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*Writing Material in Ancient India*

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## WRITING MATERIAL IN ANCIENT INDIA

1.1 The *Nārada-smṛiti* (ca. 5th century A.D.) which gives great importance to written documents as evidence in the court of law, enjoins that the incidental statements of the plaintiff (*vādin*) should be immediately written down by the court scribe on a *phalaka* or other material for writing;

तत्रादौ तु लिखेत्सर्वं वादिनः फलकादिषु ॥<sup>1</sup>

1.2. *Phalaka*, the wooden tablet or board is a well attested writing medium in ancient India,<sup>2</sup> used by school children and adults for writing what is not meant to be a permanent record or what can be copied out later on a permanent medium. To cite a few early references in literature, the *Kaśhaka Jātaka* (No. 125) speaks of a servant boy who carried his young master's writing board to school every day and thus learnt to read and write himself. The *Lalitavistara*, in its usual hyperbolic fashion, states that the young Siddhārtha Gautama went to school with a writing board made of sandalwood and a golden pen studded with gems.\*

1.3: But more useful for our purpose are sculptural representations as they show the shapes and approximate sizes of the writing boards. A panel from Gandhāra<sup>4</sup> (2nd century A.D.) depicts the "child Bodhisattva going to school in a ram-cart accompanied by his school-fellows carrying their writing-boards and ink-pots."<sup>5</sup> The boards

1. *Nārada-smṛiti*, ed. J. Jolly, Calcutta 1885, (Bibliotheca Indica), II.18cd, p. 30.
2. On wooden writing boards, see Rājendralāla Mitra in Archibald Edward Gough, ed., *Papers relating to the Collection and Preservation of Records of Ancient Sanskrit Literature in India*, Calcutta 1878, p. 17 f.; Gaurishankar Hirachand Ojha, *Prācīna Bhāratīya Lipimālā* (Delhi 1994), reprint: Delhi 1959, pp. 146-147; G. Bühler, *Indian Paleography* (German original: Strassburg 1896), Calcutta 1959, p. 113; D. C. Sircar, *Indian Epigraphy*, Delhi 1965, pp. 68-69.
3. *Lalitavistara*, ed. P. L. Vaidya, Darbhanga 1958, p. 88:

अथ बोधिसत्त्व उरगसारचन्दनमयं लिपिफलकमादाय दिव्यार्षसुवर्णतिरकं  
समन्तान्मणिरत्नप्रत्युत्तम्...

4. Victoria and Albert Museum, London. Reproduced in Sir John Marshall, *The Buddhist Art of Gandhāra*, Cambridge 1960, pl. 66, fig. 95.
5. Thus Marshall, *ibid.*, p. 75.

are oblong in shape with a handle on the shorter side by which they are held. The boys are dressed in Greek fashion, and one scholar conjectured that their writing materials "may also be of Greek origin."<sup>6</sup> I am unable to comment on this possibility, but the shape of the writing boards with the handle prevails even today in many parts of northern India. The 'ink-pots' in the sculpture are almost cubic in shape with a clearly marked lid. Can they have been boxes for chalk ?

Radha Kumud Mookerji reproduces another sculpture from the Gandhāra school<sup>7</sup> where Gautama is seen writing on a board held on his knees. The board is longish but very narrow like a palm leaf and the stylus or chalk is wedge-shaped.

Another sculptural panel from Nāgarjunakoṇḍa<sup>8</sup> (3rd century) graphically illustrates Nārada's injunction cited above. Its theme is the interpretation of Queen Māyā's dream by the soothsayers. Near their feet is seated a scribe who is taking down their statements on a writing board. This evidence from the third century shows that not only schoolboys used wooden boards but court scribes also for instantly recording what was being stated in the court, an activity Nārada's law-book envisages.

1.4 There were, in fact, two basic varieties of writing boards in ancient India. One type was for ephemeral writing used by school children and court scribes. These boards were painted black, and one wrote on them with chalk producing white letters. This writing was called *pāṇḍulekha*, *likhita*, or *lipi*, 'white writing.' If necessary, this writing was transferred, after corrections, additions or deletions, to a permanent medium like palm leaf or birch bark as in the case of statements made in a court of law, or on to copper plates or stone if it had to do with royal edicts.<sup>9</sup>

6. K. Krishna Murthy, *The Gandhāra Sculpture: A Cultural Study*, Delhi 1977, p. 94.

7. *Ancient Indian Education (Brahmanical and Buddhist)*, (London 1947), reprint; Delhi 1974, pl. XX.1, facing p: 485.

8. National Museum, New Delhi. Reproduced in C. Sivaramamurti, *Sanskrit Literature and Art—Mirrors of Indian Culture*, New Delhi 1970, pl. XVIII. 59.

9. Thus *Nārada-smṛiti* II.20, p. 31:

वादिभ्यामभ्यनुज्ञातं शेषं च फलके स्थितम् ।

ससाक्षिकं च लिखेयुस्ते प्रतिपत्तिं च वादिनोः ॥

or more explicitly *Kātyāyana* (cited in P. V. Kane, *History of Dharmaśāstra*, III, Poona 1946, p. 293, n. 400):

1.5 The second variety of boards was used for painting and was presumably coated with a white layer. These were called more specifically *citrāphalaka* or *vartanāphalaka* (Pkt. *vattanāphalaya*<sup>10</sup>). According to the *Kāmasūtra*, the bed chamber of a man of fashion should contain a lute, a painting board (*citrāphalaka*), a box of paintbrushes, some book and garlands of yellow amaranth.<sup>11</sup> Portrait painting on *phalakas* is such a beloved motif in Sanskrit drama and poetry that it does not need reiteration here. But some sculptural representations of painting boards may be mentioned.

A tenth century panel from Khajuraho shows an art teacher demonstrating to his pupils the method of painting on a rectangular board.<sup>12</sup> From the proportion of the board to his body, we may assume that the board measured about  $1\frac{1}{2} \times 2$  feet.

More well known is, of course, the sculpture of the lady writing a 'love letter'.<sup>13</sup> She is writing with a tapering object on a small oblong tablet with carved edges. It is naturally more romantic to call this a love letter, but it also may be a painting board.

