

Ancient Chinese Ink sticks



An Investigation
Jaap den Hollander (NL)

Updated version September 25, 2025

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Cover illustration: Photo of ancient Sail ships in Amsterdam 2025 by Birgit Reissland (used with her permission), Photo by the author of different Chinese Ink sticks, found in a watercolour paint box, sold by William John Reeves in London between December 1799 and April 1800.

Colophon

Ancient Chinese ink sticks
A limited Investigation

Jaap den Hollander (NL), 14 oktober 2025

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Foreword

This research aims to contribute to an area where different cultures meet each other. It is the realm of painting and drawing combined with writing. Calligraphy has become an indispensable part of Asian and Western European culture. For centuries, attention has been paid to ink. Scrolls, sacred texts on bamboo, but also announcements, letters, charters, accounting records, and books were recorded for centuries with pen and ink. The quality of the ink, its water solubility, and the durability and preservation of documents require considerable attention, even today. The described ink sticks were not subjected to laboratory examination with electronic equipment or chemical analyses. However, these could potentially serve as confirmation if their age and composition are necessary.

Indian and Chinese inks are both carbon-based. They differ in binder and form. Indian ink is mostly a liquid or a cake containing carbon and a binder like gum Arabic. Shellac and borax are added to make it more durable and water-resistant. Chinese ink is made of carbon black and an animal glue. Chinese ink sticks have to be rubbed in water for use with highly water-absorbing pointed brushes or a pen

The descriptions of the content of a watercolour paint box can be helpful in more accurately dating Regency and other watercolour boxes, but conversely, the original contents of the boxes can often lead to determining the age and origin of the ink sticks within them, even if only a single fragment is sometimes available. Only the trade card is not the only referrer to the origin. A lot of boxes are lost or were emptied because the chest or box itself was more important to a new owner than the contents.

Ink makers' marks on Chinese ink sticks are visual messages from the past and aimed at the future. Ink sticks usually bear the name of the ink maker and the impersonal name of a brand. In many cases, as scholar Thomas Kelly wondered in 2023, it is far from clear which of the two names would have been more recognizable to a Chinese consumer from the mid-seventeenth or eighteenth century. This remains relevant today. Sometimes the marks are so stylized that they are difficult to read. The names of ink makers or their workshops are unknown or are historical artefacts. Example: The rubbing of a sentence or a brand name can be: "One with clear Heaven". Seals are mostly made in a rectangular form and possessed content like "Made by Sun Ruiqing, Yuquan of Xindu" (example in the Palace Museum in Beijing)

"The Ming ink cake as a result came to constitute an interface where different approaches to writing - literature, calligraphy, epigraphy, seal carving, and artisanal trade marking — could be brought together and transformed through their contact, enlarging possibilities for the presentation of words on objects. The ink business expanded in the late sixteenth century because of flourishing communication networks, with supply lines stretching from the ateliers of Huizhou and the temple stalls of Beijing to stationery stores in Japanese and Korean cities. Entrepreneurial manufacturers took advantage of these new markets to publish encyclopaedic catalogues of designs, orchestrating a heightened level of interchange and transfer between different sectors of the Chinese graphic landscape." (Thomas Kelly, fragment in Part III, Ink makers Marks in his study "The Inscription of Things, Writing and Materiality in Early Modern China")

In the Japanese term sumi-e (墨絵), the "e" means "painting". The word is a combination of sumi (墨), which means "black ink," and e (絵), meaning "painting," translating the entire term to "black ink painting". Briefly rubbing the ink stick on a wet, flat rubbing stone, creates gray ink. The longer we do this, the more intense and opaque the black becomes. Sometimes extra water is needed.

Besides an ink stick, water and an ink stone, one also needs a brush. In 250 BC, there lived a general Meng Tian from the Qin Dynasty. He successfully defended China against several Xiongnu invasions and, as a promotion, he was tasked by the imperial court with building fortifications to protect China from future attacks: the Great Wall of China. He had a lot of paperwork to do to keep up with the endless stream of reports. As the story said Meng Tian began tying camel and rabbit hair to a branch, unknowingly inventing the first calligraphy brush. This may be the origin of camel hair brushes. To paint with these on various surfaces, special pointed brushes were used, which can retain a lot of moisture. Camel hair isn't specifically mentioned as a material for sumi-e brushes, but the combination of hard (like wolf or sable) and soft (like sheep or goat) hairs in a brush is ideal for sumi-e because of its ability to absorb both water and ink well, providing the control needed for subtle strokes

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and washes on rice paper. Highly absorbent brushes are essential, as you need to be able to work without interruption.

There are two sorts of qualities for materials to make an ink stick. Materials in an ink stick are the pigment and the binder. The pigment, typically soot from burning wood or vegetable oil, provides the ink's color and opacity, while the animal glue (or other binders) acts as the binding agent that holds the pigment particles together in a solid stick. Adding a binder like shellac and a vegetable juice acting as a mordant, along with precise proportions of the other materials, can make a China ink stick more resistant to re-dissolving in water. Traditional ink sticks use animal protein glue, carbon soot, and water. However, to achieve a more indelible and water-insoluble result, binders such as shellac are incorporated into the ink mixture.

Until a month ago, I've barely delved into the study of small ink sticks (or east-indian ink sticks) in the watercolour boxes in my own small collection. I'm more drawn to colours than to black, sometimes smudgy, lumps. Yet, these sticks intrigue me because of the characters and decorations from faraway China and sometimes Japan they depict, and ultimately, what their meaning is.

Now that digital technologies have recently made it possible to read and translate Chinese characters for me, these small components in watercolour boxes are also waiting to be unlocked. I see my research as a form of archaeology.

For years, since the arrival of the internet, I have been collecting visual information in digital form about boxes used to store watercolour tablets. EBay has been a valuable source for this. Museum collections are also of interest to me, initially to learn more about such objects, but more recently also to be able to date the boxes and ink sticks based on their context and trade card. When watercolour paint boxes became popular in England, dealers also offered Indian/ Chinese ink tablets alongside their collections of watercolour blocks in every hue.

Given the limited number of objects, it's understandable that this study only shows a few, sometimes very typical, samples. Further research by others can further expand the picture.

Some historic references about Indian cakes and Chinese ink sticks

(JdH.: Quote from a text about the treatment of the Japanese by the Chinese and the mentioning of '**cakes of Indian ink**' according a narrative from 1645)

[...] "We shall conclude with a narrative of the treatment of some Japanese traders in China and her subject states, Korea and Tartary, in which last they were captured A.D. 1645. The reader will recollect that, at this epoch, the measure of exclusion had been put in force against Europeans ; but that it was not extended to Asiatics until the Chinese traders were detected in introducing such contraband wares as prayer-books , crucifixes, and the like . When the seclusive was superadded to the exclusive system, is a point upon which none of the writers who have fallen in our way have afforded us any precise information, and we can only conjecture that the one might grow out of the other, as the government found internal tranquillity follow upon the absence of external interference or influence. But turn we to the narrative" .

*" From the earliest times, the inhabitants of the coast-towns , Sinbo and Mikuni-ura, in the province of Yetsizen, have been wont to pass over at the close of winter to the Japanese dependencies, there to trade . In 1645, vessels were as usual equipped for this purpose; and with three of these, Takentsi Tosaimon, his son Tozo, and the ship-master Kunida Fiosayemon, set sail upon the 1st of the fourth month. The crews amounted to fifty-eight souls, amongst whom was the writer of this narrative. **** All on board were in the gayest disposition, when a sudden storm arose in the night, which, before it was possible to make an attempt at anchoring, hurried away the ships [...]*

*"As evening advanced, presents were brought us. Each man received clothes and coverlets, three rolls of white linen, a girdle, a pillow, five quires of Chinese paper, five writing pencils, and **three cakes of Indian ink**. We returned our thanks, and expressed to the superintendent our wish that the king might be pleased to let us go home forthwith."*

JdH: The king's name is probably 'Chaou'. It looks that cakes of Indian (Chinese) ink are a part of diplomacy in China in 1645. The writer of the narrative is probably **Tozo**.

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Noteworthy is a text about Chinese ink de Nankin in the GAZETTE D'AGRICULTURE, COMMERCE, ARTS ET FINANCES, editeur Knapen et Delaguet (Paris), ANNÉE 1780. Du Mardi 15 août 1780. p 525. (I I I. Avis , Annonces, Notes &c. I. Observations fur l'Encre de la Chine par M. le Gentil, de l'Académie des Sciences). He describes the way he makes black ink from an Nankin ink stick by by dissolution this stick in water without rubbing.

In the 1800s, "Indian ink" and "China ink" often referred to the same type of carbon-based ink, with the distinction being primarily one of origin and form, with Chinese ink traditionally sold as solid sticks and European/Indian versions available as liquid. While both inks used carbon black pigment, Chinese inks were crafted with a rigorous pounding process involving animal glue, whereas Indian liquid inks often contained binders like gum arabic or shellac and could be waterproof or not, depending on their specific formula.

Ink masters, Ink makers

This study deliberately omits the work of Chinese Ink Masters, who demonstrate their artistic skills with ink and brush on canvas, silk, and paper.

Ample studies and research have been conducted on this topic in recent years. A wealth of examples are available online

This study does address ink makers. These producers are important for improving and maintaining the quality of black ink. A historical overview covers a large number of classical and historical Chinese ink makers.

See Chapter 2 of this study.

Importing Ink Sticks from China into England

Private or 'privilege' trade was allowed to the captains, officers and crew of East Indiamen on a sliding scale of cargo space and value based on rank, to supplement their low official salaries. The information about private-trade is not to find in logbooks of the ships.

Each sailor and marine from England (East India Company) and Holland (Dutch East India Company) was permitted to trade whatever non-monopolized items he could fit into his chest.

In the early years, from 1780 onward, ink blocks imported from China (and from Japan via the Netherlands, between 1641 and 1853, the Dutch East India Company had the sole right to trade with Japan in the world) This sticks were primarily, so looks it, offered to buyers of watercolour paint boxes.

The blocks were highly recognizable due to their black color, relief-decorated surfaces with ornaments, landscape motifs, human figures, animals, and plants, and paintings in gold, blue, and sometimes red. The size and shape of these blocks, sticks, and tablets was also quite varied. In China, people sought to hark back to the early days of Chinese culture. Famous ink masters, like Zhan Cheng gui, as well as warlords and gods, were memorialized on blocks. Proverbs were inscribed as haikus.

Early mentioning India Ink in an advertisement in London in 1744.

"To be Sold at Seven Pence per Pound, At WHITE's China and Flint-Glass Warehouse, oppofite the King's Arms Tavern in New Bond-Street, Large Parcel of Wine, Beer, and Water Giafics, fome Jelly and Sillabub Glaffes, Quast and Pint Decanter; likewife feveral large, globular, and Bell-fafhion'd Glafa Lanthorns, proper for large Stair-Cafes, Galleries, &c. A Where likewife is fold at the lowest Prices, great Variety of China Ware, plain Flint, flowered and Diamond-cut Glaffes, Japan and Chinefe Soy, **India Ink** and Fans, the finest Havanna and Spanifh Snuffs, Lavender, Orange-Flower, Hungary, Honey, and Sanfpareil Waters, &c.

Classified ad: Daily Advertiser (London). May 16. p. [5], col. 2.8.

Collectors of Indian/ Chinese Ink sticks

There are many collectors of ink sticks worldwide because these sticks demonstrate a strong connection to the ancient cultures of China and Japan. Antique inksticks, with their most beautiful decorations, are also featured at auctions. Yet, I felt I lacked an overview beginning this study. This article aims to provide a starting point. I searched numerous catalogues from well-known art supply suppliers.

Calligraphers in Western Europe are users of Indian ink for a long time. In 1906 write Edward Johnston in his Writing & illuminating & Lettering The following words:

"PAPER & INK

Ancient Chinese Ink Sticks

For "practice" any smooth-not glazed-paper will do. For careful work a smooth, very fine-grained hand-made paper is best (pp. 69, 77).

Stick Indian ink is best, and a good-quality stick is worth paying for; the necessary rubbing down on a slab is well worth the trouble. We can our-selves control the thickness, colour, and state of this ink, and safely add to it, e.g. vermilion and yellow ochre (to make a deep brown), or gum-water (to prevent spreading on porous writing surfaces).

Jet black is the normal hue; it will also test the quality of the writing; it shows up all the faults; pale or tinted inks rather conceal the faults, and lend a false appearance of excellence (p. 286). A thin ink greatly adds to the ease of writing (see p. xxi); too thick inks do not flow freely enough.

A brush is used (in left hand) for filling the pen."

I am very grateful to **Mr. Tai-Yang Hwang** for his advice on the correct display of photographs with Chinese characters on the inksticks and his enthusiasm for my research. I am also pleased to have discovered the information about inksticks on his website.

Google Translate (by images) and Google lens (also through image analysis) have been very helpful to me. AI gives some answers on my questions but the Tatoo world is dominating the answers. It must have something to do with my type of questions.

-

If you have any additions or corrections, please let me know.
Future readers will certainly appreciate it.

Abstract

Ink in plaques and small sticks is the main focus of this study. Three historical inks (Roman, Hebrew, and Hindu) are worth mentioning. Chinese ink production has a long, continuous history, beginning in 1046 BCE.

This study divides the Chinese inkmakers into periods before and after 1795. The Chinese themselves are divided into families and their descendants. Japanese inkmakers are mentioned indirectly. Attention is paid to famous printed and illustrated Chinese books by inkstick makers from around 1400, 1588, and 1605. These books can be useful for analyzing the texts and symbols on the inksticks and contribute to dating, although in China, people also tend to refer to older examples in later periods.

The external characteristics of Chinese and Japanese inksticks and their relationship to English watercolour boxes from the Regency period and their mutual dating are the main focus of this study. From the mid-18th century onward, there was a growing market for watercolour paint boxes in England. In addition to paint cakes, shopkeepers also placed a stick of Indian ink in the paint box. These sticks originated primarily from China and were brought to England via the English East India Company. These sticks are present in authentic antique watercolour paint boxes, but are not a point of interest for many collectors.

Chinese ink sticks have a much longer history than Regency watercolour paint boxes. The sources for this research are very diverse. "Historical" photos of antique watercolour paint boxes online on eBay are an interesting source for me. Since about 2008, I have collected digital images of numerous objects for sale on eBay, related to watercolour paint boxes and their relationship to objects in museums. These images often provide reasonably easy-to-analyze images of antique ink sticks or fragments thereof. Sellers of such boxes often show more detailed photos of the contents than museums.

Descriptions of cargoes from ships of the English East India Company and the sale of boxes of inksticks in London between 1800 and 1835 also provide a source for the connection between the availability and possible use of authentic Chinese inksticks in boxes. A possible connection between manufacturers of watercolour paint boxes and the supply of inksticks via merchants on ships, as well as connections with paint makers, is also a focus of research. Unfortunately, this connection is still lacking. For this purpose, 18th- and 19th-century merchant archives should be available.

Relatedly, museum collections in China and contemporary articles in Chinese on inkstick collections by collectors in China and abroad offer interesting source material. Scholarly research has also been conducted on the relationship between brush, inkstick, inkstone, and paper (Four Treasures of the Study used in calligraphy and painting).

The use of black Chinese ink in painted scenes and accompanying texts falls outside the scope of this study. Fortunately, art supply suppliers offer a wealth of visual information and descriptions about the appearance of ink sticks in the second half of the 19th century through their historical catalogs.

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Sources in company archives related to this area still need to be accessed. Many old English-language art supply catalogs from after 1841 have now been digitized, and they show pages with illustrations of black ink ink sticks from 1875 onward. The last printed examples I know of in Western catalogs from major suppliers date back to 1925. Collectors sometimes make rubbings¹ (with graphite on paper) of the surface of an ink stick to illustrate the characters and other details. However, these images are of limited use for digital character reading.

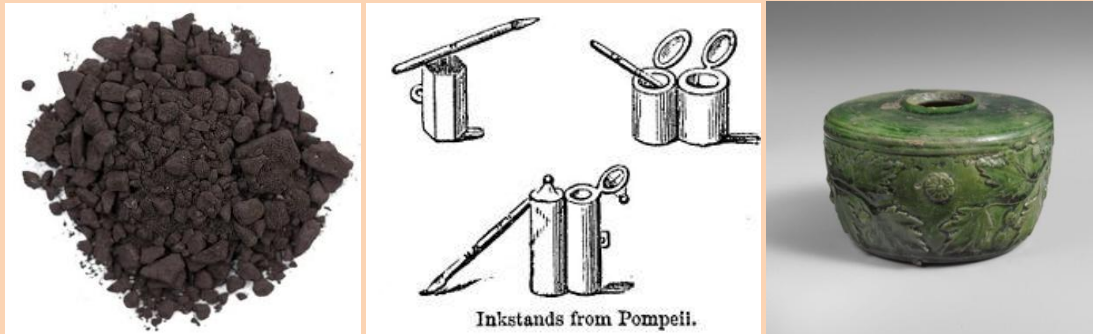
Thanks to the capabilities of AI, Google Lens, Google Translate Images, and the seamless integration of Chinese characters into texts in Word, Notepad, and similar applications, much material can now be easily stored digitally.

