

ANIMAL VEGETABLE OR MINERAL

Writing materials other than paper

Introduction

Whilst paper is universally used today for the written or printed word it is only one - relatively recent - material. The very earliest records were on stone as prehistoric cave paintings, and over thousands of years different materials have been used, though some survive better than others. The choice of material depended on plentiful local supplies, so for instance those in northern Europe used birch bark, where those in the Indian sub-continent used palm leaves.

Writing materials and the instruments used to write on them often shaped and influenced the development of scripts in general appearance, the way individual signs were formed, and the direction of the writing. For instance the tools needed for stone-cutting created different shapes to those made by a brush or pen on the soft surface of leaves or skin. These were different again from the shapes produced by making impressed marks into clay.

Writing materials also exercised a decisive influence on the shape of the finished item, which could for instance be a single block (stone), tablet (clay), concertina-shaped or scroll (palm leaves), or sewn together as the modern book (parchment or vellum).

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Bibliography

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Stone is nearly indestructible, so there are plenty of written records from antiquity



One material which post-dates paper. French postcard c. 1900 made of synthetic material, printed text then hand-painted. Not surprisingly, although this was posted it was enclosed in an envelope.

MINERAL

Stone

The very earliest recordings are rock carvings and cave paintings, some perhaps 30,000 years old. They cannot be classed as 'writing' in the sense of recorded letters or characters, but they clearly held some significant meaning.



Lascaux, France



Val Camonica, Italy

Later written records on stone are found from societies with the necessary level of technological achievement to make metal implements for carving.



Ancient Hebrew



Sandavágur runestone from the Faroe Islands, 13th century



Decree of Ptolemy VI, 196 BCE; better known as the Rosetta Stone

Being near permanent, stone lent itself to official pronouncements, so can be found recording laws, scriptures, or deeds of conquerors

Clay

Clay, the most common raw material in the Near East, was used for cuneiform, the first codified system of writing, dating from around 3,300 BCE. A wooden stylus made impressions in the wet clay, which was then left in the sun to dry, making the message permanent and tamper-proof.



MINERAL

Metal

Metal also requires tools and a degree of technical knowledge.



Lord Street, Liverpool



Printed text; handpainted rose and background



Aluminium postcard made for advertising purposes. Annotated "This card must be sent under cover only". After postal workers had sustained cuts to fingers from the sharp edges of metal cards the Post Office introduced regulations saying metal cards must be enclosed in envelopes.