1.6 Though both the varieties of *phalaka* are well attested in literature and art, we know very little about the technical details, especially their sizes and the method of coating them either in black or white. In the *Daśakumāracarita* of Daṇḍin (7th c.), Apahārvarāman draws an amorous message for the sleeping princess on a board painted

अधिकान् शोधयेदर्थानन्यांश्च प्रतिपूरयेत् ।  
भूमौ निवेशयेत्तावद्यावत् पक्षः प्रतिष्ठितः ॥  
पूर्वपक्षं स्वभावोक्तं प्राड्विवाकोऽभिलेखयेत् ।  
पाण्डुलेखेन फलके ततः पत्रे विशोधितम् ॥

or more succinctly Vyāsa (cited in Rājendralāla Mitra, *Indo-Aryans*, reprint: Delhi 1969, vol. I, p. 281n):

पाण्डुलेखेन फलके भूमौ वा प्रथमं लिखेत् ।  
ऊनाधिकन्तु संशोध्य पत्रात्पत्रे निवेशयेत् ॥

10. Cf. *Lilāvai of Kōūhala*, ed. A. N. Upadhye, Bombay 1943, v. 365:

कस्स वा णीसेसकलाकलावसंसूययाई एयाई ।  
वत्तणफलययाई विचित्तवत्तणवट्टलिहियाई ॥

11. *Kāmasūtra* 4. 10:

नागदन्तावसक्ता वीणा चित्रफलकं वर्तिकासमुद्गकः यः कश्चित्पुस्तकः  
कुरण्टकमालाश्च ।

12. Reproduced in Sivaramamurti, *Chitrāsūtra of the Vishṇudharmottara*, New Delhi 1978, fig. 2.

13. Indian Museum, Calcutta. Reproduced often, including on Indian postage stamps, but see C. Sivaramamurti, *Sanskrit Literature and Art*, pl. XIII, 41.

over with a paste made of resin (*niryāsa-kalka-varṇita*).<sup>14</sup> The resin was used to bind the coating firmly to the board and this must have been a painting board.

Bhoja's (11th c.) *Samarāṅgaṇasūtradhāra* has a chapter (51) with the title *Bhūmibandhana*, 'dressing the ground for painting', which describes the methods of preparing and applying layers of coating on walls (*bhūtibandhana*), boards (*paṭṭabandhana*) and cloth (*paṭabandhana*). The text says that the boards must be coated with a paste made by grinding and cooking the seeds of *bimbā* fruit (*Mormodica monodelpha*), or the grains of *śālī* rice.<sup>15</sup> But none of the texts seem to have anything on the technique of preparing the black writing boards. Presumably they were made in the same manner as today with all local variations.<sup>16</sup>

1.7 In the eleventh century, Alberuni (*India*, I.182) recorded the mode of writing on boards in north-western India, and his statement deserves to be cited in full:

They use black tablets for the children in the schools, and write upon them along the long side, not the broad side, writing with a white material from the left to the right. One would think that the author of the following verses had meant the Hindus —

“How many a writer uses paper as black as charcoal,  
Whilst his pen writes on it with white colour,  
By writing he places a bright day in a dark night,  
Weaving like a weaver, but without adding a woof.”

14. *Danḍin's Daśakumāracarita*, ed. M. R. Kale, Bombay 1925, pp. 98-99:

इति नागदन्तलग्ननिर्यासकल्कवर्णितं फलकमादाय मणिसमुदगकाद्वर्णवतिका-  
मुद्धृत्य तां तथा शयानां तस्याश्च मामाबद्धाञ्जलिं चरणलग्नमलिखमार्यां चेतत् ।

15. *Samarāṅgaṇasūtradhāra*, 51. 36-38ab:

सांप्रतं कथयिष्यामः पट्टभूमिबन्धनम् ।  
बिम्बाबीजानि संगृह्य त्यक्त्वा तेषां मलं बुधः ॥36॥  
एवं विशोध्य निष्पावान् यदि वान्यशालितण्डुलान् ।  
तेषामन्यतमं श्लक्ष्णं पिष्ट्वा पात्रे विपाचयेत् ॥37॥  
पट्टमालिप्य बन्धेन पूर्वोक्तविधिमाचरेत् ।

As printed in D. N. Shukla, *Samarāṅgaṇa-Sutradhāra*, Part II: Royal Palaces and Royal Arts, Lucknow 1967, Appendix, p. 65, and also his other publications containing almost the same material in different combinations.

16. Ojha, *op. cit.*, p. 146, describes the writing boards with four legs used in Rajasthan at the end of the last century. Perhaps some anthropologist should soon survey these traditional writing boards with all their regional variations before they are universally supplanted by mass-produced plastic objects in the wake of our relentless march into the twentyfirst century,

1.8 Curiously enough, of this black-coated wooden writing board, the object survives in the north and the word in the south of the Vindhya. In northern India, children still trudge to school with oblong wooden writing boards with handles (like those carried by Gautama's schoolmates in the Gandhāra panel), and these are now called *paṭṭi* (from *paṭṭikā*, another Sanskrit word for writing boards<sup>16a</sup>), or by the Persian term *takhtī*. In the south, the wooden writing boards have long since been replaced by slates in wooden frames, called *palaka* (without aspiration) in Telugu, or *kārum palakai* (lit. black board) in Tamil.<sup>17</sup>

2.1 To revert from this excursus on the schoolboy's trudgery back to Nārada's statement, Asahāya (8th c.) in his commentary on the *Nāradaśmṛti*, explains *phalakādiṣu* in these words:

तदेव फलकादिष्विति फलक-पत्र-भूर्ज-संपुटिका-कुड्येऽपि यथासंभवं तत्क्षणमेव लेखको लिखेदिति ।<sup>18</sup>

2.2 Julius Jolly, in his otherwise meticulous translation of the *Nāradaśmṛti*, understands the passage thus:

The scribe shall enter it at once in writing on a board, or leaf, or Bhūrja-bark, or box, or wall.<sup>19</sup>

2.3 In rendering *samputikā* as 'box', Jolly has the support of the *Amarakoṣa* which records just this one meaning (2.6.139: *samudgakah samputakah*). The 'leaf' is certainly palm leaf, the standard writing material like the birch bark (*bhūrja*), but 'box' and 'wall' raise questions: Did the court scribe of yore write on any wall that was nearby or were there specially prepared wall-areas for writing like the black-boards in plaster or cement in modern class rooms? Second, if *samputikā* was a box, was it any random box that was handy? Should we assume that the court clerk had a wooden box to keep the documents in and scribbled on its lid in his hurry to record the plaintiff's statements? Or, did *samputikā* have another meaning that escaped the notice of the *Amarakoṣa*?

3.1 Fortunately, these and some other expressions occur in the *Kāvyamīmāṃsā* of Rājasekhara (ca. 860-930). Speaking about the poet's material paraphernalia, Rājasekhara recommends

16a. See n. 45 below.

17. As my colleague Dr D. S. Varadan informs me, this word is used both for the slate and the larger black-board. Kannada and Malayalam have apparently opted for the English derivative *sleju*.

18. *Nāradaśmṛti*, p. 30.

19. Julius Jolly, tr., *The Minor Law-Books*, Part I: Nārada and Bṛhaspati, (Oxford 1889), reprint: Delhi 1965, (SBE XXXIII), p. 27n,



तस्य सम्पुटिका सफलकखटिका समुद्गकः सलेखनीकमषीभाजनानि ताडिपत्राणि भूर्जत्वचो वा सलोहकण्टकानि तालदलानि सुसम्पुष्टा भित्तयः सततसन्निहिताः स्युः ।<sup>20</sup>

This important passage, however, caused several problems to modern commentators.