¹ Taken via a means of wet impress, paper/ink rubbings of live rock surfaces and other hard objects have long enabled visual and textual knowledge throughout (and from) China. Yet their formation, uses and marketing have been generally minimized in several dismissive arguments: rubbings arise from a secondary technique that disqualifies them as art; their purposes are only referential; their technical process is divorced from a 'mainstream' of art theory that prefers to discuss other printing categories as more truly creative. This talk revisits conditions around rubbings' higher complexity, revealing neglected relationships with several categories of art in China, and arguing even for a new imagination of rubbings as another art form. It redirects scholars and casual viewers towards an art history less prejudicially engaged with notions of the original, the copy and other descriptions whose applicability across cultures risks missing opportunities of deeper theorizing in local conditions. (Abstract of a Lecture | China Seminar "Surface Knowledge: the roles and purposes of ink rubbings in- and outside China" by Oliver Moore/ Dr. F. Lin, 12 February 2025. Universiteit Leiden).

<https://www.universiteitleiden.nl/en/events/2025/02/surface-knowledge-the-roles-and-purposes-of-ink-rubbings-in--and-outside-china>

Chapter 1. Early black inks

Atramentum ink, 79 AD



Atramentum, Inkstands and Roman Inkwell for atramentarium, found in Pompei

National Museum of Antiquities in Leiden
Double bronze inkwell. Both lids feature relief heads.
Inkwell Netherlands, Roman period
Double bronze inkwell. Both lids feature relief heads.

Details

Dimensions: H. 6 cm

Material: metal; bronze

Period: Roman 1-300 AD

Location: Netherlands, Gelderland, Nijmegen, Waal

Acquisition: Bequest, February 1931

Inventory number: e 1931/2.7

<https://www.rmo.nl/collectie/topstukken/inktpot/>



Two thousand years ago, a new type of ink emerged that remained popular for a long time, even among the Romans. This ink was made from iron salts obtained by treating iron with sulfuric acid. This iron was mixed with gall nut extract and a thickener. This ink was called Atramentum. The recipe was relatively simple, allowing many people to make ink. Thanks to all this home industry, many different variations of Atramentum emerged. Inks based on Atramentum were used until the 19th century.

'Atramentum' is a Latin for black ink, a black pigment, or a black coloring substance. It generally refers to a very dark, often liquid, substance. In ancient Rome, atramentum was used to describe any black coloring material, including ink for writing and pigments for painting. It can also refer to 'cephalopod' ink, like that used by an octopus.

Here are more details:

Use: Romans distinguished different types of atramentum, including those used for writing (librarium or scriptorium), for shoemaking (sutorium), and for other purposes (tectorium).

Material: It could be made from soot, burnt materials like ivory (atramentum elephantinum)², or even derived from the earth.

Iron Gall Ink: A specific type of atramentum, iron gall ink, was made from iron salts and tannic acid and was widely used for centuries.

2 See Robert Dossie about Ivory

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Maimonides ink in plaque form (1204)



Dried ink plaque, according to Maimonides' recipe. In practice, the ink plaque is placed at the bottom of the inkwell, and some gall nut extract is poured onto it to soften the ink before writing. Imaginair portrait of Maimonides. Rolled sheets of parchment in the home of a Rotterdam parchment dealer in 2024.

Schrift.

..... verwerpelyk(h).

Het was alleen geoorloofd met zwarten inkt te fchryven; niet met roode, groene, of andere kleuren; zelfs niet met goud (i).

De Inkt moest zelfs naar een bepaald voorschrift toebereid zyn. Roet en tot stof gemaakte koolen werden met wat honig samen gemengd, gedroogd en onder het fchryven met water van gal-nooten ontbonden (k).

....

Footnotes:

(h) MAIMONIDES H. Teph.c. 1.v. 12. 6. 7. 0. 4. 16.

(i) MAIMONIDES H. 1.6, 1. S. 5. Maff. Sopherim 1.S.9.(R)

(k) MAIMON. H. T. 1. 4. ←-----

(l) Alphas Hal. Sepb. Tborā p. 349. a. b.

=====

[Mishneh Torah – Wikipedia](#)

Maimonides' response — The Mishneh Torah was compiled between 1170 and 1180 CE (4930 and 4940 AM), while Maimonides was living in Egypt, and is regarded ...

Contemporary reaction · Printed editions and textual accuracy · [Present day](#)

The Ink

The main ingredients of the special ink the writer uses are gall nuts, or the gallic acid extracted from these nuts; gum arabic, a resinous substance; and copper vitriol, a bluish stone that gives the ink the required blackness. The gall nuts and the resin are boiled in water for about an hour. Then the vitriol is added, and the mixture is boiled until reduced by half.

Further details of this process, however, remain a closely guarded secret. Through the tradition passed down by his teachers and the knowledge he has acquired over the years, each writer has his

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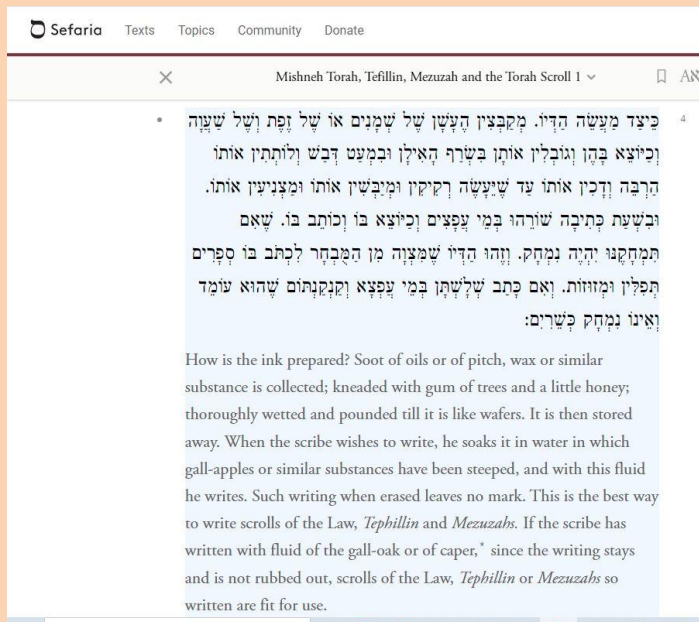
own formula for creating ink with the desired properties of brightness, easy flow, intense color, and a tack-free film when dried. (Criteria that characterize good ink)

Here is the description of Maimonides' ink recipe according to Colette Sirat:

How is the ink made? One gathers lampblack obtained from oil, pitch, wax, or similar substances; it is bound with wood rosin and a little honey, kneaded well, and flattened into cakes; it is dried and then stored. When one wishes to write, one soaks it in gall-water or something similar and writes with it. If one wishes to erase, one must do so. This is the finest ink and is suitable for writing Torah scrolls, tefillin, and mezuzot. However, if (any of) these three is written with gall-water and chalcantum, which is durable and cannot be erased, it can be used for religious purposes.

In Europe, Jews, like Christians, used liquid ink: this was based on gall-water, with the addition of resin to bind the ink and a metallic salt. In both Muslim and Christian countries

Text in Hebrew ([Maimonides: Laws of Tefillin chapter one, Halacha three](#)) :



Sefaria Texts Topics Community Donate

Mishneh Torah, Tefillin, Mezuzah and the Torah Scroll 1

ביצד מעשה הדיו. מקבצין העשן של שמנים או של זפת ושל שפוח
וכיוצא בהן וגובלין אותן בשרף האילן ובמעט דבש ולותתין אותו
הרבה וזכין אותו עד שיעשה רקיקין ומיבשין אותו ומצנעין אותו.
ובשעת קתיבה שורהו במי עפצים וכיוצא בו וכותב בו. שאם
תמחקנהו יהיה נמחק. והו הדיו שמוצוה מן המבחר לכתב בו ספרים
תפלין ומזוזות. ואם כתב שלשון במי עפצא וקנקנתום שהוא עומד
לאינו נמחק כשרים:

How is the ink prepared? Soot of oils or of pitch, wax or similar substance is collected; kneaded with gum of trees and a little honey; thoroughly wetted and pounded till it is like wafers. It is then stored away. When the scribe wishes to write, he soaks it in water in which gall-apples or similar substances have been steeped, and with this fluid he writes. Such writing when erased leaves no mark. This is the best way to write scrolls of the Law, *Tephillin* and *Mezuzahs*. If the scribe has written with fluid of the gall-oak or of caper,* since the writing stays and is not rubbed out, scrolls of the Law, *Tephillin* or *Mezuzahs* so written are fit for use.

The Recipe

How is Maimonides' ink prepared?

Soot from oils³, pitch, wax, or a similar substance is collected; kneaded with tree gum and a little honey, thoroughly moistened, and pounded into wafers.

It is then stored.

When the scribe wishes to write, they immerse it in water soaked in galls or similar substances, and with this liquid they write.

Such writing, when erased, leaves no trace.

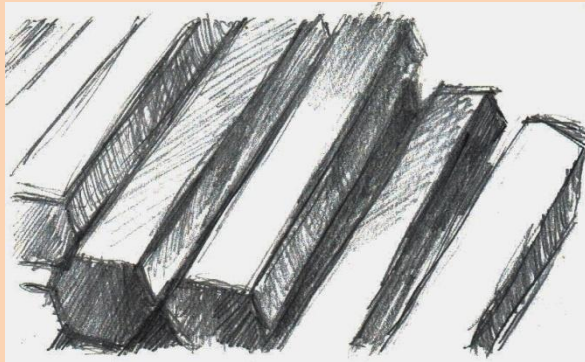
This is the best way to write on scrolls of the Torah, Tephillin, and Mezuzah.

If the scribe has written with the liquid of galls or capers,* since the writing remains and is not erased, the scrolls of the Torah, Tephillin, or Mezuzah thus written are suitable for use.

(* **Caper: flower buds or seeds of a low shrub native to Mediterranean countries, used as a seasoning.**)

3 Soot from Oils , as used in China

India's `maṣi` ink, ca 1650

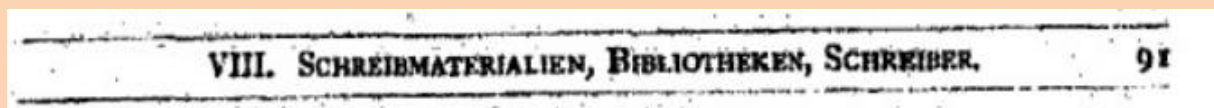


India's "maṣi" ink blended ashes, water, and animal glues.

Description of maṣa by Georg Bühler:

p 62,

Regarding the use of ink in India , see above p . 22. The ancient Indian term for ink is maṣi, often spelt masi, and now pronounced makhi , which is derived from the obsolete verb mas, himsāyām , compare maṣa and maṣmaṣā. Etymologically and originally it means 'powder' (of charcoal and the like), used for the preparation of ink, see the larger Petersburg Dictionary under masi, and the Grundriss, I , II , p. 91 .



<https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k73602g/f97.item.r=tinte>

91

H. Tinte. - Der älteste, sicher indische Namen der oder maṣi, wofür auch oft masi oder masī geschrieben wird. Das Wort, welches als v. 1. schon in einem Grhyasūtra vorkommt, ist von maṣ himsāyām abgeleitet und bedeutet ursprünglich, Zerriebenes, Pulver«, 34 Dann bezeichnet es verschiedene zerriebene Kohlenarten, die mit Wasser und Gummi arabicum, Zucker u. s. w. vermischt, als Tinte verwendet wurden. 15 In der classischen Sanskrit-literatur ist maṣi mit der Bedeutung Tinte keineswegs, wie BURNELL (JdH: Arthur Coke Burnell 1840-1882) meint, auf späte Werke beschränkt, sondern schon Subandhu und Bāṇa bekannt. Einen zweiten Namen der Tinte melā haben BENFEY und HINCKS aus dem griechischen μέλας ableiten wollen. Das Wort dürfte aber das Fem. des Prakrit-Adjectivs maīla schmutzig, schwarz (scil. maṣi) sein, welches schwerlich ein Lehnwort ist. Auch mela erscheint schon bei Subandhu 37 in dem Denominativ melānandāyate wird zum melānanda oder Tintenfass. Für melānanda kommt in den Koṣa maṣimani und in den Puranen maṣipātra oder maṣi bhanda vor.

Dass die Inder im 4. Jahrh. a. Chr. Tinte gebrauchten, wird durch die schon erwähnten Angaben des Nearchus und Q. Curtius sehr wahrscheinlich, denen zufolge sie auf Baumwollenzeug und Bhūrja schrieben. Diese Wahrscheinlichkeit wird durch die Substitution von Punkten für Schleifen in einigen Buchstaben der A. Ed. noch verstärkt. Nicht später als das 2. Jahrh. a. Chr. ist die älteste Probe von Tintenschrift auf dem Steingefässe, aus dem Stūpa

92 I. ALLGEMEINES UND SPRACHE., 11. INDISCHE PALAEOGRAPHIE,

von Andher (S. 30). Aus den ersten Jahrh. p. Chr. stammen die beschriebenen twists von Bhūrja und die Steingefässe mit gemalten Kharoṣṭhi-Buchstaben (S. 19 f.) und einige Jahrh. später kommen die alten MSS. auf Bhūrja und Palmblättern. Gemalte Inschriften kommen noch in den Höhlen von Ajanta vor. 38

Farbige Tinten, mit denen in späterer Zeit besonders die Jaina sehr schöne MSS, hergestellt haben, 39 werden auch in brahmanischen Werken, 2. B. in den Abschnitten der Puranen über Schenkungen von MSS., mehr-fach erwähnt. 4º Als Surrogat für Tinte wurde in alter Zeit neben der schon erwähnten Kreide, auch Mennige (hingula) gebraucht."

Paper MSS. dated Vikrama-Samvat 1394 and 1394 (A.D. 1397-98 and 1397-98), the leaves of which are not according to the size of palm-leaves, have been discovered by Peterson at Anhilvil Patan⁵⁴. It is very doubtful if any of the ancient MSS. from Kashgar, which are written on a peculiar paper, covered with a layer of gypsum, are of Indian origin; Hoernle believes that all of them were written in Central Asia⁵⁵.

The oldest undoubtedly Indian term for ink is *māsi* or *māśi* frequently spelt *masi* or *maśi*. The word, which occurs as a *varia lectio* already in a Gṛhyasūtra, is derived from the verb *maś* (*maśayāmi*), and means etymologically "powder"⁵²⁶. Further, it serves to denote several kinds of pulverised charcoal, which were mixed with water, gnm, sugar and so forth, and used for the preparation of ink⁵²⁷. Burnell is mistaken when he asserts that in Classical Sanskrit Literature *maśi*, "ink" occurs only in the late works; it was known to Bṛhas (about A. D. 620) and to his predecessor Subandhu⁵²⁸.

The statements of Nearchos and Q. Curtius (see above, page 20) according to which the Hindus wrote on cotton cloth and on the inner bark of trees, i.e. Bhrjra, make it very probable that they used ink already in the 4th century B.C. To the same conclusion points the fact that in some letters of the Aśoka edicts dates are occasionally substituted for loṣṭa⁵⁴². The oldest specimen of writing with ink, on the reliquary of the Stupa [92] of Andher (see above, page 20) is certainly not later than the 2nd century B. C. From the 1st centuries A. D. dates the Kharoṣṭhi Dharmapada from Khotan, as well as the twists of Bhrjra and the stone vessels with Kharoṣṭhi letters in ink from the Stūpas of Afghanistan. Somewhat later are the ancient Bhrjra and palm-leaf MSS. with Brāhma characters. Painted inscriptions occur still in the caves of Ajanta⁵⁴³.

The general name of "an instrument for writing" is *lekhanī*, which of course includes the *stilus*, pencils, brushes, reed and wooden pens, and is found already in the epics⁶⁺⁷.