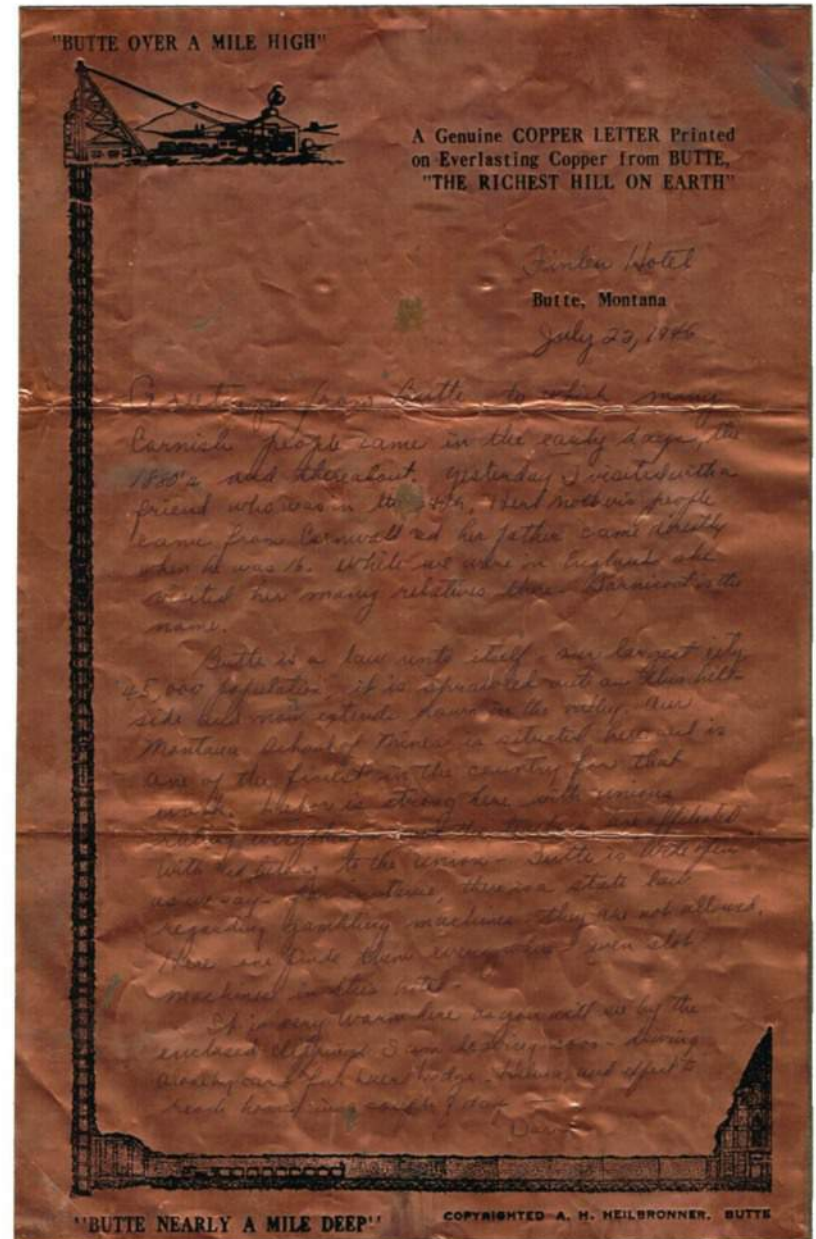


Silver
Special issue by La Poste of a 5€ 'Marianne' definitive in silver

MINERAL

Metal

Copper is soft enough to take a handwritten inscription



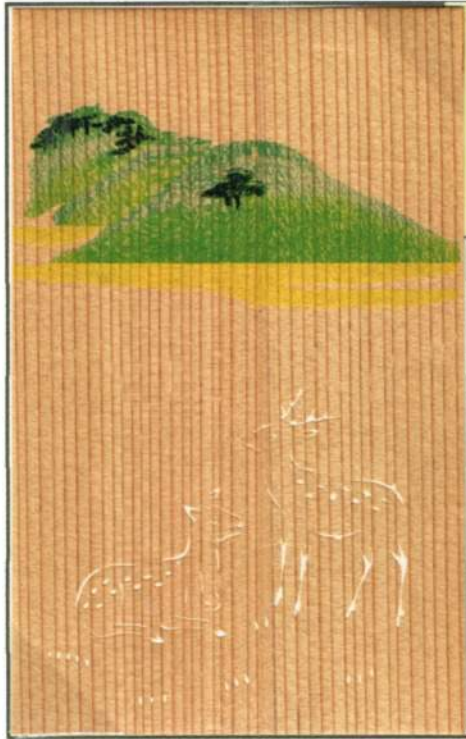
"BUTTE NEARLY A MILE DEEP" COPYRIGHTED - A. H. HEILBRONNER, BUTTE

22 July 1946
Letter written on a thin sheet of copper from a copper mine in Butte, Montana. Butte, in the Rockies, had several productive copper mines

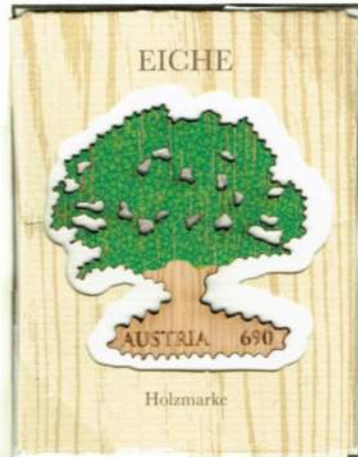
VEGETABLE

Wood

Wood has been used since antiquity, but unlike mineral very little survives.