3.2 The editor of the revised GOS edition explains that *samputikā* is a 'box', *saphalakakhaṭikā* a 'piece of chalk fixed to a wooden piece', and *samudgaka* a 'box'.<sup>21</sup> One wonders how the two types of boxes differed from one another.<sup>22</sup>

3.3 D C. Sircar, in his valuable work *Indian Epigraphy*, makes the following remark on this passage:

Rājaśekhara's *Kāvyamīmāṃsā* refers to it (sci. iron pen or stylus) as *loha-kaṇṭaka* or iron needle used to write on *tāladala* whereas *lekhaṇī* and *masī-bhājanī* are mentioned in connection with writing on *tādi-patra* and *birch-bark*. The work also mentions other writing materials as *phalaka* (a board) and *khaṭikā* (a piece of chalk), both preserved in a small box, and refers or (sic! read 'to') the practice of writing on well-cleaned *bhittis* meaning floors or walls.<sup>23</sup>

I do not see why a board and piece of chalk should be *preserved together*. It would be more convenient to have separate containers, provided the board needs a container at all. We may recall that it is not the school-boy's writing board to be carried back and forth, but one that is kept in a poet's study. Furthermore, if they are preserved together in a *small* box,

20. *Kāvyamīmāṃsā of Rājaśekhara*, ed. C. D. Dalal and R. A. Sastry; revised and enlarged by K. S. Ramaswamy Sastri, 3rd edition, Baroda 1934 (GOS I), p. 50. Strictly speaking, this is not Rājaśekhara's view, for he continues

'तद्धि काव्यविद्यायाः परिकरः' इत्याचार्याः । 'प्रतिभैव परिकरः' इति यायावरीयः ।

"This is the [material] equipment for the poetic art,' say the masters. 'Genius alone is the equipment' [required for poetry],' says the Yāyāvāriya (i.e. Rājaśekhara himself)." But this does not alter the position regarding the writing material common in those days, and Rājaśekhara himself adds at a later point (p. 53) that, when a composition is completed, several copies of it should be made:

सिद्धं च प्रबन्धमनेकादर्शगतं कुर्यात् ।

21. *Ibid.*, p. 198.

22. Kedāranātha Śarmā Śarasvata, in his Hindi tr. of the *Kāvyamīmāṃsā* (Patna 1954, p. 124) brings the two boxes together, but imagines palm leaves stapled with iron pins in *salohakaṇṭakāni tāladatāni*:

खडिया, स्लेट, सामान रखने के डिब्बे, कलम दावात के साथ कलमदान, ताड के पत्ते, भूर्जपत्र, लोहे की कीलों (पिनो) से गुंथे हुए ताल-पत्र, स्वच्छ और चिकनी दीवारें...

23. D. C. Sircar, *Indian Epigraphy*, p. 82.

the boards must have been smaller still—hardly capable of containing all the poetic affusions of the inspired writer!

3.4 Finally A. K. Warder, in the most elegant and perceptive history of Sanskrit *kāvya* ever attempted, approaches this passage more cautiously. “Rājasekhara notes (p. 50),” says he,

that the *kavi* should have always ready for use a bag containing a writing tablet and chalk, a casket (presumably to store completed works), palm leaves or birch bark (the standard writing materials) with writing ink and metal stylus, and walls prepared for writing on...<sup>24</sup>

Now anyone who tries to put a hard wooden board and chalk together in a bag will soon see that the board will crush the chalk to powder. But credit must go to Warder for suspecting technical terms here, for he continues in parenthesis, with a question mark against what he has said before:

(? this is the ordinary meaning of the words, but as we have no old commentary on the text to guide us we may be in ignorance of some special meaning: the word *bhitti*, which ordinarily means ‘wall’, may also refer to a kind of slab or block for scribbling on)<sup>24</sup>

3.5 Indeed, these ought to be technical terms since the meaning ‘box’ or ‘bag’ given for *samputikā*, and ‘wall’ for *bhitti* or *kudya* make no sense in these passages (and others to be discussed below); one gets the impression that the ancient court scribes and poets were so desperately in want of writing material that they took the nearest possible object. But neither a well-organised court of law nor a prosperous poet like Rājasekhara—son of a mahāmantrin, wedded to a princess, teacher of king Mahendrapāla of Kannauj—could have been in such dire distress.

3.6 It is reasonably certain that Asahāya’s *kudya* was not any random wall but, as Rājasekhara elaborates, a *susamr̥ṣṭā bhitti*, a well-prepared wall, and not just a well cleaned one. That is to say, in the law courts known to Asahāya and in the poet’s study envisaged by Rājasekhara, a portion of a wall was smoothly plastered and presumably painted black, say, with a mixture of lamp black and resin. This would be a convenient place to write on with chalk—convenient for the scribe to take down the statements made in the law court, or for the poet to record his poems whenever inspiration strikes him. After necessary emendations, this writing would be transferred to palm leaf or birch bark, and the wall could be reused. Warder’s conjecture that the *bhitti* may

24. A. K. Warder, *Indian Kāvya Literature*, I, Delhi 1972, p. 210.

also refer to some kind of slab or block for scribbling on is unwarranted as this sense is already covered by the word *phalaka*.<sup>25</sup>

3.7 In the absence of any graphic description in Sanskrit or Prakrit texts of these specially prepared wall-areas for writing, what was said above must remain a reasonable assumption, but it is not beyond the realm of the possible. There is a long tradition of mural painting in India, and texts like the *Viṣṇudharmottara*,<sup>26</sup> *Samarāṅgaṇasūtradhāra*,<sup>27</sup> and *Mānasollāsa*<sup>28</sup> teach how walls should be coated with thick layers of various ingredients in order that paintings in tempora can be made on them. Technically, then, it should not have been difficult to give a black coating to such specially prepared wall-areas, and the *kuḍya* or *bhitti* was, in all likelihood, the precursor of the black-boards in the modern class rooms.

4.1 With regard to *samputa*, the Jaina Śvetāmbara canon knows it as a writing material and mentions it among the 'five kinds of books' (*potthaga-panaga*, *potthaya-panaya*), viz. *gamḍī*, *kacchavī*, *muṭṭhī*, *samputa* or *samputaka-phalaya*, and *chivāḍī*.<sup>29</sup> These are described in the *Nisīha-cunni* (12.25) in the following manner.

दीहो बाहल्लपुहत्तेण तुल्लो चउरंसो गंडीपोत्थगो, अंते तणुओ मज्जे पिहुलो  
अप्पबाहल्लो कच्छवी, चउरंगुलो दीहो वा वृत्ताकृती मुट्ठीपोत्थगो, अहवा  
चउरंगुलदीहो चउरसे मुट्ठीपोत्थगो । दुगाइफलगा संपुडं । दीहो हस्सो वा  
पिहुलो अप्पबाहल्लो छिवाडी, अहवा तणुपत्तेहि उस्सीओ छिवाडी ।<sup>30</sup>

Accordingly, *gamḍī* is long with equal breadth and thickness; *kacchavī* is broad in the middle, tapering towards the ends (like the shape of a

25. The editor of the GOS edition would like to include here brass plates as well. Cf. p. 198: "*śusammrṣṭā bhittayoh*—well cleaned walls or well rubbed plates. In ancient times they used to write as well as paint on walls. Brass plates are still being used by shop-keepers for writing daily accounts."