Coloured ink, which in later times the Jainas especially have used extensively for their MSS644, is mentioned also in Brabmanical works, e.g., in the sections of the Purāṇas on the donation of MSS545. Besides ohalk (see above, § 34, B), red lead or minium (hingula) was used, already in ancient times, as a substitute for ink 846.

Ancient Chinese Ink Sticks

Robert Dossie, Of Indian ink - ca 1758

The Handmaid to the Arts Teaching [...], 1758

Black. CLASS IX. Of black colors . p. 129 -133

Of Indian ink.

Indian ink is a black pigment brought hither from China, which on being rubbed with water, diffolves ; and forms a substance resembling ink ; but of a consistence extremely well adapted to the working with a pencil : on which account it is not only much used as a black color in miniature painting; but is the black now generally made use of for all smaller drawings in chiaro oscuro (or where the effect is to be produced from light and shade only.) The preparation of Indian ink, as well as of the other compositions used by the Chinese as paints, is not hitherto revealed on any good authority ; but it appears clearly from experiments to be the coal of fish bones, or some other vegetable substance, mixed with isinglass size, or other size ; and, most probably, honey or sugar candy to prevent its cracking. A substance, therefore, much of the same nature, and applicable to the same purposes, may be formed in the following manner.

*“ Take of isinglass six ounces, reduce it to a size, by dissolving it over the fire in double its weight of water. Take then of Spanish liquorice one ounce ; and dissolve it also in double its weight of water ; and grind up « with it an ounce of **ivory black** , prepared above directed in p. 130. Add this mixture to the size while hot ; and stir the whole together till all the ingredients be thoroughly incorporated. Then evaporate away the water in balneo mariæ , and cast the remaining, composition into leaden moulds greased ; or make it up in any « other form.” The color of this composition will be equally good with that of the Indian ink : the isinglass size, mixt with the colors, works with the pencil equally well with the Indian ink : and the Spanish liquorice will both render it easily dissolvable on the rubbing with water, to which the isinglass alone is some what reluctant; and also prevent its cracking and peeling off from the ground on which it is laid.*

JdH: A recipe how to make your own black ink in 1758. See p. 130 [by Dossie] for preparing ivory black.
Cast the remaining, composition into leaden moulds greased.

Chapter 2. Chinese and Japanese Ink Makers

Before, after and during the English Regency period (1795-1837)

Because later ink makers refer back to the work of their predecessors, it is important to include them in this overview as well. This is noted where possible.

Chinese Ink stick makers before 1795

Xing Yi invented ink production in the reign of King Xuan during the Zhou dynasty. Existed for 789 years, from c. 1046 BC until 256 BC, the longest span of any dynasty in Chinese history.

Wei Dan, who lived in the kingdom of Wei. **Wei Dan (韋誕) was a calligrapher from the Three Kingdoms period in China (220–280 AD)** who is regarded as the earliest known master ink maker in China's history, with a biography attributed to him in the historical record "《中國墨水製造史》 (History of Chinese Ink Manufacturing). He is noted for his expertise in producing ink, a fundamental element of the Four Treasures of the Study used in calligraphy and painting (brush, inkstick, instone and paper). The earliest comprehensive written description of ink production is found in the **Ch'i-min Yaoshu**, a work dating to the 5th or 6th century AD.⁴

Xi Chao and **Xi Tinggui**, father and son ink makers who were active in the Southern Tang during the reign of Li Yu. Both **Xi's** achieved imperial recognition for their exceptional inks made from materials like pine soot, ground pearl, jade, and Borneo camphor. These ingredients were mixed with varnish, then pounded 10,000 times. Li's recipe called for one catty of pine soot, three measures of powdered pearl, and one measure each of ground jade and Borneo camphor. Their method made use of the ancient pines at the base of Mt. Huang, producing inks so beloved that the emperor conferred the imperial surname of Li upon them. Li's recipe called for one catty of pine soot, three measures of powdered pearl, and one measure each of ground jade and Borneo camphor. These ingredients were mixed with varnish, then pounded 10,000 times. Li's inks were claimed to be "as enduring as jade, and their patterns as sharp as horn; the writing of tens of scrolls barely uses one or two hundredths of a tael."

Inks were valued for their quality and the reputation of the maker. Famous makers, like the father-son duo Xi Chao and Xi Tinggui, achieved imperial recognition for their exceptional inks made from materials like pine soot, ground pearl, jade, and Borneo camphor, according to Taiwan Panorama

During Li Yu's reign as the third ruler of the Southern Tang dynasty (961–976), he was an accomplished patron of the arts and a renowned master of ci poetry.

Li Tinggui's inks from the Five Dynasties period (907–960) were so extraordinarily rare that "gold itself" was easier to come by. **Traditional Hui inksticks** are associated with the **historical ink maker Li Tinggui**. These inks are renowned for their premium "oil soot" black color, used for calligraphy and painting. The tradition of **Li Tinggui's inks** continues through brands like Old Hu Kai Wen, which produce modern inksticks incorporating **Li Tinggui's** legacy, and the production method for Hui ink, a traditional Chinese art form from Huizhou, still exists today (2025). Li Tinggui's method was passed down to the present day in his native Huizhou, in modern-day She County, Anhui Province, with the result that Hui Ink is still regarded as among the best Chinese inks. The high-quality ink is also engraved with fine landscapes and portraits, comes in a variety of shapes and colors, and is beautifully packaged. Even today, literati in both Taiwan and the mainland cannot go calling on friends without bringing a stick or two of Hui Ink along as a gift.

⁴ It details the ingredients, including carbon (from soot) and animal glue (likely from bovine skins), which form the basic components of traditional Chinese ink used for writing and painting.

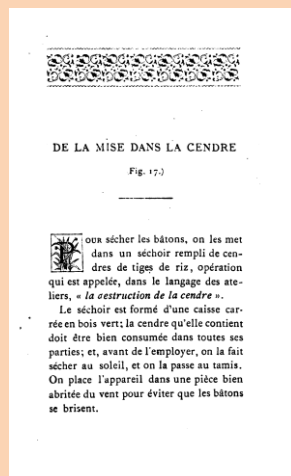
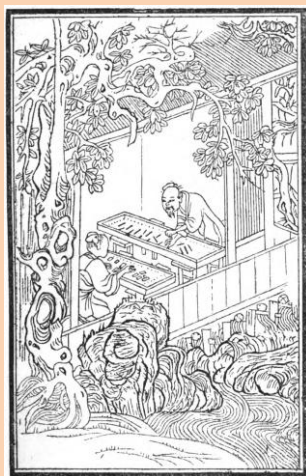
Ancient Chinese Ink Sticks

Siu Yijian (957–995) records three stages in the development of ink in China. He was a Northern Song Dynasty scholar-official, not a traditional ink maker, who compiled the "Four Treasures of the Study," a significant work detailing the crafting of paper, ink, brushes, and ink stones. While he was an authority on these scholarly tools and the methods of their creation, his role was as a compiler and intellectual, not an artisan who personally produced ink.

The Song dynasty (960–1279 CE) was a culturally prosperous, economically advanced, and technologically innovative period in Chinese history, divided into the Northern Song (960–1127) and the Southern Song (1127–1279). In the Song-dynasty text *Wenfang Si Pu* ("Four Books on the Scholar's Studio"), Su Yijian records three stages in the development of ink in China—first the sap of the varnish tree, then graphite, and finally ink "pills." Su reports that ink from the belly of cuttlefish was also used for both writing and dyeing.

Inkstick-maker **Shen Jisun** 沈繼孫 (1322–1403) wrote a manual on his artisanship *Collected Essentials for Inksticks* (Mofa jiyao 墨法集要) to demonstrate his literacy to his friends and potential customers in the literati circles in Jiangnan region. In sixteen-century China.

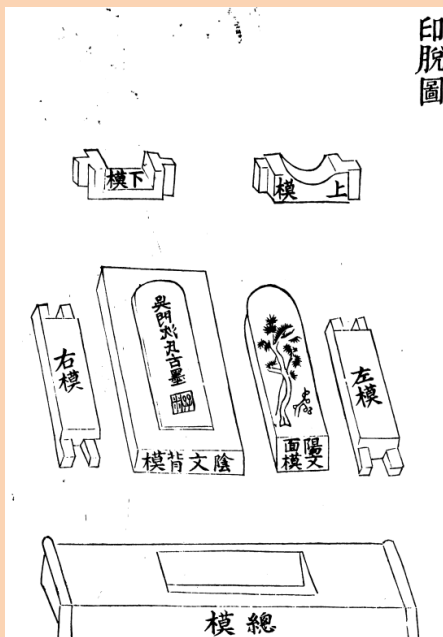
Son Histoire Et Sa Fabrication, par Jisun Shen (14th century), traduit par Maurice Jametel (1856-1889)



See for more information the book.

Free to download on the internet.

<https://archive.org/details/lencredechineson00shen/lencredechineson00shen>



The image shows parts used in making traditional Chinese ink pens or seals.

The different components are:

模上 (mó shàng): Upper evil.

模下 (mó xià): Bottom evil.

右模 (yòu mó): Right wrong.

左模 (zuǒ mó): Linker mal.

模背文陰 (mó bèi wén yīn): The back of the mold with the inscribed text (here it says "吳門古墨" - Old Wumen ink).

模總 (mó zǒng): The general/complete grit or the complete inkblot.

These parts are used to mold ink pens or seals, with the mold creating the desired shape and inscription.

Here is a translation:

印脫圖 (yìn tuō tú): Printing/stamping diagram.

模上 (mó shàng): Upper mold.

模下 (mó xià): Lower mold.

右模 (yòu mó): Right mold.

左模 (zuǒ mó): Left mold.

Ancient Ink of Wumen (a place name).

模背文陰 (mó bèi wén yīn): Inscribed text on the back of the mold (literally "mold back text yin").

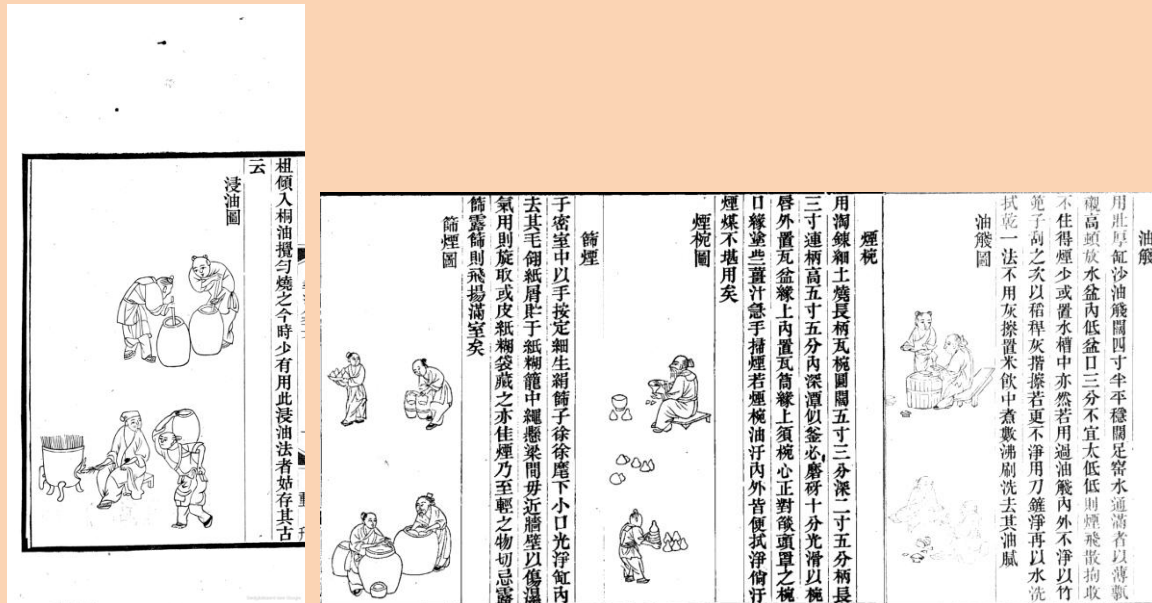
模 (mó): Mold/Model.

模總 (mó zǒng): General/Complete mold or total mold.

Page from the original book of Jisun Shen (14th century, China)

https://books.google.com/books/about/Mo_fa_ji_yao.html?id=OHEtAAAAYAAJ

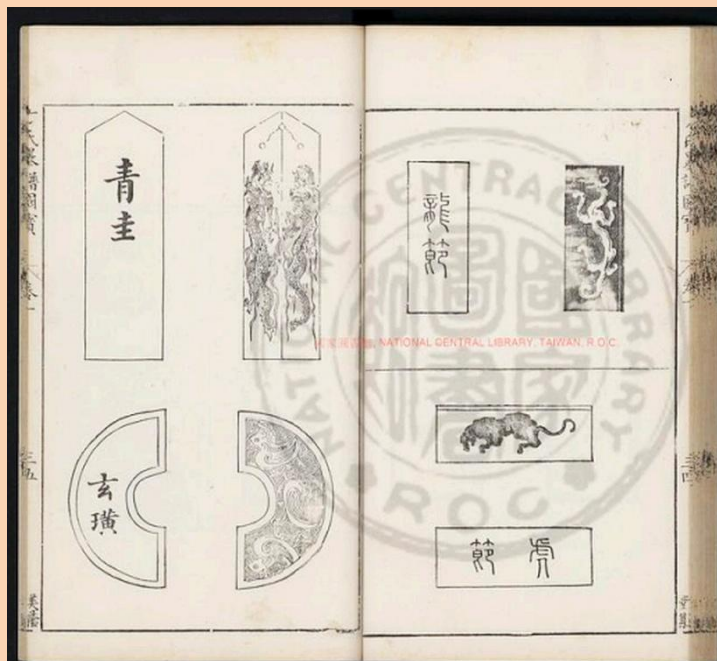
Ancient Chinese Ink Sticks



Oil receptacles (*youzhan* 油{角戔}), soot cups (*yanwan* 煙碗), and the sieving of soot (*shai yan* 篩煙). From the *Wuyingdian juzhenban* 武英殿聚珍版 edition.

Mofa jiyao 墨法集要 "Collected essentials of ink-making methods" is a book on the production of ink written during the MING PERIOD 明 (1368-1644) by Shen Jisun 沈繼孫 (late 14th cent.), who lived in Suzhou 江蘇, Jiangsu, during the very early Ming.

Not much is known about his life, but he is mentioned in a poem included in the painter Ni Zan's 倪瓚 (1301-1374) collection *Yunlin ji* 雲林集. (Ulrich Theobald, ChinaKnowledge.de)



A page from the **The Fang Family's Inkstick Catalogue** (*Fangshi mopu* 方氏墨譜);

There is a look alike relation with the pointed ink sticks of LeFranc & Co. Paris (1905), Winsor & Newton London (1884), Charles Roberson & Co. London (1875), James Newman, London (1862).

Inkstick-makers **Fang Yulu** 方于魯 (1541-1608) and **Cheng Junfang** 程君房 (1541-ca. 1620) edited and published **The Fang Family's Inkstick Catalogue** (*Fangshi mopu* 方氏墨譜; 1588).

They initiated new trends by decorating their solid inks with flamboyant designs.

https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/d/df/NCL-06845_%E6%96%B9%E6%B0%8F%E5%A2%A8%E8%AD%9C.pdf



Pages from Cheng Family's Inkstick Garden

The Cheng Family's Inkstick Garden (Chengshi moyuan 程氏墨苑; 1605)

https://www.shuge.org/view/cheng_shi_mo_yuan/

respectively to establish the scientific knowledge of inksticks through the brush of contributing literati to the albums.

Two ink-makers from Hui-chou: **Fang Yü-lu (ca. 1541-1608)** and **Ch'eng Chün-fang (1541-after 1610)**

Both books feature hundreds of illustrations of ink-stick designs as well as commentary by the famous literati of the day.

Zhan Chenggui was good at revitalizing fifteenth-century inks of the Yongle court (eighteenth-century Wuyuan ink maker)

Another inkstick-maker **Pan Fangkai 潘方凱 (fl. early seventeenth century)** acted as a publisher to establish a link between his products and those by famous inkstick-makers mentioned in books he reprinted.

The book 'Collected essentials for making Inksticks' acted as a link between Emperor Qianlong and artisans in the Qing court's Imperial Inkstick Workshop in the eighteenth century. The book functioned for the knowledge on inksticks to be communicated between the two parties.