Japanese card, perhaps 1940s



Special stamp issue made from oak wood, issued in co-operation with the Austrian Federal Forests



Plywood comprises thin layers or 'plies' of wood veneer. Miniature sheet on plywood, with gummed backing

VEGETABLE

Bark

Strong, but soft and pliable, birch bark has been used for writing wherever the tree is found, including Scandinavia, Finland, Russia, Siberia and North America.

Birch bark



Envelope made of birch bark



Belarus booklet 2008

6 таран к 1000 руб. = 6000 руб.
6 stamps к 1000 BYR. = 6000 BYR.

VEGETABLE

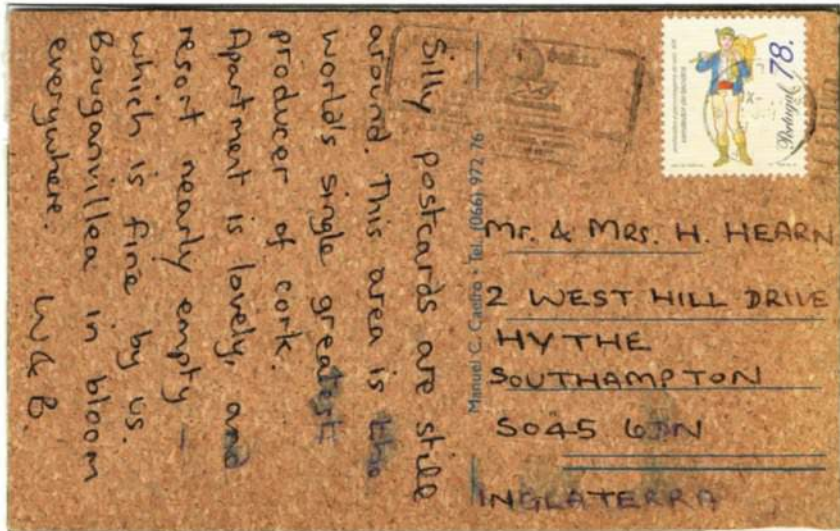
Bark
Cork oak is native to Southwest Europe and Northwest Africa. Portugal is the world's largest cultivator.



Bark up to 10cm thick is cut from the trees every nine years.



Postcard and stamps made of cork oak



VEGETABLE

Leaves
Various types of palm were used including talipot palm, lontar palm, and palmyra.



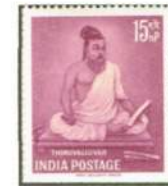
Palm trees
Trial multicolour margin proof pair



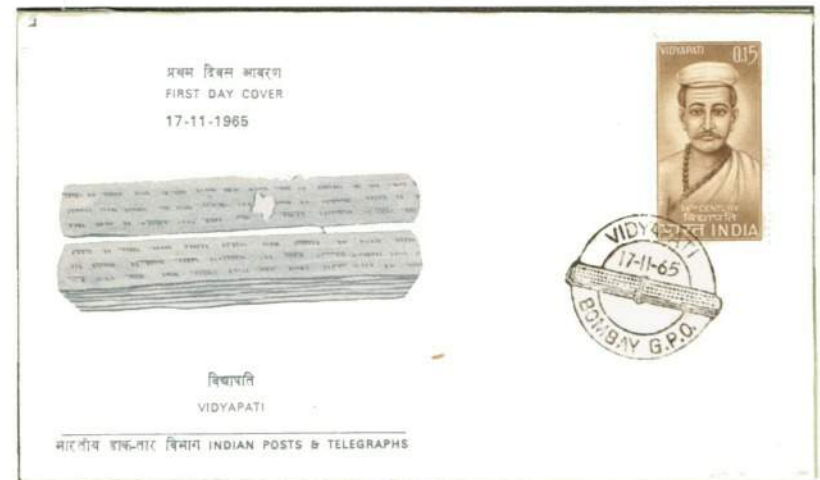
Talipot palm



Palmyra



The leaves were dried and polished. Once inscribed they were sewn together concertina-fashion.