26. C. Sivaramamurti, *Chitrasūtra of the Viṣṇudharmottara*, pp. 45, 150-151 (text), 180 (translation).

27. Cf. D. N. Shukla, *op. cit.*, pp. 90-93; Appendix, pp. 63-66.

28. *Mānasollāsa of King Someśvara*, ed. G. K. Shrigondekar, vol. II, Baroda 1939, (GOS LXXXIV), 3.132-140.

29. टाणंग ४.३: गंडी कच्छवि मुट्ठी संपुडक फलए तह छिवाडी य ।

एवं पोत्थयपणयं पणत्तं वीयरगेहि ॥

निसीह १२.२५: गंडी कच्छवि मुट्ठी संपुड पिहुलो तहा छिवाडी य ।

as cited in the *Abhidhānarājendra*, s. v. *potthaga*.

30. As cited in *ibid*.

tortoise) and not very thick; *muṭṭhi* is a small book, four inch square, or oblong, or round, that can be held in one's fist (*muṣṭhi*). For *chivāḍī* two mutually contradictory prescriptions are given: either it is a broad book but long or short (= birch bark manuscript with written lines running parallel to the breadth?) and not very thick; or it is a high (thick) book with narrow leaves (=thick palm leaf manuscript?). Finally two or more boards constitute *sampuḍa*.

The *Abhidhānarājendra*, s.v. *sampuḍa-phalaya* (Skt. *sompuṭa-phalaka*) explains it as follows :

पुस्तकपञ्चकान्तर्गतेऽन्यतमपुस्तके 'संपुङ्गो दुग्माई फलगा पोत्थ' संपुटफलके  
यत्र द्वयादीनि फलकानि भवन्ति ।

This is not the place to discuss the other four kinds of 'books' which seem to be made up of either a few or many leaves of varying length and breadth (long narrow palm leaves or broad and long/short birch bark), or cut to special shapes like a circle or a tortoise,<sup>31</sup> but from these unambiguous statements it is clear that *sampuṭa* consists of two or more writing boards (*phalaka*), like the Roman codex that was made up of several wax-coated wooden writing tablets.

4.2 These could not have been just loose boards tied together with a string. For in such a case they could have been called simply *phalakas* in plural, and there was no need for a new name *sampuṭa*, *sampuṭaka*, *sampuṭikā* or *sampuṭa-phalaka*. The word *sampuṭa* (from the root *puṭ* *samśleṣane* or *samsparṣe*) implies some sort of joining of these boards and not just tying. As we shall see in section 9 below, the same word occurring as the second member of several compounds denotes the joining of two halves in such a manner that they can be opened and shut.

Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that in *sampuṭa*, the writing boards were joined at one side—either at the top or at the left—with one or more metal rings so that the boards could be opened and closed like a modern book. The advantages of such a contraption over an ordinary *phalaka* are obvious. Depending on the number of boards, the *sampuṭa* will have more writing area than a single board. And the writing, if

31. On these, see Muni Puṣyavijaya, "Bhāratīya Śramaṇasaṃskṛti āne Lekha-nakalā" (in Gujarati), *Jaina Citrakalpadruma*, I, pp. 1-136, which was not accessible to me.

done on the inner sides of the *samputa*, will not be rubbed off accidentally.

4.3 Wood being perishable, archaeological remains of such contraptions will naturally be difficult to find, but there are examples in more durable material to prove the probability. Such are the copper plate grants which we may regard as the metal versions of the wooden *samputa*. It is well known that there are grants engraved on single copper plates (resembling *phalaka*, the single writing boards); there are also grants on two or more plates joined together with copper rings (resembling *samputa*). More particularly, the few examples we have of inscriptions on two copper plates may have been based on the simplest form of the *samputa*, containing two writing boards. D.C. Sircar reports about

the grants of some Western Indian rulers, which were incised on the inner side of two plates of copper with two rings passing through holes in their upper margin holding them together.<sup>32</sup>

Sircar adds that in this they resemble the Roman 'diploma' which was called so "because it was formed of two sheets of metal, which were shut together like the leaves of a book."<sup>33</sup>

5.1 *Samputa*, then, is not a box or bag, but (usually) two writing boards joined at one margin with rings so that they can be opened and shut, and we may call this contraption double or folding writing board. With this meaning thus assured, we now retranslate the two passages above.

5.2 Asahāya: "The scribe shall write down [the plaintiff's statement] as far as possible immediately on a [single] writing board (*phalaka*), or on [palm] leaf (*pātra*), or on birch bark (*bhūrja*), or on a double writing board (*samputika*), or on [specially prepared] wall (area) (*kuḍya*)."

5.3 Rājaśekhara: "The poet should have always ready for use a double writing board (*samputikā*); a [single] writing board (*phalaka*) and chalk (*khaṭikā*); a casket (*samudgaka*) (to store completed works); palm

32. *Indian Epigraphy*, p. 126, n. 2. As an example, Sircar (*ibid.*, p. 122, n. 2) refers to the Maitraka charter in *Epigraphia Indica*, XXXI p. 299 ff. See also the Ghumli plates of Bashkaladeva dated V. S. 1045; the inscription is written on the inner side of two thin copper plates measuring 8 $\frac{3}{4}$ " x 8", strung on two copper rings. These are reproduced between pp. 14 and 15 in the volume just mentioned,

33. *Indian Epigraphy*, p. 126, n. 2.

leaves (*tāḍipatra*) or birch bark (*bhūrjatvacakḥ*)<sup>34</sup> along with pens (*lekhanī*)<sup>35</sup> and inkpot (*maṣībhājana*);<sup>36</sup> or palm leaves (*tāladala*) with metal stylus (*lohakaṇṭaka*);<sup>37</sup> specially prepared wall areas (*susammṛṣṭā bhitti*).”

5.4 We should note that Rājāśekhara clearly distinguishes between two kinds of palm leaf: one is *tāḍipatra* for writing with pen and ink which is the practice in northern India; the other is *tāladala* for incising with metal stylus, the common mode in the south.

*Tāla* (*Borassus flabelliformis* or *B. flabellifer* Linn.), commonly known as Palmyra, grows everywhere in India but more widely in the south. *Tālī* or *tāḍī* (*Corypha umbraculifera* or *C. taliera*), called Talipot in English, grows in the south but more extensively in Ceylon and has larger leaves than Palmyra.