Ancient Chinese Ink Sticks



A yellowed copy of Cao's Ink Forest in the display cabinet is a valuable and important document that traces the history of Cao's ink. According to Wang Yi, Cao's Ink Forest is a classic book of ink collection compiled by Cao Sugong and his grandsons Dingyuan and Linyuan. It has been supplemented by later generations, but most of the pages of this book are missing. The ink collection in front of him was passed down from Zhang Xiebo and Yin Runsheng, two collectors, to his own hands. [Shanghai Brush-pen and ink Museum near Fuzhou Road in Shanghai, the "Love for Ziyuguang-Cao Sugong's Ink Collection", 2025. "In the fragrance of ancient ink, reread Cao Sugong's literary tradition and Shanghai style imprint"]⁵

Cao Sugong, active from 1615 to 1689, was a successful inkmaker who established his business in Shexian. The Cao family continued the business for three hundred years, and inksticks from the sixth generation were still in circulation in the 1920s.

Giving up a career in officialdom in Beijing, Cao took over an ink-making business in Shexian, his hometown, and published the ink catalogue *Molin* (The forest of ink) under the name of the Visu Zhai studio.

Each ink stick came complete with the maker's names, seals, titles, sometimes dates. His inks were produced in sets of six, eight or twelve sticks, each moulded with a series of scenes. He named each set in the same way as artists named their prints. The Cao family continued the business for another three hundred years, and later moved to Suzhou.

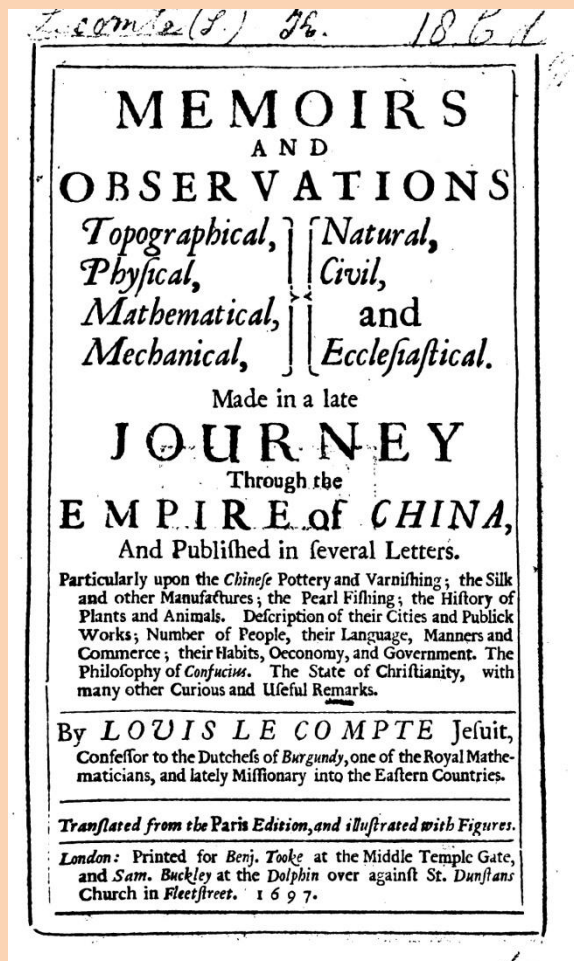
Remark of Winsor & Newton:

In India, scribes have used needle and pen since antiquity to write many of their Buddhist and Jain scripts. Black ink was known as masi in India: a mixture of different ashes, water and animal glue. It was only in the mid-17th century, when Europe began importing ink from India, that it became known as Indian ink.

⁵ It is a pity that there is not any original image of the collection in Copy of Cao's Ink Forest. Nor is there an illustrated copy of this edition available for viewing anywhere.

Ancient Chinese Ink Sticks

Memoirs and observations made in a late journey through the empire of China by Louis Le Comte, Jesuit Priest (1697)



192 Of the Language, Characters, Books,
continually renew the Libraries, that are therefore ancient, because they conſiſt of Authentick Copies of Ancient Originals.

Since I have told your Grace all things that concern the Books and Printings of *China*, I hope you will not take it amiſs, if I ſpeak a word or two concerning the particular quality of their Ink: It is moſt excellent; and they have hitherto vainly tried in *France* to imitate it; that of *Nankin* is moſt ſet by: And there be Sticks made of it ſo very curious, and of ſuch a ſweet Scent, that one would be tempted to keep ſome of them tho' they ſhould be of no uſe at all.

I ſay Sticks of Ink, for it is not a Liquor like ours; it is ſolid, and reſembles our Mineral Colours, tho' lighter by far: They make it into all Figures; the more uſual are four-ſquare, but not ſo broad as long; about half an Inch thick. There are ſome of them gilded with Figures of Dragons, Birds, and Flowers; they contrive for that purpoſe pretty Moulds of Wood ſo curiouſly wrought, that one would have much ado to make any thing more compleat upon Metal.

When one has a mind to write, they have a little poliſht Marble upon the Table, made hollow at the end, proper to hold water; they infuſe one end of the ſtick therein, which they rub gently upon the ſmooth part of the Marble; and in a moment, according as they rub, there is produced a Liquor, more or leſs black, wherein they dip the point of the Pencil to write with. This Ink is ſhining, extream black, and altho' it ſinks when the Paper is ſo fine, yet does it never extend further than the Pencil, ſo that the Letters are exactly terminated, how groſs ſoever the ſtrokes be.

It

Louis le Comte: "I ſay Sticks of Ink, for it is not a Liquor like ours; it is ſolid, and reſembles our Mineral Colours, tho' lighter by far: They make it into all Figures; the more uſual are four-ſquare, but not ſo broad as long; about half an Inch thick. **There are ſome of them gilded with Figures of Dragons, Birds, and Flowers;** they contrive for that purpoſe pretty Moulds of Wood ſo curiouſly wrought, that one would have much ado to make any thing more compleat upon Metal.

When one has a mind to write, they have a little poliſht Marble upon the Table, made hollow at the end, proper to hold water; they infuſe one end of the ſtick there in, which they rub gently upon the ſmooth part of the Marble; and in a moment, according as they rub, there is produced a Liquor, more or leſs black, wherein they dip the point of the Pencil to write with. This Ink is ſhining, extream black, and altho' it ſinks when the Paper is ſo fine, yet does it never extend further than the Pencil, ſo that the Letters are exactly terminated, how groſs ſoever the ſtrokes be."

The Zhan family in Hongguan village is the representative of Hongguan ancient smoke ink industry: it was **Zhan Yuanxiu (1627-1703)** who improved the original technology to make Hongguan smoke ink a favorite of the Chinese literati. Nowadays, Hongguan Zhan's ink can still be seen in the Palace Museum.

Zhan Chenggui Zhi, a Wuyuan ink maker, is not a widely documented figure in historical records.

Known is a Chinese ink pen with wooden box China, Qing Dynasty, 17th - 18th century Soot / ink, dragon motif (long), Gold-colored. At the entrance of Hongguan village (Wuyuan County, Jiangxi Province), Liu Geng Tang Hall is the residence of **Zhan Guohan**, the third grandson of **Zhan Chenggui**, a master of ink-making in the late Qing Dynasty. The Late Qing Dynasty refers to the final decades of the Qing dynasty in China, from roughly the mid-19th century until its collapse in 1912.

Ancient Chinese Ink Sticks

One of Cao's employees, **Wang Jinsheng**, established his own workshop, the Antiquity Appraisal Studio (Jiangu Zhai), in the 1730s in Huizhou and also published a catalog of his inksticks.

Both Cao's and Wang's inksticks were renowned for their quality and sold in luxurious packaging, and were popular with both scholars and the imperial court.

Writing set in a lidded box made from black lacquered wood, with 8 compartments. Inside is one large and one small ink stone, a red ink stick which is oval in section with raised dragon amid cloud design painted with gilt and inscribed on back with 'xiang long tian men ru zi wei', Towards the dragon gate, entering the Purple Star, another ink stick that inscribed on the back with 'Huishe Cao Su-gong zhi', Made by Cao Su-gong in Anhui province, two small metal containers, possibly made of paktong with stamped star pattern. There is another empty compartment for 2 brushes.

Cao Su-gong, 1615-89, gave up his official career in 1667 and took over an ink-making business from Wu Shu-da. He changed the studio name to Yisu Zhai and published an ink catalogue called Molin, The forest of ink. The Cao family business moved to Suzhou during the Qianlong period, 1736-1795, later moved to Shanghai in 1860. (<https://www.horniman.ac.uk/object/nn14443/>)

Wang Jin-sheng, made a name of his own by setting up another workshop, Antiquity Appraisal Studio (Jiang Zhai), in the 1730s in Huizhou. Wang's inksticks were known for their designs of landscapes, and he too published his own collection of five hundred inksticks in a catalogue, Jangu chat moson. His inksticks were sold in expensive packages such as zitan wood or gilt lacquer boxes, a popular gift item among scholars. Wang's famous edition of inks included a series of sets decorated with scenes and flowers, and even with the versions of the popular Gengali tu prints (Agriculture and Sericulture Painting series). Making ink and mineral pigments in sets of several sticks was also favoured by the court. The National Palace Museum has a number of beautiful boxes of coloured inksticks, each bearing a flower on one side, and the emperor's poem on the other.

Wang Jie'an (n.d.), **Wang Jinsheng** (n.d.), and **Hu Kaiwen** (1742-1808) were called the "Four Major Inkstick Makers of the Qing." Even today, "Hui ink" is a synonym for "inkstick."

Wang Ji'an, along with **Cao Sugong** and **Wang Jinsheng**, was recognized as one of the three best producers of ink-sticks during the Qianlong (active 1736-1795) period.

Wang Jinsheng lived during the periods of Emperor Kangxi and Emperor Yongzheng (active 1723-1735).

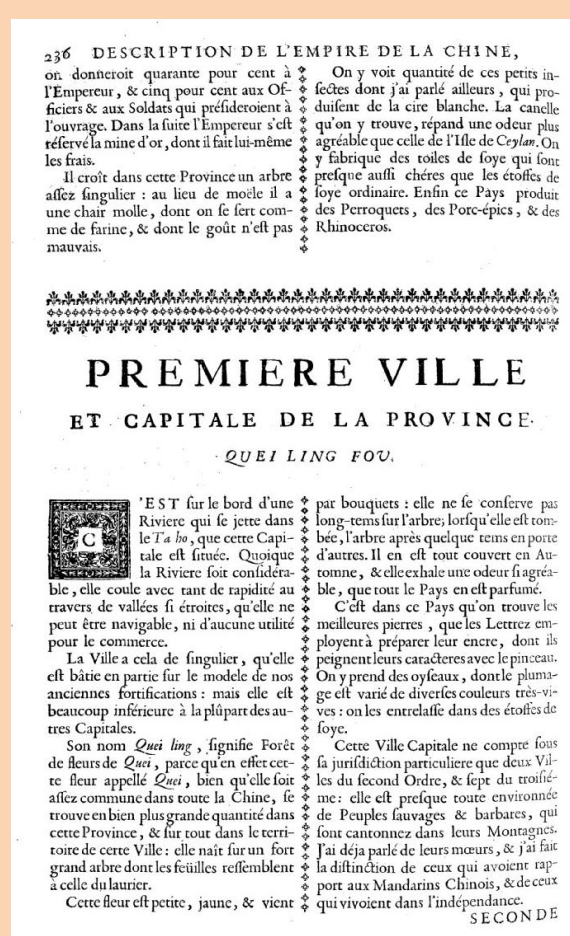
Wang Weigao, Wang's second son, served for a time as the ink-producing training officer at the imperial court, bringing more fame to Wang's ink. Their descendants compiled books to record their reputations.

Circular inkcake, moldest with landscape designed by **CGuan Huai** 1124 hof) on one side, molded poetry composed by Qanlong in 1765 penned by Gioan Haw on the other. Field Museum, Chicago. Dimeter 457 the ink-making business from his father-in-law, he set up branch shops in other cities and eventually changed the shops to his own name. **Hu** was known for making coloured mineral inks for painting. His most sought-after series was one decorated with **Huang Shan** mountain scenes. **Hu's family ink shop** stayed in business until the twentieth century and was a prize winner in the 1915 Panama-Pacific Exposition in San Francisco,

Description from Father Jean-Baptiste du Halde (1735) about Chinese Ink stick making

Interesting text about old (1735) Indian ink sticks is the mention in the next source about China: Jean-Baptiste du Halde (<https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k54962623/f361.image.r=encre>)

Du Halde, Jean-Baptiste (1674-1743). Author of the text. Geographical, historical, chronological, political, and physical description of the Empire of China and Chinese Tartary. Volume 1 / ... By Father J.-B. Du Halde, 1735.



Orinally Part of text in French translated in English

(DESCRIPTION OF THE EMPIRE OF CHINA) AND OF CHINESE TARTARY, 135

EIGHTH CITY
CAPITAL OF THE WESTERN PART OF THE PROVINCE
NGAN KUNG FOU.

Its location is charming: it borders three Provinces, and although it is only five days' journey from the Capital, it nevertheless has a private Viceroy. This Mandarin holds a large garrison in a Fort commanding Lake Po Yang, at the entrance to the Province of Kiang Fai, and the Yang Tse Kiang River. This city is very considerable for its wealth and its commerce: it is the passage for everything brought to Nankang: all the country that depends on it is very open, very pleasant, and very fertile. It has within its jurisdiction only six cities of the third order.

NINTH CITY
HOEI TCHEOU.

It is the southernmost of the entire province, and one of the richest in the Empire: the air there is healthy and temperate, although it is surrounded by mountains. It has under its jurisdiction only six cities of the third order. Its inhabitants are considered to be very skilled in commerce: there is no city, however slightly commercial, where there are not merchants from Hoi Tcheou; nor bank, or exchange, where they are not among the principal stakeholders. The people there are thrifty and content with little; but they are bold and enterprising in their trade. In the mountains there are mines of gold, silver, and copper. It is said that this is the country where the best tea grows. The people there are thrifty, and are content with little; "Enterprising in this trade." There are mines of gold, silver, and copper in the mountains. It is said that this is the country where the best tea grows. It is also in this city that the best ink in China is made, supplied by the merchants of Nanjing. It is known that this ink is not liquid like ours, but is made in the shape of small molds, on which the workers carefully engrave various figures of flowers, animals, grotesques, etc. The art of making ink, like all the arts related to the sciences, is held in high esteem in China, where....

136 DESCRIPTION OF THE EMPIRE OF CHINA,

It is only through science that one rises to the dignities of the Empire. Likewise, all the varnish works that are done in Hoi Tcheou are preferred, because it is more beautiful, and because they know how to apply them than anywhere else. And it is only through science that one rises to the dignities of the empire. Likewise, all the varnish works that are made in Hoi Tcheou are preferred, because it is more

Ancient Chinese Ink Sticks

beautiful, and because people know how to apply it better than anywhere else. And it is similarly from its borders, which touch the district of lao Tcheou, of the province of Kiang Fi, that part of the earth used for porcelain is brought to King Te Tching.

176 DESCRIPTION DE L'EMPIRE DE LA CHINE, cœur humain qui porte les petits génies hâfards, dans le dessein de faire fort à court rémètairement les plus grands

De la civilité, & de ses devoirs

Les civilitez qui se pratiquent dans le commerce du monde, font à la vérité de pures cérémonies; cependant il n'est pas permis à un honnête homme de les ignorer: il faut qu'il sache comment on se fait l'un l'autre, soit de loin, soit en s'abordant; quand & de quelle manière il faut céder le pas; de quelle sorte on fait la plus profonde révérence; quelles cérémonies se doivent observer dans un festin; enfin cent autres manières honnêtes & polies, que l'usage & la bienfaisance prescrivent. Ceux qui négligent de s'en instruire, seront fort embarrassés (a) de leur contenance, lorsqu'ils se trouveront dans l'obligation indispensable de les pratiquer.

Nos jeunes gens ont coutume de dire: alors comme alors, on en fera qu'en faisant quelques petits mouvemens, comme si l'on voulait faire la civilité dans les formes; on ne voit-on pas souvent les Mandarins en aller ainsi entr'eux? Ils agissent & abrègent ces cérémonies; dans un festin, après avoir fait un petit salut, en remuant & élevant les deux mains jointes, *Y'kung*, ils vont prendre leurs places sans façon. Que dites-vous, jeunes gens? On voit bien que vous avez peu d'expérience. Ces Mandarins savent parfaitement tous les Rits qui se pratiquent, & ils n'y manquent pas au besoin, au lieu que vous autres, vous ne vous en dispensez, que parce que vous les ignorez. Quand on ne s'est pas formé de bonne heure à ces civilitez, il est aussi difficile de s'en tirer avec honneur, que de transporter une Montagne d'un lieu à un autre.

