left in their natural state, with the text incised in cursive characters, and until the seventeenth century, the title and pagination were inked in at the corners.

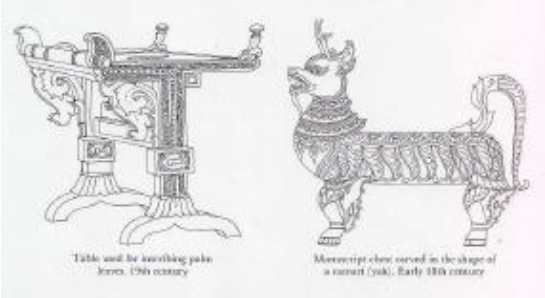
Stand used for reading palm leaf manuscripts. 19th century

The Mon also declared some of their religious manuscripts in gold and silver leaf, with a preference in gold and silver leaf, with a preference for the latter. A certain rivalry in scholarship is said to have existed for centuries between members of their clergy and those of Upper Myanmar, each confident of their own intellectual superiority. Rakhaing, which was a sovereign state until 1784, produced secular and religious works when under a stable government, but had to import most of the prepared palm leaves and parabaik paper from Central Myanmar.

Twenty of so different species of palm are found in Myanmar; of these, only two are used as writing material.

Htan (*Borassus flabelliformis*) grows to about one hundred feet and fruits after fifteen years its leaves were used for writing letters, memoranda and specific types of documents at court. These were stored in tubes of baboo in the *Shwetaik* (Treasury) which also housed the state archives. During the months of March and April, owners of plantations had to present one thousand leaves, as part of the annual tribute to the *Hlutdaw* (Privy Council).

Scribes attached to the various ministries followed three procedures: a royal order had to be composed in a single sentence on a long htan leaf with a point at both ends; called a *tagyaung sarchun* (one line better) stamped with the royal seal and made into a seven inch loop. The second type, issued by the Hlutday, consisted of two sentences and was rolled into a tighter coil. At the investiture of a Crown Prince, htan leaves which bore the royal commands, composed in three sentences, were used during each stage of the ceremony. The death of a king and the accession of his successor were also announced by heralds reading from an htan leaf.



A foreign observer in 1700 that the country was “governed by a pen, for not a single person could go from one village to another without a paper of writing.” Passes in the form of htan leaves were issued until the middle of the nineteenth century when they were replaced by paper. Roofing material, ceremonial fans for monks and zardar horoscopes are still made from the leaves.

Pay (*Corypha umbraculifera*) takes about fifty years to mature, only to die after producing its first flowers and fruits. The leaves were used for manuscripts, documents and in the making of gilded helmets, called *shwe pay khamauk*, which were part of the insignia of one of the official ranks known as *naymyo zeya nawratha*. Judging from the number of volumes from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that have survived in Myanmar and abroad, the demand for palm leaves must have been enormous.

Myanmar kings reveled in extravagant titles and considered the ruling heads of other countries inferior. Depending on the mood of the court, state letters to foreign powers either on a sheet of gold, pay leaf which was sometimes gilded or plain and on paper. The communications, one from the monarch and the other from the Hlutdaw, were sent in carved invory cylinders encased in sealed red velvet bags, stamped with the *chinte* (lion) seal.

During the reign of Minyekyawdin, a guild was founded for the supply of pay leaves for the use of civil servants capital. A secret process was said to have been employed whereby the leaves became pliable, achieving a quality which set the standard for the next two hundred years of so. Until the end of the monarchy in 1885, eleven members of the guild were employed at a collective salary of 115 kyat per month.

Pay leaves were first boiled and once the black secretions which oozed from the surface had been removed, the strips were weighed down and dried; they were later rubbed smooth and cut into the required lengths. Lines were next drawn, using a mixture of water and sanwin or turmeric (*Curcuma longa*). The characters were incised beneath these lines, piercing the thin fibrous surface without going through the other side. Unskilled use of the instrument usually tore or split the leaf.

The title of the manuscript is usually inscribed on the *pali chat* (cover) which is composed of several leaves stitched together this is followed by the text which begins in the middle of the first two folios, covering an area of about seven inches, and continues onto the third and subsequent folios with a fuller

spread, ending in the style of the first two. The folios were then rubbed with earth, oil and soot; this darkened the incised characters and protected the leaf from mould and insects. Each leaf was numbered on the left hand corner of the convex with a letter of the alphabet. Depending on the size of the leaf and the competence of the scribe, a folio could accommodate up to fourteen lines of script. The donor or the author's name usually appeared at the end, together with the date of either the copying of the composing of the text.

The bundles of leaves were next collated and a thin bamboo rod (*palin laing)* insterted into each of the two small holes (*palin pauk*) near the centre, the perforation being made before writing of the text. In Myanmar the royal thrones, as opposed to those for Buddha images, were carved in segments, which were then assembled and the whole held together by ples which passed through the structure; palin taing means literally "throne poles".

To prevent the leaves from becoming warped, they were placed between two wooden boards (kyan) and kept tightly bound with a piece of cloth (sarpalway) to which thin strips of bamboo had been added for support. The boards, which in rare cases, were of carved ivory, which usually made of a light wood called letpan (Bombox malabiracam). These were painted either with red oxide of mercury called highapada (Sanksrit: hamsapada or goose foot) or lacquered black with and exudation from *thitse* tree (*Melanorrhoea usitata*). Some were carved, gilded or elaborately worked in glass mosaic.