5.5 In an interesting account, Jinavijaya Muni<sup>38</sup> reports that in earlier times *tāḍī* leaves were imported from Malaya and other eastern countries to Malabar. From there they were sent by sea or land to Gujarat, whence to other places in western and central India. The leaves

34. On birch bark as writing material, see the literature cited in n. 2 above, and also Alberuni's *India* I, 171. More valuable is G. Bühler, *Detailed Report of a Tour in Search of Sanskrit Mss. in Kashmir, Rajputana and Central India*, Bombay 1877, pp. 29-30. When Bühler visited Kashmir in 1875, the pandits there sought his help in rediscovering the technique of preparing birch bark for writing, a technique that had been forgotten for some two hundred years. But he “declined to do so as [he] feared that an extensive manufacture of spurious Mss. would be the consequence” (p. 30). It is indeed a great pity that Bühler declined, for now it will be much more difficult to discover the lost technique, a knowledge of which would be of great use in restoring manuscripts. Unprepared birch bark is still used in northern India for writing magical *yantras*.

35. On pens, see *Mānasollāsa*, vol. II, 3, 141-148; Rājendralāla Mitra, *Indo-Aryans*, I, pp. 281-82.

36. On the preparation of inks, see literature in n. 2 above, esp. Ojha, *op.cit.*, 154-56. P. K. Gode has published valuable material in *Studies in Indian Cultural History*, vol. I, Hoshiarpur 1961, pp. 101-110: “Recipes for Hair-dyes in Nāvanitaka (c. 2nd Century A. D.) and their close Affinity with the Recipes for Ink-manufacture (after A.D. 1000)”; *ibid.*, vol. III, Poona 1969, pt. 1, pp. 31-47: “Some Notes on the History of Ink-Manufacture in Ancient and Medieval India and other Countries.”

37. The word survives as *gaṇṭamu* in Telugu.

38. Jinavijaya Muni, ed., *Jainapustakaprasastisamgraha*, I, Bombay 1943, Introduction, p. 14. On palm leaf as writing material, see also literature in n. 2 above. On early European notices of writing on palm leaves and the words this activity engendered in English, see *Hobson-Jobson*, s. v. Brab, Cadjan, Ollah, Palmyra, Talapoin, Talipot, but esp. Cadjan, p. 636.

were soft and smooth and were suited to write upon with pen and ink. They were called *śrutāḍa*<sup>39</sup> in contradistinction to *kharatala*, i.e. those used in the south for incising with metal stylus. Since the *śrutāḍa* came via Malabar, they were also known as *malubārī* palm leaves.

6.1 As to *sampuṭa*, its occurrences in story literature, to be discussed below, reveal that it was a folding writing board as well as painting board. Since the interpretation of the word *sampuṭa* is closely connected with the incidents in some stories, and since these have been widely misinterpreted, it will be necessary to relate the incidents at some length.

6.2 In Budhasvāmin's *Bṛhatkathāślokaśamgraha*,<sup>40</sup> the earliest Sanskrit version<sup>41</sup> of the Paiśāci *Bṛhatkathā* of Guṇāḍhya, there is an emboxed story called *Nalinikākyāna* (XIX 62-199).<sup>42</sup> The word *sampuṭa* occurs in two episodes of this story.

6.3 Sumaṅgala, the premier of all the superintendents of administrative departments (*sarvādhyakṣagaṇāgrāṇiḥ* XIX.177) in the kingdom of Nāgapura, sets out in search of a bridegroom for the king's daughter Nalinikā, taking with him a portrait of her painted on a board (*tato*

39. Rājasekhara uses this word also. See *Rāja-śekhara's Karpūra-Manjarī*, ed. Sten Konow and tr. Ch. R. Laman, Cambridge, Mass. 1901 (HOS IV), p. 36:

कधं अज्ज वि सो ज्जेव सिरितालीपत्त संचओ ताओ ज्जेव अक्खरपत्तीओ ।

40. *Budhasvāmin's Bṛhatkathāślokaśamgraha*, ed. Felix Lacôte, Books I-IX: Paris 1908; Books X-XXVIII: Paris 1929. Lacôte translated I-XX into French and Louis Renou the rest.

There is another curious publication entitled "*Bṛhatkathāślokaśamgraha: A Study*, by (The Late) Prof. V. S. Agrawala, with the Sanskrit text *Edited* by Dr P. K. Agrawala, Varanasi 1974." Actually it contains Lacôte's text (pp.1-298) without his critical apparatus and his valuable word-notes, and "A Cultural Study of the Brihatkathaslokaśamgraha" (pp. 299-353), the latter being a collection of unedited notes made by V. S. Agrawala. Had he lived to rewrite these notes into a coherent account, it would have become another classic like his cultural studies of the *Aṣṭādhyāyī*, *Kādambarī* and *Harṣacarita*.

J. A. B. Van Buitenen has translated some stories from this text in his *Tales of Ancient India*, New York 1971. My criticism below of his rendering of a few words in no way diminishes my admiration for his sensitive translation.

See also A. K. Warder, *Indian Kāvya Literature*, II, Delhi 1974, pp. 129-138 for the translation of some extracts from Budhasvāmin's work.

41. Its date is not yet satisfactorily discussed. The work is usually assigned to the 8th or the 9th century, but is probably much younger.

42. Translated into English by Van Buitenen with the title "The Prince and the painted Fairy," *op. cit.*, pp. 157-165.

*nalinikārūpam ālikhya phalake* 180). Eventually, he reaches Kānana-dvīpa where he hears about the virtues of the king's son Manohara. Thinking that this might be a suitable match for Nalinikā, and having heard that the prince is addicted to the art of perfumery, he lets himself be announced as an expert-perfumer, which in fact he is. To test him, Manohara burns an incense that disagrees with the other perfumes in the room. As soon as he enters the room, Sumaṅgala announces that the incense gives him a bad headache, and

आकृष्टे स्थगिकायाश्च स्वस्याः फलकसंपुटे ।

मनोहरं मुहुः पश्यन् स्वयं घूपमयोजयत् ॥ XIX. 71 ॥

V.S. Agrawala (p. 335) explains the verse thus:

Thereupon he took out from his wallet (*sthagikā*) a small wooden casket (*palaka-samputa*) and burnt his own incense.

J.A.B. Van Buitenen (p. 157) renders it in the following manner:

He took a perfumer's palette from his travelling bag and, studying Manohara meanwhile, mixed his incense.<sup>43</sup>

Both scholars connect the incense with the *phalaka-samputa*, and then interpret the latter accordingly. Agrawala thinks that this was a small wooden casket from which the incense was taken out and burnt—in fact it was mixed (*ayojayat*). Van Buitenen, on the other hand, imagines that it was the object on which the incense was mixed, and so invents an object called 'perfumer's palette'.

But what actually happened is related by Sumaṅgala in greater detail to Manohara, after he has taken the prince to his own city by a clever stratagem:

यच्च योजितवानस्मि गन्धमाल्यानुवादिनीम् ।

घूपं तत्फलके न्यस्तामपश्यं राजकन्यकाम् ॥187॥

तामालोक्य ततो युष्मान् मन्येऽहं घन्यजन्मनाम् ।

आत्मनो राजपुत्र्याश्च विधातुश्च कृतार्थताम् ॥188॥

Van Buitenen's translation of this passage is again rather free (p. 164):

While I prepared a more harmonious perfume, I studied the princess's portrait which I painted on my perfumer's palette. And as I looked at her and then at you, I knew that I and the princess and the Creator had succeeded and that our existence had not been in vain.