VEGETABLE

Leaves

The Silvertree grows on the lower slopes of Table Mountain. The characteristic silver sheen of the leaves is due to thousands of hairs which cover the leaf and protect the plant. In the past the leaves were pressed, dried and used by artists for painting scenes for sale as souvenirs, but overuse has led the plant being an endangered species.

Silvertree



VEGETABLE

Leaves

The muttonbird shrub is endemic to Stewart Island, the third-largest island of New Zealand, lying 30 kilometres south of the South Island.

Muttonbird

15 March 1996
Halfmoon Bay, Stewart Island



1901 example



Southpex '96 chairman Jeff Long gets ready to write on a muttonbird leaf, an early form of postcard used on Stewart Island. A batch of leaves has been brought to Invercargill for the national stamp show next month.

Stamp show has unusual items

INVERCARGILL, South Island, New Zealand, will be the venue for a national stamp show next month, featuring a collection of unusual items, including muttonbird leaves.

The show, which will be held at the Invercargill Convention Centre, will feature a wide range of stamps and philatelic items.

Among the items on display will be a collection of muttonbird leaves, which were used as early forms of postcard on Stewart Island.

The leaves, which were used by the island's early settlers, were pressed and dried, and then used to write messages and affix stamps.

The show will also feature a collection of stamps from New Zealand, including the 40c stamp used on the muttonbird leaf.

The show is open to the public and is a great opportunity to see and buy some of the most interesting and unusual items in the world of philately.

The show will be held from 10 to 12 October, and is free of charge. For more information, contact the Invercargill Convention Centre.

The show is a must-see for all stamp collectors and philatelists, and is a great opportunity to see and buy some of the most interesting and unusual items in the world of philately.

Whilst a few genuinely used early examples have been preserved in museums, today they will only be found as philatelic souvenirs.

VEGETABLE

Stems

Its use as a writing material was widespread in early China. Bamboo strips date from the fifth century BC and were the standard writing material until the invention of paper around 100 AD.

Bamboo



The bamboo plant. The stalks are cut into strips and dried



Qin Dynasty (201 - 206 BCE) bamboo strips



Chinese postal stationery lottery card. The numbered tab represents the lottery ticket

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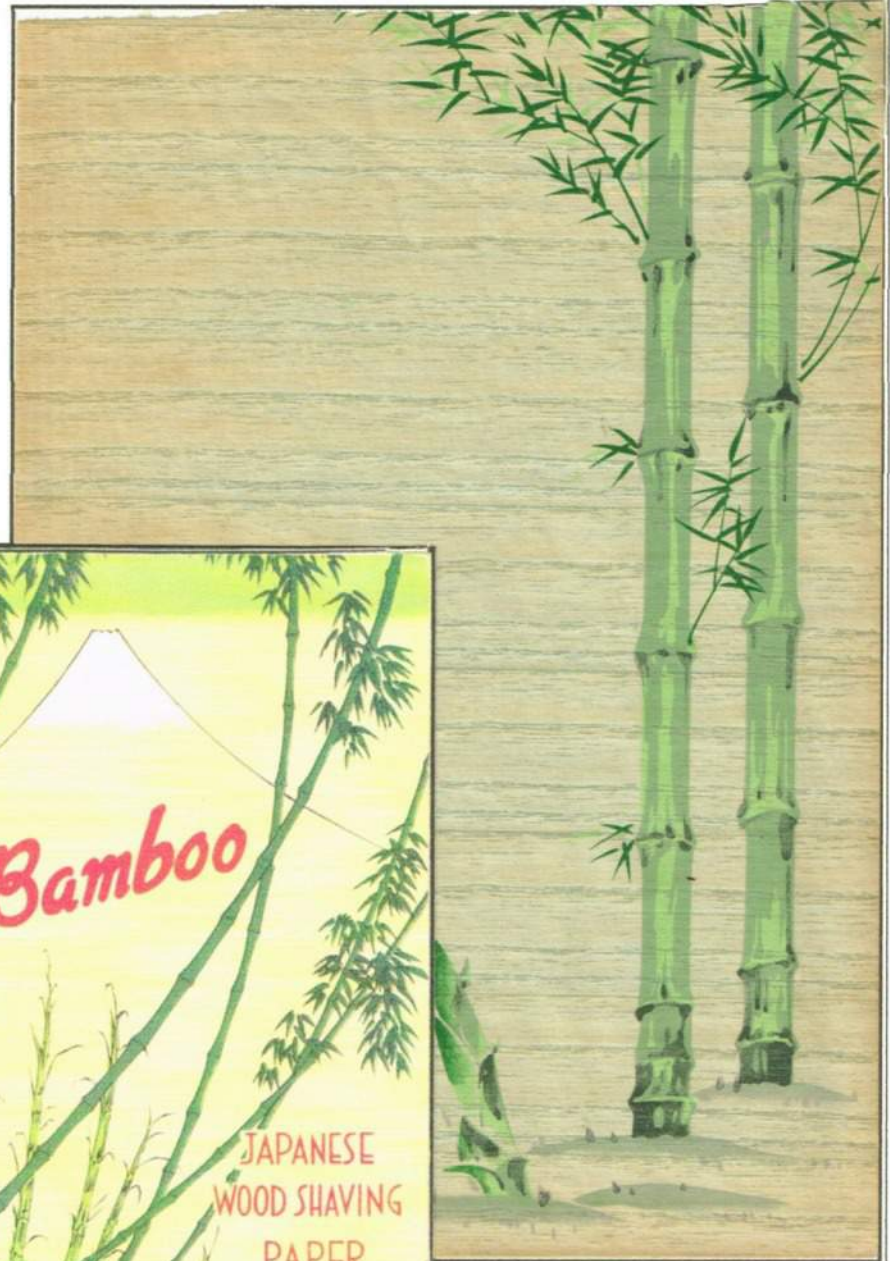
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VEGETABLE