(a) L'expression Chinoise dit: ne sçauront que faire de leurs pieds & de leurs mains.

bon,

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William Watson and Chuimei Ho, write in The Arts of China after 1620 (Yale University Press Pelican History of Art), 2007: "Ink connoisseurs believed that imperial inks marked with the dates 1737 and 1771 were recycled products. The effort of copying old imperial inks was not limited to the court. The eighteenth-century Wuyuan ink maker Zhan Chenggui was good at revitalizing fifteenth-century inks of the Yongle court."

Chinese ink makers from 1795 and later date



Hu Kaiwen

The famous Anhui ink maker, **Hu Kaiwen (active) 1780-1800** learned his trade through marriage.

Inheriting the ink-making business from his father-in-law, he set up branch shops in other cities and eventually changed the shops to his own name. **Hu** was known for making coloured mineral inks for painting. His most sought-after series was one decorated with Huang Shan mountain scenes.

After the Cao family moved to Suzhou, **Wang's** ink-sticks filled more than half of the market in the Hui Prefecture area. At that time, every time a senior official in the South selected tributes for the Imperial Court, Wang's ink products were always included. His ink-sticks also gained praise from the great scholar Ruan Yuan.

Ancient Chinese Ink Sticks

1796 Imperial Ink Stick in Jiaqing Period

JIAQING PERIOD (1796-1820), Emperor of China Website text and image Christies - year 2011

AN IMPERIAL GILDED AND PAINTED RECTANGULAR INK STICK

JIAQING PERIOD (1796-1820) Price realised USD 8,750 Estimate USD 1,500 – USD 2,500 Closed: 15 Sep 2011



Details

AN IMPERIAL GILDED AND PAINTED RECTANGULAR INK STICK

JIAQING PERIOD (1796-1820)

The rectangular block of black ink finely molded in relief with two gilded dragons contesting a flaming pearl highlighted in red against a background of fine waves, the body of the larger dragon wrapped around the top of the stick, the reverse molded with a large four-character seal, *tian fu yong cang* (eternal treasure of the heavenly palace) and a two-character inscription, *long de* (the virtue of the dragon) which are also gilded, one narrow side molded with a five-character inscription, *Yangxindian zhen cang* (collection of the Hall of Mental Cultivation); with a black lacquer box with the same inscription as the seal on the ink stick, *tian fu yong cang*, but in standard script

5 3/16 in. (13.7 cm.) long

Lot Essay

First built in the Ming dynasty, the Yangxindian (Hall of Mental Cultivation) in the Forbidden City is where, from the time of the Yongzheng Emperor, the Qing emperors lived and ruled.

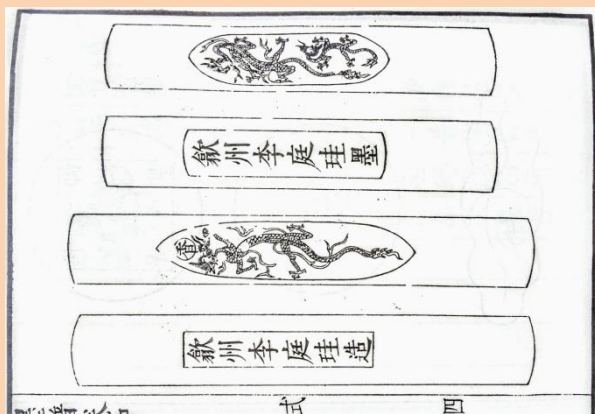
The Jiaqing emperor Ruled 1796–1820

about 1800, Imperial workshops: Nanjing, Suzhou or Hangzhou

1800 ca. Ink sticks made by Li Tinggui?

Chinese ink Sticks

Around 1800, during the Qing Dynasty, Hui Ink from Huizhou (now She County, Anhui Province) was highly regarded as some of the best Chinese ink. Li Tinggui and his family were famous for their ink, which was said to be incredibly rare and durable. They used a recipe of pine soot, pearl powder, jade, and Borneo camphor, among other ingredients. The ink was known for its longevity and fine detail when used for calligraphy and painting.



Stick second from above: Ink of Li Tinggui from Shezhou.
Stick beneath: Li Tinggui from Shezhou maker

Hui Ink:

This type of ink, produced in Huizhou, was particularly prized for its quality and craftsmanship.

Li Tinggui's Ink:

Li Tinggui's ink was so famous that it was even given the imperial surname of Li, according to Taiwan Panorama. His recipe involved pine soot, powdered pearl, ground jade, and Borneo camphor, all mixed with varnish and pounded repeatedly.

Ancient Chinese Ink Sticks

Ink's Properties: Hui ink was known for being long-lasting and capable of producing sharp, detailed lines.

Cultural Significance: Inksticks, especially Hui Ink, were popular gifts among literati and were associated with both mainland China and Taiwan.

Beyond Hui Ink: While Hui ink was a major player, other ink makers and styles existed during the Qing dynasty, including those associated with the imperial court and the development of ink wash painting.

See: <https://www.inkston.com/stories/guides/inksticks-buyers-guide/>



Emperor Daoguang (active 1821-1850)
Where the ink stick laid down is unclear.



Brushes, brush layer, ink pot and ink stone

After the Emperor Jiaqing (active 1796-1820) and Emperor Daoguang (active 1821-1850) periods, **Hu Kaiwen** came into the limelight with his production of ink-sticks. The influence of the other three at that time was in gradual decline. Because Hu paid as much attention to the production of common ink-sticks as he did to high-class ones, he increased his sales volume, and with successful publicity he became the largest ink provider in the national market. Hu also invented many famous kinds of ink-sticks, most of which served as tributes for a long time.

In 1915, Hu's Earth Ink-stick won the gold prize at the Ink makers in Nan-king (China).

Jian Ying Zhai was a Chinese Ink stick maker. An Ink Stick (Period: Qing dynasty (1644–1911) Date: after 1850) of his Workshop is part of the collection of the MET museum in New York.

Anhui ink makers played a direct role in court production. Nan-king or Modern: Nan-jing.

Despite the dominance of carbon inksticks, innovation continued, as seen with Xie Songdai's invention of liquid ink in the late 19th century, which was an attempt to create a more convenient writing tool for the civil service examination, notes HKU Scholars Hub.

Ancient Chinese Ink Sticks

1795 - 1837 Japanese sumi ink makers

Japanese ink (sumi) originated in the 7th century when Korean monks introduced Chinese ink-making methods to Japan. The practice flourished, leading to the establishment of manufacturers like **Kobaïen** in 1577 in Nara, a region where much of Japan's ink production still takes place today. Over centuries, these skilled artisans have refined the traditional process of creating ink sticks from pine soot or oils, animal glue, and water, a craft that continues with companies like artience (formerly Toyo Ink) and **Shinseido**, which blend tradition with innovation.

NARA

History of Japanese Ink makers

The history of Japanese ink (sumi) is said to have begun in 610 AD when the production methods were transmitted to Japan by a Korean monk named Damjing (Donchō in Japanese). Production of ink, essential for writing characters and recording text, moved to Nara with the relocation of the capital in the beginning of the 700s and has continued there for about 1,300 years since.

Pine Soot Ink (Shōen Zumi)

Even after the capital moved to the Kyoto area in 794, Nara remained a place of religious significance with many Buddhist temples. Much ink was needed for tasks such as sutra transcription, and there were abundant forest resources nearby to provide the carbon soot that is the ink's raw material. Nara, therefore remained a site of high-quality ink production. In the Nara, Heian and Kamakura periods, shōen—soot from pine, which has a high resin content—was the preferred material for Nara ink. This was obtained by chopping pine wood into small pieces and burning it in a stove.

Glue (Nikawa)

Besides carbon soot, the other ingredient of traditional Japanese ink is animal-based glue (nikawa). This is extracted by boiling the dermis (the layer of skin below the epidermis) of an animal such as a cow or a deer. Nikawa is highly adhesive and is widely used as a bonding agent in traditional art forms. Sticks of ink are produced by mixing the soot with this glue and drying it. In addition, in order to ameliorate the unpleasant smell of the glue, fragrant substances such as musk, borneol or Japanese apricot blossom essence are added. This gives rise to a clean smell when the ink stick is rubbed down.

Lamp Soot Ink (Yūen Zumi)

Ink is indispensable for those responsible for administration and culture. For this reason, ink was produced all over Japan in ancient times. Circumstances changed, however; there is a reason that Nara became famous for ink production.

This is because, at the beginning of the **Muromachi period**, a monk at the **Kōfuku-ji Temple** tried making ink out of the soot from votive oil lamps lit in front of the Buddha statues. This gave rise to **lamp soot ink (yūen zumi)**, made from soot obtained from such lamps. Yūen zumi became the most commonly used ink because it gave a deep black color.

Nara, with its early adoption of lamp soot ink production, became known as place where high-quality ink was made, a reputation that it maintains till today.

Japanese ink through western eyes in 1587

Luis Frois (1532-1597), was a Portuguese priest, working in Asia, most notably in Japan during the second half of the 16th century. He described, from 1587, in his History of Japan, about ink as "Our ink is liquid, but theirs is a lump of black stone". He notes its dry, solid form and contrasting it with European liquid ink. He described and documented Japanese customs, including naming women after objects (Cookpot, Crane, Turtle, Inkbrush and Tea) and the use of distinct writing systems. While Frois's writings did not detail the process of making the ink sticks, they provide valuable insight into European perceptions of Japanese writing materials and customs during the 16th century.

Kobaïen Lineage:

In 1577, **Matsui Douchin** moved from **Yamatonokuni to Nanto** and started making ink. At that time, the Japanese ink making process was still in its infancy.

Ancient Chinese Ink Sticks

He studied Enki-Toshoryou-Zoubokushiki, Rice-Seiboku-Hou, and Kuukai-Niteibou-Yuen-Seibokuhou and developed his own high quality ink making method.

The **Enki-Toshoryou-Zoubokushiki** is an ancient Chinese text from the Northern and Southern Dynasties period (5th century) that contains information and principles related to ink production and the materials used. It outlines how to produce ink sticks by processing soot and animal glue, along with other ingredients, and is a foundational text for traditional **Japanese sumi ink making**, according to worlds-oldest-inksticks.jp.

Rice-Seiboku-Hou (Rice-Seiboku-Hou) refers to a traditional Japanese technique for making ink, particularly a type of "seiboku" or black ink, that was studied by early ink makers such as **Matsui Douchin in the late 16th century** to develop high-quality Japanese ink

The Kuukai-Teibou-Yuen-Seiboku Hou (Kuukai-Teibou-Yuen-Sōboku-hō) is a specific, traditional Japanese ink-making method that uses **pine resin soot (soot from burned pine wood)** as the primary component, mixed with animal glue, and is then pressed into ink sticks. The process involves burning pine wood to create the fine soot, preparing the animal glue by dissolving it in warm water, and **then kneading these ingredients into a dough**. This **mixture is then pressed into molds** and **allowed to age for several years** to form solid ink sticks.

In 1603, the achievement of **Matsui Douchin** was recognized when he was granted the official title "Tosa no Jo" for presenting high-quality ink to the Imperial Court. After more than a century there was Collaboration with Chinese ink makers.

In 1739, Kobaien's sixth-generation head, **Matsui Motoyasu**, learned advanced sumi ink stick production methods from Qing dynasty craftsmen in Nagasaki, further improving the quality of their ink. Kobaien developed oil soot ink, which is made from vegetable oil soot, and is, even today, considered a Japanese specialty.



In 1888 Kobaien inksticks were exhibited and awarded at the 1888 Barcelona and at the 1889 Paris World Expositions. That was the time of the promulgation of the Meiji Constitution in 1889. Matsui Gencho was the 10th successor. Matsui Gencho had the official name of Tosaroku, but gave it back during the Meiji Restoration.

Kobaien is even in our days known worldwide as a leading manufacturer of sumi ink sticks.

See: <https://www.mariosforsos.com/stories/on-calligraphy-ink>

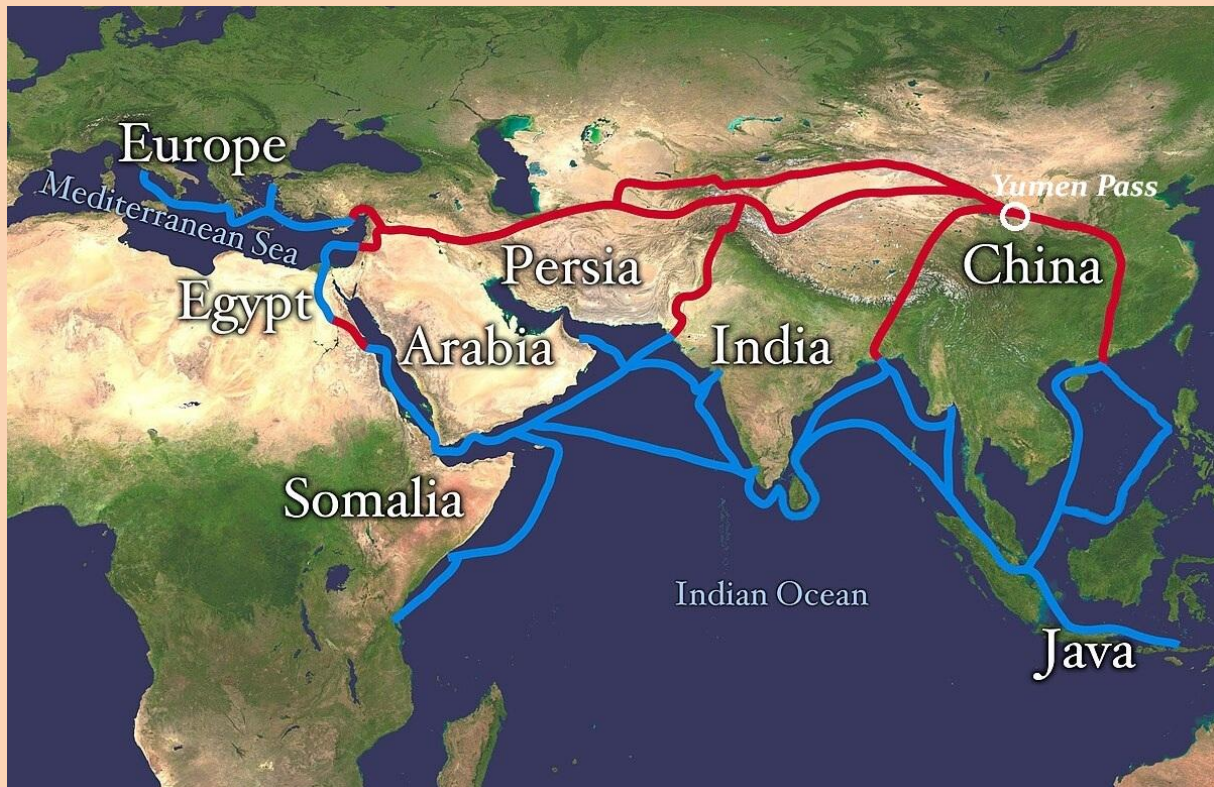
Ancient Chinese Ink Sticks



The Kobaien company is still active anno 2025.

Chapter 3. Private-Trade and Licensed: Indian Ink & China Ink

Caravans, via India, over the Silk road between China and Rome



The Great Wall pass west of Dunhuang, in present-day Gansu Province, China, is called the Jade Gate, or Yumen Pass (Yumenguan). This pass was the gateway to the Silk Road, connecting Central Asia to China during the Han Dynasty (202 BC–220 AD). Just to the south was the Yangguan Pass, which was also an important point on the Silk Road.

Travellers to 'The Western Regions' left China through the famous Yumenguan or 'Jade Gate Frontierpost,' named for the many Jade caravans that passed through it. The original Jade Gate was erected by Emperor Wudi (Emperor Wu of Han) soon after 121 BCE and the final outpost of Chinese territory for caravans on their long caravan journeys to India and Parthia.

The Sogdians organized long-distance caravans from their capital at Samarkand for merchant expeditions travelling out across the Tarim kingdoms to acquire exotic goods from the distant Chinese Empire.

In the third and fourth centuries, Central Asia was "unsettled." This disrupted overland trade. The sea route via India began to displace overland trade via the Silk Road. By the sixth century, when caravans preferred the northern route via Hami, the Jade Gate, or Yumen Pass (Yumenguan) was no longer used.

In 1907, Sir Marc Aurel Stein found bamboo slips naming the site as Yumenguan, and in 1944 Chinese archaeologists discovered relics that confirmed this.