When these two passages are read together, it becomes clear what Sumaṅgala really did. He first took from his bag (*sthagikā*) a double painting board (*phalaka-samputa*). As he mixed his own incense, he looked

43. I regret not to have been able to consult the second volume of Lacôte's edition and see how he understood this passage, but Van Buitenen's rendering owes "much to his French translation."



at the princess's portrait on the painting board (*phalaka*) and then at Manohara and found them suitable to each other. That is to say, *phalaka* in verses 180 and 187 and *phalaka-samputa* in 71 refer to the same object on which the portrait was painted, for *phalaka-samputa* consists of *phalakas*. Therefore we should construe verse 71 as follows: "Looking repeatedly into the double painting board drawn out from his bag and at Manohara, he mixed his own iacense."

Sumaṅgala was looking at the portrait surreptitiously so that the prince and his friends would not notice what his real purpose was. Accordingly, the verse is also deliberately cryptic, for the poet does not wish to reveal at this stage who Sumaṅgala really was and why he came to Manohara. His identity and objective are revealed—to Manohara as well as the readers—only when that objective is achieved, i.e. when Manohara is taken to Nāgapura. This is typical of the dramatic narrative technique of Budhasvāmin.

6.4 Between Sumaṅgala's first meeting with Manohara and winning the prince's friendship by his expert knowledge of the art of perfumery, and subsequently taking the prince to his own kingdom, there is another episode where *samputa* plays a key role.

Once Manohara goes to a fair where he sees a painting of a yakṣiṇī and falls in love with her. She materialises and asks him to come to her home on Mount Śrikuṅja if he really loves her, and disappears. While Manohara is pondering where the mountain is and how to reach there, he happens to be present in the audience hall when a merchant narrates his adventures to the king and in this connection mentions his visit to Mount Śrikuṅja. The prince follows the merchant to the latter's home and asks him about the location of the mountain. Then the merchant

श्रीकुञ्जं सहितैश्चिह्नैराख्यातुं प्रचक्रमे ॥95॥

\* \* \* \*

इत्यादि कथितं तेन यद्यत्तत्तन्मनोहरः ।

सहसागरदिग्देशं स्पष्टं संपुटकेऽलिखत् ॥107॥

आगमय्य ततः पोतमाप्तनिर्यामकास्थितम् ।

बकुलादिसहायोऽसावगाहत महार्णवम् ॥108॥

अनुकूलमहादेगसमीरप्रेरितेन सः ।

आसीदचिरेणं पोतेन दिशमीप्सितम् ॥109॥

सदृशैः फलकस्थानां<sup>44</sup> चिह्नैर्जनितनिश्चयः ।

मनश्चक्षुशरीरैः सः श्रीकुञ्जं युगपद्गतः ॥110॥

44. Agrawala's edition wrongly reads *sphalaka*°.

Aside from the use of *samputa*, this passage contains one of the few detailed descriptions of a sea voyage in Indian literature, and V.S. Agrawala (p. 337 f.) translated it completely:

Hearing the account of the Śrīkuṅja mountain as related by the Niryaṃaka to the sea-merchant, the prince Manohara noted down on a wooden board, having a cover on it (*samputaka*), the details about the particular sea, direction and place (*sahasāgra-digdeśam*, XIX.107). With this information the prince ordered a boat manned by an experienced Niryaṃaka-sailor and went out in the sea in search of that spot (XIX.108). Impelled by favourable wind he reached his desired destination. In accordance with the marks and signs as noted down on the board the prince identified the Śrīkuṅja mountain and reached there (XIX.109-110).

Van Buitenen (p. 159 f.) renders the passage thus:

The merchant went on describing the course, and the prince charted everything on a detailed map with all the directions and distances by sea. Then he had a ship readied and manned by a crew of reliable sailors and set sail on the high seas with Bakula, Asoka and Sumangala.

Strong favourable winds sped the craft, and soon the prince reached his point of destination. The landmarks corresponded to those he had noted on his map, and he was certain that this was the place. And his thoughts, eyes and body rushed alike to Mount Srikunja.

Both translations bring out the essentials of the passage accurately enough—one briefly, the other more elegantly. But *samputaka* is not exactly a 'wooden board with a cover on it', nor a 'map', but the same thing that Sumaṅgala in the previous episode carried with him on his journey. Here too *samputaka* and *phalaka* are used almost synonymously, which is like saying today "He wrote it down in his book; he looked at the page and read what he had written." The frequent references to this writing material suggest that it was an essential object for a sophisticated person,<sup>45</sup>

6.5 In an article entitled "Cartography,"<sup>46</sup> D. C. Sircar discusses early references to maps and map-making in India. Attempting to inter-

45. Besides these writing materials, the text (X. 45-49) also describes a pair of sham census enumerators, one carrying an inkpot and pen and the other two books (*pustakadvayahasta*), who are supposed to list all the sophisticated persons (*cetasya*) in the first book and the boors in the second. We also hear of a class room of girls studying *Ars amatoria*, with their eyes glued to writing boards (*paṭṭikā-vyagrāh* X.67ff.).

46. D. C. Sircar, *Studies in the Geography of Ancient and Medieval India*, Delhi 1971, pp. 326-330.

pret the picture gallery scene in Act I of the *Uttararāmacarita* of Bhavabhūti (8th c.) in this sense, he says:

These paintings included some which are said to have depicted particular regions and may be regarded as a sort of maps.<sup>47</sup>

While deciding the question whether in this scene Lakṣmaṇa shows to Rāma and Sītā maps of the places they lived in during the exile or composite pictures of those places, it should be kept in mind that the purpose of this scene in the drama is to make Sītā relive the various experiences she underwent in the forest. This is better served by life-like pictures rather than maps.<sup>48</sup>

On the other hand, Manohara's sketch on his *samputaka* which he carries with him on his voyage has a better claim to be a map and suggests that sailors carried such objects with them.<sup>49</sup>

7.1 There are two other passages where *samputa* occurs in connection with a merchant and again should mean the same thing. In Dāmodaragupta's (8/9th c.) *Kuṭṭānīmata* (vv 607-608), a merchant demands payment for goods taken on credit in these words:

यत्तु घनसारकुङ्कुमधूपदि मुक्तकं दत्तम् ।  
तत् संपुटके लिखितं श्रुणु पिण्डलिकां करोमि ते पुरतः ॥  
एतावन्त कालं नावसरेऽभ्यर्धिता त्वमसि ।  
रिक्तं भाण्डस्थानं सांप्रतमिति याचनं क्रियते ॥<sup>50</sup>

"Whatever camphor, saffron, incense etc. I have given you occasionally,<sup>51</sup> all that is written in the *samputaka*. Listen [to me] as I make the total (*piṇḍalikā*)<sup>52</sup> in your presence. All this while I have not asked you as there was no occasion for it, but now that my store-room is empty I ask [for payment]."