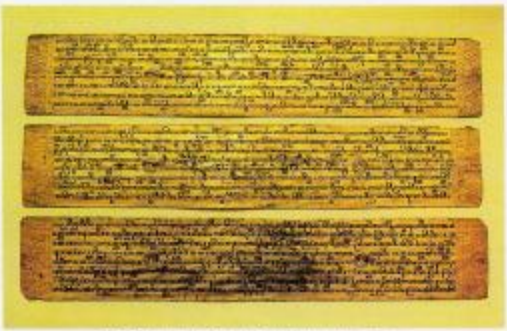
The sarpalway itself was wrapped with another cloth (*sar htoke pawar)* which was a patchwork of materials, or a plain cotton scarf dyed a bright yellow, a color associated with the Buddhist order. The volume was then tied with a long ribbon (*sarseky*) which was either plain or woven with a prayer. And finally, a small strip of pay leaf inscribed with the title and other information was inserted between the cords.

Manuscripts vary in size, with some forming a precarious pile of eight hundred leaves, about eight inches high, presenting two broad surface areas which could be decorated in five different ways. If the sides were gilded completely as in case of important religious texts, the volume was called *shwemyee pay* (gold sided). If it had a panel of lacquer in the middle and the gilding at the sides, it was known as *kyansit pay* (sugar cane bracelet, as it resembled a ridge in a piece of sugar-cane); sometimes the panels were flanked by floral patterns. Painted completely with cinnabar, it was called a *myeenee pay* (red sided). Coated with lacquer, the volume was known as *myeenet pay* (black sided). Unlacquered leaves were referred to as *pay phyu* (white sided, because of their pale color).

Professional scribes were always laymen, but it was said that the personal habits of some, known as *kyaung saye*, contrasted markedly with their calling, the most brilliant being addicted either to drink or opium. The census of 1891 showed that three thousand men were classed as scribes. They earned their living from copying texts for the clergy, ninety thousand of whom were listed as living in the 15.371 monasteries in the country.

Ruins of the 18th century Aungmyaikwin Pitaka library at Monywa, where rare works by the abbot Ariyavamsa were discovered in 1916

A scribe invariably had a crescent cut in the nail of his left thumb, to steady the metal *kanyit* (stylus), which was held upright by the right hand. The implement was occasionally tipped with a small piece of agate, which was said to be ideal for production detailed work. Blunt metal points were sharpened on a small piece of stone, which was usually placed in a carved container in the shape of either an animal or a bird. The inevitable scratching on the leaf produced tiny fragments called *kanyitsan* or the seeds of the stylus. AS deletion was impossible when errors occurred, a dot was inscribed within the centre of each character.



Recently discovered gilded palm leaves. Marginal decorations are in the style of the Minyekyawdin manuscript of 1683

Incised and dated manuscript of 1771 with decorated covers

Two inscribed palm leaves with a superimposed stylus

A detail from the palm leaf folio above, dated 1771

In **Mandalay**, the price for twelve leaves was five annas in 1890. The cost of copying five hundred folios was twenty five rupees. A skilled copyist could complete one *in-gar* (twelve leaves) per day. Despite the threat of the printing press in Lower Myanmar, which began producing large number of books from the 1870s, the production of ***palm leaf*** volumes continued into the twentieth century, one dated 1924 having recently been found in London.

Thus the commissioning of a manuscript not only required the services of a scribe but also those of several other professions, such as the preparers of ***palm leaves***, wood carvers, artists, lacquer and glass mosaic workers and weavers causing a chain of events which benefitted many people.

One of the reasons why some of the old texts have come down to us is due to the tradition of copying, and act which stemmed from the belief that by preserving knowledge, merit was acquired by the donor and the scribe. Sheer luck too played a part in their survival. Each racial group regarded its **manuscript** with high

esteem until the end of the last century, when lack of interest and neglect caused the loss of so many.

The Pali scholar Saya Phay attempted in 1911 to revive the use of this traditional material by having a few religious works printed onto palm leaves at the Pyigyimantaing Pitaka Press, Yangon. Although the texts, in green and blue, looked splendid on the buff surface, the innovation did not catch on and plans for further publications were abandoned.

In 1941, retreating Kuomitang soldiers passing through Maymyo set fire to some four thousand volumes belonging to U Tin, a sometime official King of Theebaw. The contents of the Pyatthat monastic library at Inn Wa, which were said to have been “large enough to fill a railway carriage”, were left rotting in the open air. As recently as 1984, over one thousand manuscripts in various stages of decay, lay in a dilapidated eighteenth century building at U Pu Gyi Chaung, near the Mingun Pagoda opposite Mandalay. For years, a belligerent old monk patrolled the grounds, refusing to let anyone salvage them.

The picture is however encouraging. A national awareness which began in the late sixties gradually built up during the following decade. Far-sighted individuals are beginning to donate their collections to the safety of Universities’ Central Library and other institutions at Yangone. Although a national up to date figure is still unavailable, by 1976 the Department of Religious Affairs alone had procured 9275 volumes, among which are some rare seventeenth century works that have somehow survived the hostile climate, dynastic wars and man’s apathy.

For further details, please visit: http://www.burmese-art.com