Ancient Chinese Ink Sticks



Found in an earthenware pot at Yumenguan. Traveller passes were here written on paper. Stored between wooden plaques, the confiscated passes contain all sorts of information about each traveller. They include details that would identify the pass-holder, including stature, skin-complexion and ethnic clothing. The Loulan documents confirm that the Chinese government employed merchant caravans to transport materials and used trade opportunities to acquire commodities.

"A SILK ROAD TRAVEL PASS

The travel pass, right at the top of the photograph above, in the Kuchean language, measuring 3 ¼ inches (8.25 cm) by 1 ¾ inches (4.4 cm) and written in [Brahmin script](#), (or in Sogdian or in Kharosthy script) gives the name of the official inspecting a party of travellers going through a border station, the official to whom he is sending the report, and the name of the person carrying the pass. Over one hundred such passes have been found, which usually continue by listing the people and the animals travelling together (information missing from this document). Written with on notched poplar wood, these passes originally had a cover bed with twine and sealed, but no intact examples survive. Collection of Bibliothèque Nationale de France". [JdH: it looks that the writing is done with black ink and a fine-pointed brush with quickly noted turns and thin-thick differences).]

"The Sogdian Ancient Letters" are so called because they are the earliest substantial texts written in Sogdian, the language formerly spoken in the area around.

In ancient times, an Iranian people called the Sogdians became one of the leading intermediaries in Silk Route commerce between China and Rome. The Sogdians were an urbanised population who farmed fertile lands in Central Asia to the northeast of Bactria (northern Afghanistan). Their homelands lay between the Oxus and Jaxartes rivers (Tajikistan and Uzbekistan), near where the Ferghana Valley led into the Pamir Mountains and the Tarim Basin.

Goods from Europe and India transported to China by the Ogdians:

Indian spices and specialist minerals such as the 'white lead' (ceruse powder) that the Chinese used in cosmetics and camphor that was used for flavourings, perfumes and medicines.

Sogdian caravans probably conveyed other Indian flavourings including pepper, ginger, saffron, sugar and cinnamon. Nonperishables made ideal commodities, in particular sandalwood perfumes and specialist metals including copper, tin and an alloy known as antimony.

Ancient Chinese Ink Sticks

Chinese markets also sought clothing dyes and the Sogdians could provide plant-based blue indigo and red mineral cinnabar. Precious stones offered another high-value commodity for Sogdian merchants as their homelands could supply lapis lazuli and red garnets. Khotan also provided jade and Indian markets offered diamonds, sapphires and rubies. Translucent green and white jades were particularly valuable in Chinese markets where the stone was carved into amulets, ornaments and sculptures. Roman merchants also shipped valuable red Mediterranean coral to India and this material reached China via the Tarim Silk Routes.

The Sogdians received gold from the Parthians along with woollen cloth, hemp, linen, white lead and purple dyes that came from the Roman Empire. Indian and Chinese workshops were only capable of producing thick opaque glass that contained many impurities, but Mediterranean workshops had perfected specialized techniques to manufacture transparent glass that could be coloured with rare mineral pigments to create brightly coloured items. Western glassware was therefore valuable in the Far East and could be transported as ingots, vessels, or even broken shards that could be melted down and remade as small decorative gemlike orbs. Sogdian artisans also melted down the foreign gold and silver to create ornate metalwork that included filigree hair clasps and Iranian-style tableware. Sima Qian (Chinese historian during the early Han dynasty) writes about the Xiongnu people (related to the Sogdians), 'When they receive Chinese gold and silver, they make it into tableware in preference to money'.



Goods exported over land from China to India and Europe:

The Sogdian caravans that left China were loaded with light-weight silk materials which fetched high prices in western cities. Records from the eighth century indicate that the market value of silk fabric could double between Dunhuang and Samarkand (14 to 28 silver coins per bolt). In this period, a wealthy Sogdian merchant paid a ransom of 5,000 silk rolls to an Arab general during the Muslim invasion of his homeland.

[JdH: It is highly likely that ink, paper, brushes, and pens, although not listed, were trade goods delivered by caravans to the borders, as large quantities of writing materials were needed for administrative purposes to create border passes containing information about incoming and outgoing merchants and their cargoes. This inventory is based on the inventory for the maritime "Silk Road" by William W. Wang.]

Other products taken west by the Sogdians included Chinese lacquer ware, bronze mirrors and ingots of silvery-white nickel that could be used for decorative metalwork. Sogdians also traded the potent musk glands of certain deer species found near the Tibetan Plateau, Siberia and North Korea. These glands were used as a fixative in potent and long-lasting Iranian and Indian perfumes. Tibetan musk glands reached Roman markets in the form of small hair-covered leather pods. Their appearance confused Roman writers and Jerome refers to women who used potent scents made from 'that mouse-like musk'. He also mentions perfumes manufactured from 'fragrant skins from the foreign mouse' [musk, has nothing to do with mice's].

At the border passage with China and v.v. a fee of twenty staters seems to have been the cost of caravan passage between Samarkand and China. Perhaps senior merchants would lend these sums to fellow Sogdians travelling to work in China to finance their own commercial dealings in the intervening cities. Twenty Sogdian staters of pure silver weighed 345 grams and was equivalent to 100 denarii.

Ancient Chinese Ink Sticks

In those days it was not permitted to stay in China for longer than six months. This can be checked using the dates on the residence permits.

None of these letters, found at the Yumen Pass, reached their intended destination, and the fate of the correspondents/pass holders remains unknown. The documents were confiscated by border guards at a Chinese watchtower near Yumen shortly before the outpost was abandoned. In our time, the letters reveal important details about the lives of the traders and businessmen who transported valuable goods through some of the world's most inhospitable regions.

Sir Aurel Stein has done a lot of research. See: <https://sogdians.si.edu/sidebars/marc-aurel-stein/>
Some letters have been deciphered/ transcribed by Nicholas Sims-Williams. See <https://sogdians.si.edu/ancient-letters/>

See [this link](#) for more information about the **Five Ancient Sogdian Letters**.

Maritime Silk Road

Qingxin Li, Maritime Silk Road, translated by William W. Wan William W. Wang, p 153 Ink etc.

*"In the early 17th century, the Dutch and British barged in on the Orient. Facing the aggressive presence of these two new colonist countries, Spain and Portugal could only strengthen collaborations to take on the mutual competitors. The relationship between Macao and Manila was improving significantly. Most of the commodities shipped from Macao to Manila were Chinese goods, including household products such as raw silk, silk threads, veils, lace, flowered satin, thin silk, cotton fabric of various colours, **white paper, coloured paper, ink, porcelain, pottery jars, iron woks, roof tiles, bead strings, gem strings, gems, aquamarines and so on**; As well as all kinds of foodstuffs such as grain, sugar, confiture, hams, salted pork and peanuts; Fruits including figs, chestnuts, jujubes, pomegranates, pears and oranges; Livestock such as cows and mares; Military goods including ammunition, gunpowder, iron, copper, tin, lead, mercury and so on. Raw silk and silk knit products were the principal traded items."*

GOODS DECLARED FOR SALE AT THE EAST-INDIA HOUSE

A lot of information about importing of Indian / China ink in London is present in THE ASIATIC JOURNAL AND MONTHLY REGISTER FOR British India and its Dependencies, here especially the period from 1816-1824, because of its accessibility via the internet

Known is a private trade in Ink from China between 1700 - 1750 ("The China ink for Governor Ancarcrona, by contrast, was a routine commission, since the governor asked for ink every time Charles Irvine went out to China.") - Meike von Brescius (2022)

Another source is "Fine teas were sold and gifted in attractive canisters, boxes and cases, and so were mother-of- pearl fans, **Chinese ink**, etc.", - Irvine Papers. p. 145 and p. 162.

JdH: Ink sticks in attractive boxes and cases refer among others to the packaging of Ink sticks.

Every quarter of a year arrives in London Cargoes of East- India Company's Ships. Lately arrived, their cargo is auctioned. Many times between 1816 and 1824 Indian ink and China Ink is sold by private sale.

"Private trade" in ink sticks refers to unofficial trade in these products outside official merchants channels. Often, merchant ship crews would bring certain items back on their voyages to trade on their own account. This was permitted as long as the cargo did not exceed the capacity of a cabin trunk per crew member. Some

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sailors traded directly, outside official channels, among craftsmen, artists, and collectors. This could include a variety of ink sticks. It's possible that this method of supplying goods already existed in London in the 18th century, commissioned by art supply dealers such as Reeves, Newman, Ackermann, and other watercolour painting chest dealers. Every sold watercolour paint box in the 18th and 19th centuries with more than twelve cakes contained a Chinese ink stick.



India House. The Saleroom in 1808 of the East India Company, Leaden hall Street in the City of London. (Image by Ackermann, Rudolph; Pugin, Augustus Charles; Stadler, Joseph Constantine; Rowlandson, Thomas)

In the next Journals is **BOLD** mentioned **China Ink** or **Indian Ink** in the category **Private- Trade and Privilege or and Licensed**.

Import of **China Ink** or **Indian ink** is in the period around 1816 a private trade and must be registered. One time, in 1816, is mentioned: China Ink, 2 boxes. The quantities of sticks are not mentioned per box. Private-Trade in Indian Ink or China Ink is often a trade on commission by Colour men or perhaps Ink makers in London. They have contacts with captains or relatives on board ships sailing on China.

Monthly Register for British India and its Dependencies during 1816-1824,

1816 p. 623 Cargoes of East- India Company's Ships lately arrived. Cargoes of the Walmer Castle, Warley, Princess Amelia, Hope, Royal George, Cuffnells , Lowther Castle, Chartes Grant, General Harris, Bridgewater, Vansittart, David Scott, Essex, Alnwick Castle, Ceres, Inglis, Atlas , Warren Hastings, Marquis Camden, and Lady Flora, from China Company's Tea, 323,600 chests, containing 27,874,739 lbs. Raw Silk, 31,047 lbs . Nankeens, 191,700 pieces . Private- Trade and Privilege . Tea, 40,147 chests and boxes - Gamboge, 114 cases - [....] - **China Ink , 2 boxes** - Shells, 190 bags- Paper, 2 cases.

1817 THE ASIATIC JOURNAL AND MONTHLY REGISTER FOR British India and its Dependencies **VOL. IV**. FROM JULY TO DECEMBER 1817 LONDON : PRINTED FOR BLACK, KINGSBURY, PARBURY, & ALLEN, BOOKSELLERS TO THE HONOURABLE EAST- INDIA COMPANY, LEADENHALL STREET. 1817 .

1817 page 107 Price Current of East- India Produce for June 1817 Goods declared for Sale at the East- India House. On Friday, 11 July-Prompt 10 October. Private-Trade and Licensed. - Cassia Lignea- Nutmegs-Mace Cloves -Oil of Spices-Ginger -Rattans-Nux Vomica-Galanga Root-Turmeric-Rhubarb-Mats- Soy- **Indian Ink**- Sago - Shellack Cane Table Mats-Rattans -Ebony Wood-Saltpetre

1817 page 211 Goods declared for Sale at the East- India House . On Monday, 11 August-Prompt 5 November . Company's [...] Private- Trade and Licensed.- Cassia Lignea- Nutmegs-Mace-Cloves-Oil of Spices-Ginger -Rattans-Nux Vomica-Galanga Root-Turmeric- Rhubarb-Mats-Soy- **Indian Ink** – Sago - Shellack Cane Table Mats- Rattans –Ebony Wood-Saltpetre.

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1817 page 211. .On Monday, 11 August-Prompt 7 November. Private-Trade and Licensed.- [...] Rhubarb-Gamboge- Soy- **China Ink** - Seedlac- Tamarinds [...]

1817 page 427 Goods declared for Sale at the East- India House On Tuesday, 14 October- Prompt 28 January . Cargoes of East- India Company's Ships lately arrived. Cargoes of the Wexford and Aurora from China . Company's Goods . Tea, 2,075,344 lbs .- Raw Silk, 4,718 lbs.-Nankeen Cloth, 10,000 pieces . Private-Trade and Privilege.-Tea-Raw Silk- Wrought Silks Nankeens Crapes-Anniseed and Cassia Oil- Rhubarb - Mother-o'- Pearl - **China Ink** - Seed Coral- Whanghees Mats.

1817 page 444

*"I observed a common plant something resembling butcher's broom, which was said to be the Setbarua, from which the mountaineers make a paper that is sold at Sirinagar and Almora, and from thence finds its way into Hindústan although not in large quantity. The bankers employ it for their bills of exchange or Húndis in preference to any other kind, as the ink does not sink further into its substance, than is necessary to retain the writing, as it does not imbibe water readily, and relatively to its thickness is much stronger than any other kind of paper. As connected with paper, I must here observe, that the layers of the bark of birch are used by the natives to write upon and they bear both **ink** and the stroke of the pencil very well. The leaves are called Bhoj-patr. The bark of the birch is used at Lac'knau for covering the wires of húka-snakes."*

1817 page 479 Sir T. S. Raffles' History of Java The Javans usually write with **Indian * ink** upon paper manufactured by themselves, and sometimes on European or Chinese paper. But in Bali the natives use an iron stile, and cut the letters on prepared palm leaf, in the same manner as in western India.**

*As we call the useful, admirable, and hitherto inimitable, carbonaceous - oleaginous substance, so well known in England; but it is neither made nor used in India. Rev.

**of the peninsula, and the southern islands of western India, Rev.

1819 p 207

GOODS DECLARED FOR SALE AT THE EAST- INDIA HOUSE . For Sale 13 August-Prompt 5 November . Licensed and Private- Trade .[...] – **Indian Ink**-Rouge-Artificial Flowers- China Ware- Fishing Lines-Fish Counters-Table Mats-Soy -Pastils-Rattan Hats and Rice Paper- [...]

1819 p. 311

GOODS DECLARED FOR SALE AT THE EAST-INDIA HOUSE . For Sale 22 November-Prompt 17 March. CARGOES OF EAST- INDIA COMPANY'S SHIPS LATELY ARRIVED . CARGOES of the Regent and Castle Huntly from China, and the Europe from Bengal. Company's. [...] Private-Trade and Privilege. -Tea- Nánkeens [...] -Vermilion- Indigo- [...] - **China Ink** - Safflower-Svelac-Lac Dye-Ferra Japonica-Dragon's Blood- China Rouge- [...].

1819 page 519

GOODS DECLARED FOR SALE AT THE EAST - INDIA HOUSE .

For Sale 12 November-Prompt 11 February . Licensed and Private-Trade . Red Saunder's Wood- [...] - Cow Hides-Goat Skins- **China Ink** -Rouge-Pickled Salmon-Soy.

1823 CARGOES OF EAST-INDIA COMPANY'S SHIPS LATELY ARRIVED. CARGOES of the Duchess of Atholl, Earl Bal- carras, Canning, Sir David Scott, and London, from China; and the Winchelsea, from Bengal; and the Astell, from Bengal and Madras. [...]Camel's Hair Brushes- **Indian Ink** -Fishing Lines-China Ware-Tin-Rattans-Madeira and Sherry Wine.

1824 The Asiatic Journal and monthly register for British India and its dependencies of 1824 mentioned at page 103 : CARGOES OF EAST - INDIA COMPANY'S, SHIPS LATELY ARRIVED . CARGOES of the Hythe, Vansittart, Warren Hastings, and Buckinghamshire, from China ; **VOL. XVIII. JULY TO DECEMBER, 1824** .

"Private-Trade and Privilege-Tea-China and Bengal Raw Silk-Wrought Silks- Crapes- Shawls-Nankeens Bandannoes - Piece Goods- Coffee-Rice- Indigo- [...] Ivory Ware-Lacquered Ware-Stained Paper--China Paper- **China Ink** - Feathers- [...]"

JdH: This is comparable to the situation in other years (1820 , 1823 etc.).

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JdH: In 1829 (vol 28) the Private-Trade is the largest part of the trade: £ 2,4 million pounds of £ 5,2 million pounds. (p.34) But there is **no mentioning that year of Indian or China ink**. (see listings at p. 128, p. 644, and p. 764)

However, there is a mention in Reeves' list from 1830 (Whimsie, p3): Indian ink. Common Indian ink, of all sizes, Fine do. do. **British Ink, Blacker than Indian Ink**. JdH: It looks that there is a problem around 1830 with the quality of the imported **Indian/ Chinese Ink from Nankin**.