47. *Ibid.*, p. 327.

48. For a fine analysis of the picture gallery scene in the *Uttararāmacarita*, see Warder, *Indian Kāvya Literature*, IV, Delhi 1983, pp. 340-342.

49. Moti Chandra (*Sārthavāha*, 2nd edn., Patna 1966, p. 145) recognised the earliest reference to cartography here, but otherwise his explanation of this passage is quite muddled.

50. As cited in Ajay Mitra Shastri, *India as seen in the Kuṭṭānī-Mata of Dāmodaragupta*, Delhi 1975, p. 203, n. 1.

51. In analogy with *muktaka* stanzas that are independent in themselves, I have understood *muktaka* here to mean separate (occasional) purchases. The word can also denote 'pearls' collectively, or is this merchants' slang for 'unconnected with cash payment'—on credit?

52. From *piṇḍa*, 'sum, total', but here it is a curious formation from Prakrit *piṇḍala* (cf. *piṇḍala-ia* = *piṇḍīkṛta*).

7.2 In his study of this work, Ajay Mitra Shastri makes the following comment on this passage:

they (i.e. the merchants) recorded credit sale account in a register (*samputaka*) which was afterwards totalled, the total being called *piṇḍalikā*; they had a hard time collecting their dues.<sup>53</sup>

Since this and the next passage deal with similar situations, it would be best to discuss the word *samputa* in these two passages together.

8.1 In Somadeva's *Kathāsaritsāgara* (written between 1063 and 1081), there is the charming story of the 'mouse merchant' (1.6.28-49). Kumāradatta, a young impecunious merchant, goes to Viśākhila to ask him for some starting capital. Just then Viśākhila is scolding a youth for squandering away the capital advanced to him. Viśākhila says that a clever fellow can make money even with a dead mouse and points to one in front of his shop. Kumāradatta takes the mouse, makes money with it in a short time and repays the debt with a golden mouse. As in all such tales, the pleased banker Viśākhila gives his daughter in marriage to the enterprising Kumāradatta, who in the meantime has earned the nickname 'mouse merchant.' It is here that the word *samputa* occurs. Kumāradatta narrates what he did when Viśākhila pointed to the dead mouse:

गृहीतोऽयं मया त्वत्तो भाण्डमूल्याय मूषकः ॥३८॥  
इत्युक्त्वा मूषकं हस्ते गृहीत्वा संपुटे च तम् ।  
लिखित्वास्य गतोऽभूवमहं सोऽप्यहसद्वणिक् ॥३९॥

This simple passage caused lot of difficulties to translators and lexicographers alike, and led to some hilarious results.

8.2 Here is C.H. Tawney's translation:

'I hereby take this mouse as capital advanced.' Saying this, I took the mouse up in my hand, and wrote him a receipt for it, which he put in his strong box, and off I went. The merchant for his part burst out laughing.<sup>54</sup>

Following the *Amarakośa*, Tawney takes *samputa* to be a box—rather a strong one at that—, but then he has to invent an extra word 'receipt' to fit with the verb *likhitvā*. Another translator, more squeamish about the dead mouse than Tawney, has a version in Hindi<sup>55</sup> which I shall put into

53. Ajay Mitra Shastri, *op.cit.*, p. 203.

54. *The Ocean of Story*, tr. C. H. Tawney, ed. with an introduction by N.M. Penzer, (London 1924-28), reprint: Delhi 1963, I, p. 63.

55. *Kathāsaritsāgara*, tr. Kedāranātha Śarma Sarasvata, Patna 1960-61, I, p. 79:

ऐसा कहकर मैंने मरे हुए चूहे को हाथ से उठाकर एक डिब्बे में रख लिया और बनिये की बही में लिख दिया ।

English: "Having said this, I lifted the dead mouse with my hand, put it in a tin, and wrote down in the merchant's account book." He too conceives *samputa* to be a container (the boy apparently carried an empty tin for eventual mice) and also an account book.

8.3 The Great Petersburg Dictionary invests *samputa* with an idiomatic meaning just on the basis of this one passage: "*sampute likh* so v.a. *Jmd* (gen) *Etwas gut schreiben*, Kathās 6,39," which Monier-Williams reproduces in his dictionary thus, "*samputa*... credit, balance (°*te likh* with gen., 'to write down to the credit of') Kathās."

Accordingly, the meaning of verse 39 will be "Thus saying, I took the mouse in my hand and wrote it down to his credit..." that is to say, Kumāradatta entered the mouse to the credit of the banker, and the perfumery merchant in the *Kuṭṭanīmata* wrote down camphor etc. to the customer's credit. Aside from the fact that an idiomatic meaning cannot be derived from just one occurrence,<sup>56</sup> the meaning itself is not quite appropriate here. It is much simpler to understand *samputa* here also as a medium to write upon and to render the passage as follows: "Saying this, I took up the mouse in my hand, wrote it down in his (i.e. the banker's) *samputa*, and went off. And the merchant laughed [heartily at my freshness.]"

8.4 What is this *samputa* on/in which Kumāradatta recorded the advance of a dead mouse? One is tempted to treat this as a double writing board on which the banker entered the transactions in course of the day to be transferred later to birch bark for permanent record (as is done even today by village shopkeepers on slates or wooden writing boards), but for the passage cited from the *Kuṭṭanīmata*. In this passage, it may be recalled, the merchant demands dues which he did not ask for a long time (*etāvantam kalam*). *Samputaka* then could not have contained ephemeral writing (which is the case with a wooden writing board) but a record of long time.

8.5 Is it then possible that *samputa* or *samputaka* in these two passages refers to birch bark leaves bound together in book-form? The *Illus-*

56. In support of this meaning, the Great Petersburg Dictionary quotes *antaralāṭa-samputavikaṭākṣaramālikā* from *Indische Sprueche* II, 1504 and explains it as the letters the Creator wrote on the forehead to one's credit. But I think the poet, while juxtaposing *lalāṭa* and *samputa*, took the latter word merely as a writing material to imply that the Creator writes the future on one's forehead. However this occurrence too clearly establishes that *samputa* is a medium to write on.

trated *Ardha-Magadhi Dictionary* explains *sampuḍaga* as “a book which has wooden boards on two sides and has the shape of a merchant’s account book,” and the *Pāta-saddā-mahāṇṇavo* understands *sampuḍa-phalaga* as a book bound on both sides (with covers) like the merchant’s account book. But there is no evidence that birch bark leaves were bound together in Kashmir in Damodaragupta’s time or in Somadeva’s time. According to Ojha,<sup>57</sup> the Kashmirians began to bind birch bark leaves in leather only after Akbar’s conquest of Kashmir in 1586. All extant manuscripts before this time in Kashmir, and even after elsewhere, are made of loose leaves, be it birch bark or paper. Therefore, *sampuḍa* in these passages cannot be a bound book in the modern sense. If it was just loose birch bark leaves tied together between wooden boards, in what way did it differ from the common *pustaka*? Or was *sampuḍa* the name used for the *pustaka* of merchants only?