Stems

Bamboo can also be pulped and made into writing paper.

Bamboo



VEGETABLE

Stems
 Known from at least 3,000 BCE, papyrus is made from the stem of the papyrus plant. While various cultures used plants, only papyrus became a commercial product traded throughout the known world.

Papyrus



Papyrus fragment



Making papyrus.
 Liebig trade card



Sheet of modern papyrus

ANIMAL

Bone

From around 14th to 11th centuries BCE the Chinese used oracle bones for divination. Smooth animal bones such as the scapula, and turtle shell were used to carve questions onto the bone or shell. Intense heat was then applied until the bone or shell cracked due to thermal expansion. The diviner would interpret the pattern of cracks and write the prognostication upon the piece as well.



Wax

Secretions

Wax tablets were widely used by the Greeks and Romans. A rectangular board with a slightly hollowed-out surface was filled with beeswax, often blackened with lampblack. The metal stylus was pointed at one end for writing and flattened at the other for erasing the script and smoothing the wax surface.



From a mural at Pompeii

Secretions

Silk is obtained from the cocoon of the larvae of the mulberry silkworm. In antiquity silk was used in China as the raw material from which to make paper.

Silk



Poland miniature sheet.
 Silk-screen printing on silk,
 with rubberised backing sheet

ANIMAL

Skin

A durable and flexible material created by the tanning of animal (usually cattle) skin. Suede leather is made from the underside of the skin. Leather documents from Egypt survive from around 2,500 BCE.

Leather



Leather postcard
Sewickley USA to Ledbury, 14 January 1907
Franked 3 cents, so underpaid by 1 cent
and endorsed "T" To Pay, and 2D I.S.G.
postage due payment (double deficiency)

ANIMAL

Skin

Treated properly, animal skins, particularly parchment and vellum, are a very durable and flexible material. True parchment is made from sheepskin or goatskin and vellum from calfskin, although in general terminology all writing skins are referred to as parchments.

Parchment and vellum



Levroux has been known for its leather and parchment production since the Middle Ages

The raw materials:



Sheepskin



Calfskin



Goatskin



Parchment document with wax seal

Parchment gradually took over from papyrus as a favoured writing material, until it too was replaced by paper.