Mentioning of Indian Ink in a journal/ register for administrative tasks:

1840 ASIATIC JOURNAL AND MONTHLY REGISTER FOR BRITISH AND FOREIGN INDIA, CHINA, AND AUSTRALASIA. VOL. XXXII -NEW SERIES. MAY-AUGUST, 1840. 6 The Asiatic Journal and Monthly Register for British India and Its Dependencies [dig 261/730] No. X.-Diplomatic Intercourse with China. 249 Manners and customs of the Japanese. JdH: **Indian ink is not mentioned**.

JdH: Reason could be the production of ink sticks in England or problems with the trading. Perhaps is all the commerce concentrated in Nankin and difficult to obtain due to unrest in China at the end of the eighteenth century.

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Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie - VOC 1602-1795 (1811)

The Dutch East India Company (VOC) imported a vast range of goods to its colonies, primarily from Asia to Europe, but also brought a variety of necessities and luxury items from Europe to its settlements in South Africa, India, East Asia, and the Caribbean.

These included Asian commodities like spices, tea, coffee, porcelain, silk, and lacquer ware, alongside European goods such as furniture, textiles, tools, seeds, and common foodstuffs like cheese and salted butter.

The Dutch **VOC AND THE ASIAN TRADING ROUTES** (Robert Aronson, Delftware. <https://www.aronson.com/>)

"Other importations to the colonies included glass bottles for the South African wine industry, medicinal products, dyes, paint, ink, (seal) wax and paper. (See Inventories of the Masters of Orphanage Chamber of Cape Town, South Africa)"

https://books.google.nl/books?id=TV6f2XWG6t4C&pg=PA42&dq=%27Bohai+Sea+Envoys%27&hl=nl&newbks=1&newbks_redir=0&sa=X&ved=2ahUKewi8yJmulPmPaxWH_7siHTrzDZAQ6wF6BAglEAE#v=onepage&q=ink&f=false



Illustrative pen and ink drawing by an unknown artist of a historical (?) market scene in Yogyakarta?, Indonesia. The artist seems to have been inspired by the Indian artist Sailoz Mookherjea (1907-1960).

The Dutch VOC used for his own archive in Batavia ink derived from Oak Galls. After years, paper restoration of the VOC-archives in the tropics is desperately needed.

"This ink contains large amounts of iron which cause a chemical reaction with the acidified paper. Consequently, the ink eats into the paper (inktvraat). It is as if the letters were rusting through the paper, gradually transforming the texts into a series of large holes. The Nationaal Archief provided instruments and material and organized several workshops in Jakarta with a view to improving the physical preservation of the archive. It did not take long for the truth to dawn that conditions in a tropical land diverge tremendously from those in the Netherlands and require their own idiosyncratic solution." (Source: Tanap and the co-operation between ANRI and Nationaal Archief, Brill, Leiden, 2007, p. 171 <https://sejarah-nusantara.anri.go.id/media/userdefined/pdf/BRILLVOCInventaris.pdf>).

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Perhaps the Dutch name “Oost Indische Inkt” or “East Indian Ink” has a relation with ink import via the VOC (Dutch East India Company). It looks the Dutch did not use this Chinese ink for their own administration.

The trade over land via the Silk route shows in cargo-listings a constant stream of ink [-sticks] to the borders of China for administrative purposes domestically and internationally.

Because of the way education, civil service training (imperial examinations), administrative administration, including the implementation and supervision of border control, taxation, local and regional government, business administration, and so on, was structured in China, there was a clear need for writing materials for centuries, summarized in the Four Treasures (brush, ink stick, paper, and ink stone).

The formal education system was crucial for the civil service examinations. Successful candidates gained access to the imperial bureaucracy. The Chinese examination system provided access to administrative and official positions, and success in these examinations was virtually the only route to entry from the Song Dynasty (960-1279). With a brief interruption between 1279 and 1315 during the Yuan Dynasty, this system operated until 1905. Schools were often established by the nobility to prepare their own children for their future.

The lowest-level examination was administered under the responsibility of provincial authorities in or near the candidates' residence. Upon successful completion, candidates received the rank of *xiucai* (秀才, blossoming talent), formally *shengyuan* (生員). Only a small percentage of candidates passed. The percentage of successful candidates varied somewhat depending on the period, but in no dynasty did it exceed 10%. This rank conferred considerable prestige on the successful candidate, entitled them to wear certain attire, and granted them and their family tax exemption. However, it rarely led to an official position.

The second level of examinations took place every three years in the provincial capital. This examination lasted three days, during which the candidates were confined to a cell. In addition to paper, ink, and writing utensils, they were also required to provide food, drink, mattresses, and curtains to hang at the cell entrance. Successful candidates received the rank of *juren* (舉人, recommended person). The success rate here was even lower, often between 1% and 2%.

For a career that could lead to the highest levels of government, it was necessary to take the examination in the country's capital. This, too, took place every three years. Roughly 3% to 5% of the participants passed. This led to the degree of *jinshi* (Presented Scholar), an older term already used in the text of the Records of Rites.

All these educational institutions, as well as the examinees themselves, placed high demands on good writing equipment.

1665 Jean Nieuhoff

Jean Nieuhoff, The Embassy of the Eastern Company of the United Provinces, Visiting the Emperor of China, (Jean Le Carpentier, le "traducteur" [Dutch-Français]), Amsterdam, 1665. p. 222, p. 386, p. 446.

https://www.chineancienne.fr/app/download/13471317727/nieuhoff_ambassade.pdf?t=1514818292

Some fragments about ink in the French version (translated to English):

“Xecien, the fifth city, commands three fortresses, which are located in the midst of the mountains of Heu and Pipa, rich in quicksilver. The mountains of this region teem with gold, silver, and copper mines. Nowhere else can one find better leaves of this kind than these, nor better ink, not liquid like ours, but made and shaped into small, long, square masses, as firm as red chalk, which is used just as our painters use their colours.

The inhabitants have their own characters and do not use ink for writing, but are content to engrave [characters] with a light pressure on soft woods when they wish to remember something.

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The art of ink making is considered honourable and liberal in China, as are all those who have a connection and affinity with the sciences. It is made with small, long, square rollers in the shape of a parallelogram, which are as firm as a red pencil. It is decorated with figures, flowers, masquerades, or adorned with letters and signs, with which they compose verses and poems in praise of the ink, in which the name of the creator is written. They use it just as our painters use their colours, for they grind and pound it on a polished stone, temper it with water, and thus paint their letters with a brush instead of a pen."

The same fragments, but here in the Dutch version of 1665

(<https://archive.org/details/gezantschapderN00Nieu/>):

About 'printing or to tap in': (p. 29-30)

"Noch hebben de Sinezen een andre maniere, om 't geene dat op marmer of in hout gefneden is af te drukken. By exempel; op een zeker graf-fchrift of eenigh ander afbeeldfel, dat in een vlakken marmer-fteen gehouwen ftaet, leggen ze een nat gemaakt blat papier, en daar boven op een wollen lap, hier op kloppenze zoo lang met een hamertje, tot dat het dunne papier in de holle ftreepen van 't afbeeldfel en de Charakters komt tezakken. Daar na worden d'uitfteekentheden van dit papier, dat niet in de holligheden gezakt is, zeer behendigh met inkt, of eenige andere verwe beftreeken, zonder dat de ftreepen en trekken van 't ingeklopte papier aangeraakt worden, die hare wittigheit behouden, en 't geen op de fteen of in 't hout gehouwen ftaet zeer aartig vertonen; byna eenigzins op deze wijze, gelijk de kinderen hier te lande allerlei beelden in fteen gehouwen, met 't beftrijken van roodtaert, weten af te fponzen. Doch ftaet aan te merken, dat dit afdrukken nergens plaats heeft dan in groove en dikke ftreepen, want in fijne en dunne trekken of ftreepen is 't niet wel doenlijk." : (p. 29-30)

About Ink-stick making:

"Een byzondere en aanzienlijke kunft is ook in Sina het Ink maken. Er meê allerlei fchrift op Sineefch gefchreven wort. Deze Ink wort uit een zekre ftoffe, aan harde en langwerpige, vierkante koekjes of brootjes gemaakt, zoodanige ook hier te lande, hoewelze zomtjits vervalft worden, by de Verf-verkoopers te bekomen zijn. En dewijl de Sinezen al andre volken in cierlijk en net fchrijven met Charakters overtreffen, zoo wort niet alleen hier door een kunftigh Schrijver by hen hoog geacht, en doorgaans alle eere aangedaan; maar ook worden de geenen, die deze fchrijf-ink maken, voor geen flechte en geringe, maar voor hooge en eedele kunftenaars gehouden. Alfe deze brootjes nu willen gebruiken, zo wrijven ze dezelve op een glad marmer bortje met eenige droppels water, totdat 'et verf van komt, waar in dat ze dan hunne fchrijf-pencelen, die van haze-hair gemaakt zijn, doopen en ftippen. Ook zijn'er in Sina byzondere Kunftenaars die deze bortjes maken, en dikwils veele koftelijke fteenen glat flijpen en cierlijk optoien. Alle deze drie dingen, die de Sinezen tot het fchrijven gebruiken, zijn op 'tcierlijkt roe gemaakt, en worden ook hoog geacht, dewijl ze tot een zaak, die in zich zelf aanzienlijk is, te weten het Sineefch fchrijven, van aanzienlijke mannen gebruikt worden."(p. 33)

About Ink:

"Nergens valt beter fteenachtige aarde, die wy Ooft-Indifche Inkt noemen [te vinden], als in de lantftreek van deze Hooftftadt." [JdH: Nanhung] (p. 69)

About Inkstones:

"In 't landfchap Uguang, by Kingchen, als ook te Quenlin, in 't landfchap Qwangfi, vvorden zeer fchoone fteenen gevonden, vvaar meê de Sinezen hun inkt zoodanigh vveten te temperen, als d'Europifche Schilders hunne verruven [jdH: verruven = fijnwrijven/ wrijfsteen]: In 't landfchap Quantung, by Nanhing, is een fteen, die den Sineefche Inkt zeer gelijk is, daar meê de Sinezen, gelijk d' Europers met krijt, op Gefchaafde en wvitte bortjes fchrijven." (p. 115)

VOC – 18th century

An interesting study of the trade and ballast of VOC ships in the 18th century is done by Christaan.J.A. Jörg and is published in the Bulletin of the Institute of East-West Studies, Kansai University (関西大学東西学術研究所紀要) in Japan.

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C. J. A. Jörg, 1979, **The China Trade of the V.O.C. in the 18th Century:** 関西大学東西学術研究所, A1–A17 p

“Other articles [goods] of trade included drugs, such as rhubarb, sago, curcuma, radix China, radix Galanga and anise. Then there were small quantities of lacquer ware, and, from time to time, paper hangings and fans. Here Chinese Ink is here not mentioned as a drug.(p. 12)

*Under 'drugs and other commodities' are grouped the drugs mentioned, paper hangings, lacquer wares, fans, **Chinese ink**, mercury, gold, mother-of-pearl, borax and alum. (p. 16) As ballast were used the goods mentioned. The 'expenses' constituted 2 % of the total amount and covered only partly the costs of acquisition.”*

Table 4 Products bought at Canton 1729–1793 in *f*¹⁸

period	total amount	tea	porcelain	raw silk	textiles	drugs and other commodities	ballast and expenses
1729–1733	2.055.738	1.511.393	295.751	—	30.485	176.789	41.320
1736–1740	2.957.034	1.776.707	315.922	45.332	559.427	501.503	209.143
1742–1746	5.338.722	3.651.696	396.623	59.005	857.219	41.410	332.769
1748–1752	6.830.536	4.728.711	367.209	547.118	1.016.506	23.481	147.511
1753–1756	10.873.794	8.136.468	427.895	510.595	1.639.801	30.780	128.255
1757–1761	6.665.706	5.196.753	264.095	206.908	631.506	39.070	327.374
1762–1766	11.917.106	9.459.611	490.511	568.275	647.551	45.355	705.803
1768–1772	12.064.919	8.845.235	590.331	686.649	963.238	108.595	870.871
1773–1777	11.992.102	8.643.032	502.586	780.292	1.156.739	197.996	711.457
1778–1780	7.890.158	5.453.925	347.026	680.246	933.361	129.742	345.858
1783–1787	16.670.024	11.878.844	478.511	1.512.830	1.509.348	284.223	1006.268
1788–1793	15.569.684	11.844.907	417.395	870.183	1.533.054	210.676	693.469

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1778 Egbert Buys - Dictionary

Egbert Buys, Nieuw en volkomen woordenboek van konsten en wetenschappen ..., Volume 8, Amsterdam, 1778. p. 205. <https://books.google.nl/books?id=IGz9tgAACAAJ&dq>

“OOST-INDISCHE INKT. Atramentum Ciniticum, fommigen zyn van gevoelen dat deefe Inkt uit een zekere zwarte harst-ächtige Aarde of uit het roet van Boom-Olie of ook wel uit den damp daarvan gemaakt wordt. Dus zegt men gebruiken ze de Chineefen om te Schryven hetwelk aldaar met een Penfeel geschiedt. Deefe Inkt wordt by ons op verscheide wysen nagemaakt naamelyk van gebrande Zwarte Boonen ook van Roet, Indigo, Visch-Zwartfel en Arabifche Gom. Deefe Inkt wordt meeft door de Schilders gebruikt.”

6 See the similarity with some artefacts at the auction of A.E. Braam in 1799, in London.

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The Swedish East India Company

<https://umedia.lib.umn.edu/search?utf8=%E2%9C%93&sort=&q=ankarkrona>

1739 Charles Irvine

This collection consists of correspondence and administrative documents from the Swedish East India Company (Svenska Ostindiska Compagniet). Documents date between 1698 and 1830, with the bulk of the materials dating between the 1730s and 1770s. Nearly two-thirds of this collection, are correspondence documents to Charles Irvine (1693-1771), a successful merchant from Aberdeen, Scotland. Correspondence with James Rose, Mary Irvine, and other merchants are also in this collection. Further administrative materials related to the Company includes shipping documents, accounts and invoices, price lists, and legal documents. Nearly the entire collection is handwritten ink on paper; a few documents are from a printing press. Many of the correspondence includes remnants of or entire wax seals from family or company seals.

*“Myriad other goods came in purpose-made cases. Expensive ivory carvings of pagodas or junks were surrounded by display cases, which were usually made of glass.¹¹⁰ Fine teas were sold and gifted in attractive canisters, boxes and cases, and so were mother-of-pearl fans, **Chinese ink**, knives, walking canes and ‘ivory hats’, as Charles Irvine listed them in his private register of ‘Trinkets and Trifles’ that he had bought in Canton in 1739.¹¹¹ The dimensions of crates for porcelain were set so they could contain a precise number of...”*

*“The **China ink** for (Admiral Ankarkrona or Ankorcrona) Governor Theodor Ankarcrona (Stockholm), by contrast, was a routine commission, since the governor asked for ink every time Irvine went out to China. And so were the ‘7 canisters of Souchon’ purchased on behalf of the seic director Hugh Campbell.⁷⁰ [Souchon = black tea]*

Source: Meike von Brescius, Treasures in the Cabin: Chinese Export Wares and the Special Commissions Trade, April 2022

Teodor C. Ankarcrona (1687-1750), Charles Irvine (1693-1771) and the Campbells were some of the investors of the Swedish East India Company.

Charles Irvine (1693-1771) was not a director but a supercargoer. He made a total of 5 voyages as a supercargoer and this should have made him very rich. On the voyage with the Riddarhuset in 1740-42 alone he earned 33,750 dlr smt in commission and to that should be added his pacotill (his own goods on the ship). However, this was not the case as he made some losses on the first voyage with the Ulrica Eleonora to Porto Novo and Bengal in 1733-35 and seems to have borrowed for most of the investments and purchases. He returned to Scotland in 1759 and died there in 1771. He was unmarried.

1740 Transcription of a letter in the French Language of Theodor Ankarcrona to Charles Irvine with his best wishes for the New Year

“Monsieur, Je me rejoui de voir par votre agréable du rejouit, votre amities pour conais par vos bonnes vœux sur le Renouveau de cette année. Ayant l'honneur de souhaiter, que le bon Dieu vous comble de mille benedictions en vous faissant jouir pendant votre voyage si bien que d'une nombre d'années & un bonheur parfait, vous assurant, quoi que je n'a pas ni encore l'honneur de vous conaitre personellemant, mais bien par bonne renomée, d'une sinceere estime que j'ai pour votre persone. Je vous recommande mon Cousin F.W. König. Ma femme vous remercie, bienque moy, du present que vous avez plais nous envoier. Que le bon dieu vous guide, c'est le souhait. Monsieur, de votre tres obeisant Serviteur. T. Ankarcrona, Stockholm 7 Janvier 1740.”