8.5 Kalhana’s *Rājatarāṅgiṇī* (written in 1148-49) does not know this word in this sense; instead it uses the expression *gaṇanāpatrikā* twice. Apparently merchants maintained separate *gaṇanāpatrikās* for each year: when the authenticity of a sale deed (*vikrayapatra*) made in favour of a merchant was in dispute, King Yaśaskara sent for the merchant’s *gaṇanāpatrikā* for the year in which the sale had taken place.<sup>58</sup> Elsewhere in the text it is said that the *gaṇanāpatrikā* consists of birch bark.<sup>59</sup> But we do not know whether these birch bark leaves in the *gaṇanāpatrikā*—enough to record the transactions of a full year—were bound or merely tied together. If we assume, quite rightly, that they were not bound, and that *gaṇanāpatrikā* was a special name for the merchant’s account book consisting of loose birch bark leaves tied together into one bundle for each year, what is then Damodaragupta’s *sampuḍaka*?

I am unable to resolve the problem except to remark that while Damodaragupta’s *sampuḍaka* arouses the suspicion of being a permanent record (unless the perfumery merchant had separate sets of writing boards for each customer), in the mouse-merchant’s tale double writing board fits well because it shows the quickness of mind and action of Kumāradatta.

57. *Prācīna Bhāratīya Lipimālā*, p. 144.

58. *Rājatarāṅgiṇī of Kalhana*, ed. Vishva Bandhu, Hoshiarpur 1963-65, pt. 1, VI, 36 cd:

यत्राब्दे पत्रमुत्पन्नं गणनापत्रिकां ततः ॥

59. *Ibid.*, pt. II, VIII, 135-138.

It seems likely that at a much later period when book-binding came into vogue, the word *samputa* came to be used for bound books, and more particularly for bound account books.<sup>60</sup>

9.1 The Great Petersburg Dictionary lists under *samputa* seven different meanings, and for its derivatives *samputaka* and *samputikā* only one meaning, viz. the one recorded by the *Amarakoṣa*. These meanings are

1. a hemispherical bowl and anything having this form,
2. a round casket (for jewellery)=*samputaka*=*samputikā*,
3. hemisphere,
4. Kuravaka flower,
5. something situated between two of the same class,
6. a posture of coitus, and
7. a special meaning for *sampute likh*, which we have discussed in section 8.3 above.

Under the first meaning, the dictionary lists a number of compounds having *samputa* as the last member. At the risk of appearing to stretch the meaning too far, it may be remarked that in many of these compounds like *sāgarasukti-samputa*, *añjali°*, *kara°*, *karakañja°*, *pāñi°*, *hasta°*, *oṣṭha°* etc., *samputa* does not primarily denote the hollow bowl-like space (though such space does exist in these cases) but the joining of two symmetrical parts—two halves of the pearl oyster, two palms, two lips etc.—so that these can be opened and shut.

This is not to deny that in some compounds like *śarāva-samputa*, *kapāla-samputa*, or when one is said to drink from the *pāñi-samputa*,<sup>61</sup> *samputa* refers exclusively to the bowl-like shape. But in the majority of the compounds, the notion of the joining of two symmetrical parts seems to be warranted. These compounds may possibly have been coined on the analogy of a concrete object of daily use, namely *phalaka-samputa*, the double or folding writing board.

60. *Samputa* survives in the same form in Kannada and as *samputamu* in Telugu in the sense of a 'volume of a book', i.e. a single bound unit.

61. Cf. *Kāvya-darśa* of Daṇḍin, 2.2.88:

पायं पायं तवारीणां शोणितं पाणिसंपुटैः ।

कौणपाः सह नृत्यन्ति कबन्धैरन्त्रभूषणाः ॥

We may close this discussion with two compounds not listed in the Great Petersburg Dictionary.

9.2 In Rājaśekhara's *Karpūramañjarī*,<sup>62</sup> there is the mention of the *dalasampūḍa* of the *keai* flower (Skt. *ketakī*; *Pendanus tectorius*, syn. *P. oederatissimus*; screw-pine). Through Bhairavadatta's magic spell, the screw-pine bush in the palace garden puts forth a single flower in spring.<sup>63</sup> Of this rare flower, the queen offers some petals to goddess Gaurī, and a couple to Karpūramañjarī. The latter uses one petal for writing a love letter to the king. These petals are referred to as *dalasampūḍa*, or *kusumapattasampūḍa*. Lanman translates the term as 'hollow flower-leaf',<sup>64</sup> and Konow explains that *sampūḍa* is 'cavity, fold'.<sup>65</sup> Now, if Lanman's interpretation of *dalasampūḍa* is accepted, the petals of all flowers should be called by this expression, since most flower petals have a concave shape. The reason why *Ketakī* is singled out lies elsewhere. The *Ketakī* petals, like the individual segments of a palm leaf, have two symmetric halves joined along the midrib, and these two halves can be closed shut (of course, with some pressure) and opened. It is precisely this feature which is indicated by the word *sampūḍa*, and Konow's rendering of the word as 'fold' comes close to the real meaning. Being almost as long as the palm leaf segments and somewhat broader, these petals make good writing material, if only of a transitory kind. When the king receives the letter written on the inner side of the petal, he spreads the two halves apart (*prasāśya*) in order to be able to read the amorous message.

9.3 The other compound is *kapāṭa-sampūḍa*, used by a different Rājaśekhara in his *Prabandhakośa* (written in 1348). A housewife, wishing to seduce an ascetic who has entered her house for alms, closes the door shut with him inside (*kapāṭasampūḍam dadau*).<sup>66</sup> Clearly there is no lexicographers' hollow bowl-like space here, nor the box known to the *Amarakośa*, but two leaves of the door that can be opened and shut.

10. In the absence of a compilation like the *Vaidikapadānukramakośa* for classical Sanskrit or for the Prakrits, and perhaps until the

62. HOS edition, p. 42 f.

63. It usually flowers in the rainy season. Causing the plants to put forth flowers out of season (*akālakusuma*) seems to have been a favourite horticultural pastime (or was it only a cherished hope?) in ancient India. Cf. Harṣa's *Ratnāvalī* act II, for a similar motif.

64. HOS edition, pp. 246-47.

65. *Ibid.*, p. 166.

66. Rājaśekharaśūri, *Prabandhakośa*, ed. Jinavijaya Muni, Santiniketan 1935, p. 40.



*Encyclopaedic Dictionary of Sanskrit on Historical Principles* from the Deccan College, Pune, is completed, such studies as the one attempted in these pages can only be based on sporadic instances that come one's way in course of one's reading. The hazards in such attempts are quite obvious: one may have overlooked occurrences that support one's hypothesis much better, or one may have missed contrary examples, which is worse. But, hopefully, the foregoing pages establish that *samputa* in the instances discussed here is some kind of a writing material and that it was used by all sorts of people—merchants and court scribes, poets and princes.