1741 Transcription of a letter of Theodor Ankarcrona to Charles Irvine about colours for painting with water.

*“Dear Sir, I have had the honour to receive your agreeable letter of y 5 of this instant with 2 p. of cadesoye [silk?] you have been pleased to send me. I am very much obliged to you for your kindness and I wish to gett any occasion to be serviceable to you. This extream winter has been a great misfortune to us, as well as to many others. But I hope the Almighty will make your voyage happy for all that. If I may take the liberty, to give you as small commission when at Canton, there only to procure me for my own use **some small pieces of touche, of every sort of collour for painting with water or en minjature**. We are only used to gett black touche: but very seldom of other ‘collours’:*

Ancient Chinese Ink Sticks

although I have had them. and as I find the collours in China painting very fair. I begg your parden for troubling with this comission, remaining u alwais cincerely. Dear Sir Your most humble and obedient servant T. Ankarcrona, Stockholm 19 Marty 1740."

(JdH: Ink sticks are mentioned here '**pieces**' of **touche**. Touche refers to the act of rubbing with water on a rubbing stone to make ink. the German word 'Tusche' refers to water-soluble and dilutable ink (Indian Ink). In the East-Sea countries is the German word Tusche for Indian ink not unusual).

1743 Transcription of a letter of Theodor Ankarcrona to Charles Irvine about more sorts of colours:

Fragment: "As Counsellor mr. Collen Campbell has send to my spouse one piece of White Silk and I also received 4 boxes with China Ink or Tusche of several colours. I Cannot ommitt of giving to you Sir many my thanks for these presents, wishing occasion to be at your service. In the meantime I gratefully you with all my hearth to the destined voyage for the Indies in the condition given to you."

In the margin: *"P.S. you be oblige me Sir, in getting **some such China inck of different or more sorts of colours**, especially amongst others the fine blue, purper and redd colours. [sign.]"*

<https://umedia.lib.umn.edu/item/p16022coll542:801>

JdH: In an earlier letter (1741) it appears that **the ink is in stick shape**.

The gentlemen Collen, Hugh and Walter Campbell are the administrators and shareholders of the Swedish East India Company settled in Gothenburg in that period.

Ancient Chinese Ink Sticks

Shipwrecks Ceramics and their cargoes --- artefacts related to ink

The Hoi An Hoard, Vietnamese c. 1450-1500

The Hoi An Hoard refers to over 150,000 pieces of Vietnamese porcelain and ceramics recovered from a shipwreck in the South China Sea, dating to the late 15th or early 16th century. The cargo was discovered in the early 1990s by fishermen near the port town of Faifo, now Hoi An, and its name honours the town and the significant contribution of Vietnamese ceramics to the region's history.

"Objects destined for scholars were also found, including many water droppers that would have been used for making writing-ink. They were more than functional objects, made in two-piece moulds. Some were made in the form of an animal or a fish. Toads and other creatures connected with water seem to have been popular. These droppers, which had a hole on their back and another hole forming the mouth, were used to add water to dry ink cakes on a grinding stone. The ink made in this manner would then have to have been used immediately." (Source: ROBERT McPHERSON ANTIQUES, KENSINGTON CHURCH STREET LONDON <https://orientalceramics.com/shipwreck-ceramics/>)

Very similar objects are in the British Museum and are also described as water droppers (<https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/search?keyword=water&keyword=dropper>).

Here some water droppers seen on the internet.



The right one is a rare 15th Century Vietnamese Pottery Water Dropper from 'The Hoi An Hoard'

A water dropper, or suiteki (Japanese: 水滴, suiteki; Chinese: 水滴; shuǐdī) is a small container used in East Asian calligraphy to add small amounts of water to an ink stone, which is then used to grind an ink stick into a usable ink.



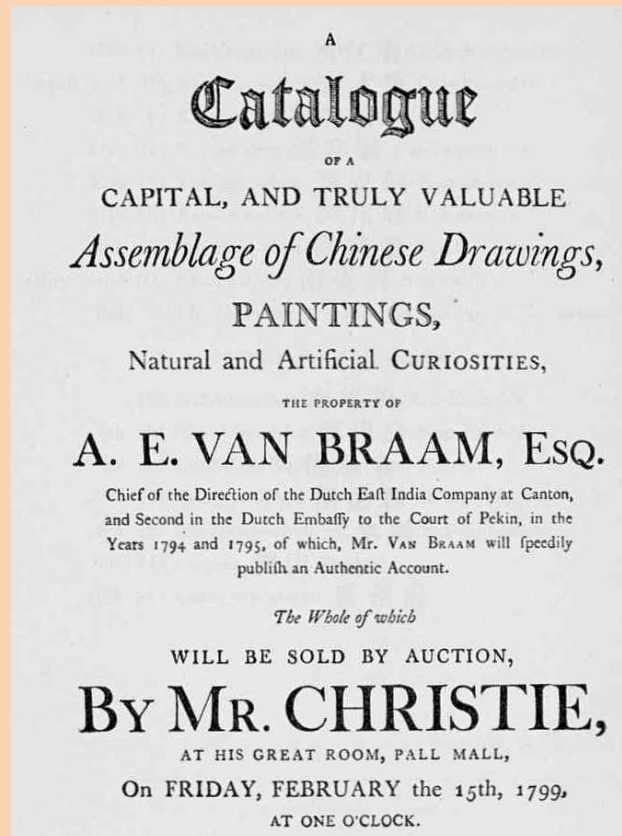
The droppers above have two small holes, one for water to drip out and another for air to enter, allowing for controlled, few-drop dispensing of water to control ink concentration. They are typically made of ceramic, copper, or stone and can serve as both a practical tool and a decorative item for a scholar's or a calligraphers desk.

Left: Image of an Southeast Asian water-dropper ⁷, height: 7 cm., diameter: 6 cm. After filling by immersion, a small stream of water can be released by tilting the dropper and lifting your thumb at the top.. Purchased at market on the Waterlooplein in Amsterdam in October 2025.

⁷ Very small (holy) water jar, or "kendi," possibly from the island of Java in Indonesia. (Era: 19th century. Style: Majapahit Kingdom. Material: Terracotta.) (See for more info about Kendi: http://rooneyarchive.net/articles/kendi/kendi_album/kendi.htm)

Chapter 4. 1799 - Auction of the property of A.E. van Braam, Esq.

[...] Artificial Curiosities from A.E. van Braam, Canton and Pekin 1794-95 in 1799 in London by Mr. Christie.



T'OUNG PAO, Vol. XXXIV, 1-2

Title-page of Christie's sales-catalogue

Christie's Great Room was the name for the auction house established by James Christie at Pall Mall, London, where he held his first auction on December 5, 1766.

In 1799, Friday, February the 15th, 1799, at one o'clock there is an Auction of the properties of A.E. Van Braam⁸, Chief of the Direction of the Dutch East India Company at Canton, and Second in the Dutch Embassy to the Court of Pekin, in the Years 1794 and 1795, of which, Mr. VAN BRAAM will speedily publish an Authentic Account.

The following information is from an article of J.J.L. Duyvendak, THE LAST DUTCH EMBASSY TO THE CHINESE COURT (1794—1795) BY J. J. L. DUYVENDAK With 1 plate, 2 maps and 9 fac-simile's, EXTRAIT DU T'OUNG PAO, VOL. XXXIV, LEIDEN, E. J. BRILL, 1938.

⁸ About Braam see: <https://www.gravenopinternet.nl/graven/x/190/1349>

Ancient Chinese Ink Sticks

This information gives examples of numbers and shapes of Indian and Korean ink sticks in the collection of the Dutch Chief of the Direction of the Dutch East India Company at Canton, and Second in the Dutch Embassy to the Court of Pekin in 1794 and 1795.

Interesting are the prices (paid) and the buyers names at some places. It is perhaps possible to find out their backgrounds.

Duyvendak has done research and shows the results in his article in 1938.

*"I have been fortunate enough to be able to trace this sale 3), which took place on February 15th and 16th 1799 at Christie's. The present firm Messrs. Christie Manson & Woods have been so obliging as to let me have a typescript copy of this catalogue, **with the names of the buyers (as far as they are legible) and the prices paid** added, as well as a photographic reproduction of the title-page and of one representative page of the catalogue. All these will be found in Appendix 11.*

It will be seen that van Braam's collection was indeed considerable, and it is a matter of great regret to Sinology, and to Dutch Sinology in particular, that the conditions of the time were such that these important collections were not preserved intact in some museum."

3) I have much pleasure in expressing my thanks to my colleague Mr. R. A. Kern and Dr. H. Schneider, Director of the Bureau of Iconographical Documentation at the Hague, whose advice and assistance led to the discovery of Christie's sales-catalogue".

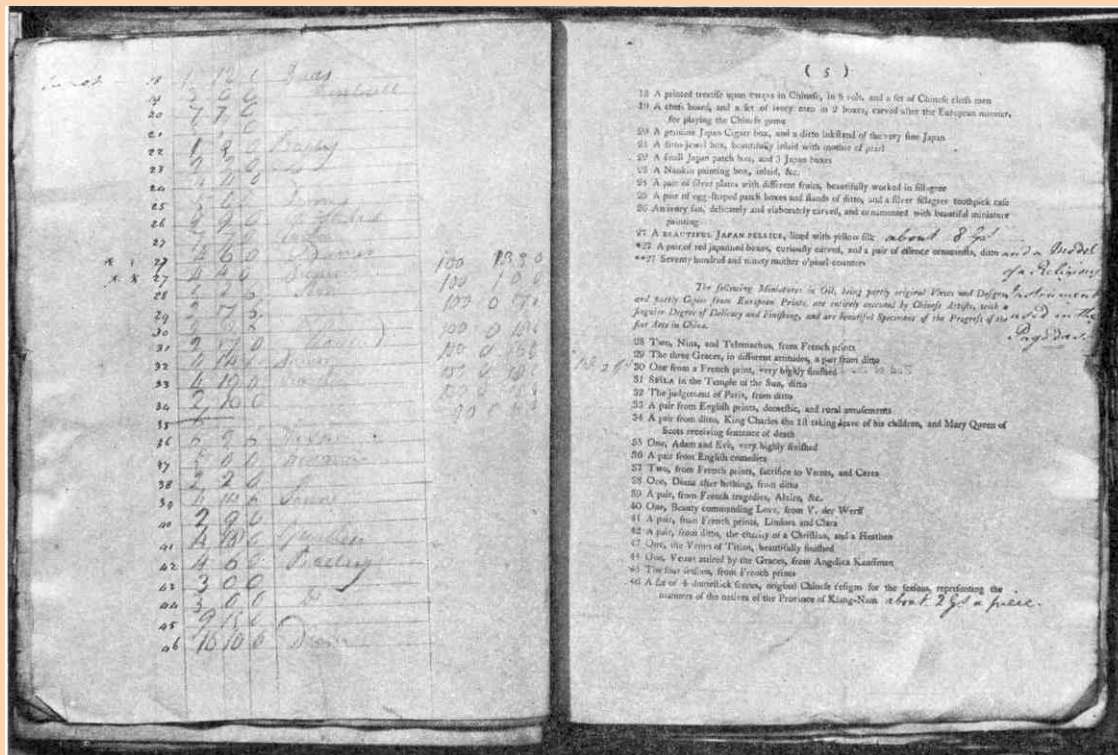
[p. 118 Duyvendak]

A CATALOGUE, &c. First Day's Sale, Friday, February the 15th, 1799. 10 pages ; 28 cm

£ 1.5.0	1. Thirty-nine tablets of Japan rouge	
	2. Three boxes of Chinese ditto, and 6 ditto of Chinese white	Nixon
1.1.0	3. Four embroidered tobacco purses	
1.4.0	4. A box of Chinese wearing ornaments, richly embroidered	Deans
1.5.0	5. A white feather fan, and 2 bunches of coloured goats hair for covering Chinese caps	do
1.0.0	6. Seven small boxes, each containing two sticks of fine Indian ink	J. Wade
2.0.0	7. Six ditto, and 2 with single sticks of imperial ditto	Long
1.11.6	8. Three ditto with 4 pieces of Corean ditto	
1.3.0	9. A square box containing 8 sticks of very fine Indian ink	Nix
1.6.0	10. A ditto with 10 round sticks of ditto	Berry
1.4.0	11. A box containing 2 hexagonal shaped sticks of ditto, beautifully figured	
2.7.0	12. A ditto with 2 solid ditto, very fine	Dumer
2.0.0	13. A cylinder containing 10 different pieces of ditto , bound in silk, and embellished with a drawing of a landscape	Trotter
2.6.0	14. A ditto	Dumer
2.3.0	15. Two bundles of Corean writing hair-pencils, and a bundle of ditto paper	

N.B. Contact with Ms. Kate Hunt from Christie's at Sept. 9, 2025 gives no clarity about Dumer.

Ancient Chinese Ink Sticks



A page

(from nr. 18) from Christie's sales-catalogue 1799, Friday, February the 15th.

The equivalent van £ 1 in the year 1800 (1799) is £ 106,04 in 2025. In euro's: £ 1 is 122,22 Euro (Sept. 6, 2025)

Possible buyers at the auction ??????

James Nixon (1741-1812) miniature painter ?

<https://www.thekingscandlesticks.com/webs/pedigrees1/10124.html>

<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/437225>

<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/437226>

etc.

(Thomas) **Trotter** ?

The Trotter mentioned in the margin (see nr. 13) may have been Thomas Trotter, a print publisher in London who worked from his London office from 1745 to 1803. He is described in the archives of the Metropolitan Museum of Art as a "British printmaker, London, 1745-1803." Because, in addition to a few ink sticks, a large number of graphic works from the Van Braam collection were auctioned in 1799, it is likely that this Trotter attended the auction primarily for that purpose.

Dumer..... Dumergue ?.

It looks this dentist is a collector of Chinese artifacts. His shortened name is mentioned 11 times in the listings of Christies in the article of Duyvendak. See Postoffice Listing London 1807.

There is no extra information about the buyers in 1799, according to Christies Archives Dept. in London on Sept. 9, 2025. "Many thanks for your enquiry, I have checked our documents from 1799 and unfortunately we are not able to find anything about "Dumer", I can confirm that he was buying different items at the sale which was held at Christie's on 15th February but we do not hold any other information."

JdH: Sept. 17, 2025: It looks that 'Dumer' is shortened for 'Dumergue', Charles François Dumergue (1739-1814), royal dentist etc, "By the Will of Marie Adeline Dumergue, a later relative, dated 18th July 1895, the V&A receives in 1912 a donation of 92 pieces of Oriental Ceramics. Two fans were included with the collection of porcelain and other works of art bequeathed by Mrs Marie Adeline Dumergue. Under the ...".

It looks there is no relation in objects between the purchases in 1799 by C.F. Dumergue and the donation in 1912.

Chapter 5. Ink sticks in Regency Watercolour Boxes (before and after 1795)

The following topics provide an exemplary overview.

1784 Chinese Ink stick on the website of Whimsie:

Chinese Ink Sticks, found in British Watercolour Boxed sets, from 1784's reveal a visual history. This Virtual Museum is a collection of photographs items, They are shown on this page are for historical interest and are physically in various collections throughout the world. This is a Chinese ink stick found in a British Watercolour Boxed Set from 1784. Shown are the front and back.

See: <https://www.whimsie.com/chinese%20ink%20sticks%20antique.html>



c.1784? For better analysing the characters the image is edited/made slightly paler.



Detail of characters 1784?

Information about this stick is difficult to find.

Ancient Chinese Ink Sticks

1785 or 1905? Another Chinese Ink Stick in a British Watercolour box

The website of Whimsie, found in a British Watercolour Box from ca. 1785's ??

This Virtual Museum of Whimsie is a collection of photographs items. They are shown on their pages and are for historical interest - and are not for sale. They are physically in various collections throughout the world. <https://www.whimsie.com/chinese%20ink%20sticks%20antique.html>



Image at the left side is dated 1905 and from LeFranc. The images at the right side with front- and backside of one ink stick should be dated c.1785 according to Whimsie. It is possible that the stick is of later date.

Ultimate left image: Ink stick LeFranc, Catalogue 1905 p. 115 *Specimens des encres de Chine* NAN-KING

Perhaps copy after older type of stick.

點漆

The characters 點漆 (diǎn qī) are Chinese characters. The term 點漆 can refer to the application of lacquer or a deep black color. (read with Google Lens)

The right ink stick shown here is made of 高永有 (Kao Yong Yǒu) but under a different title ? 塘 (? Táng). What it means isn't clear.

Comment of Mr. Tai-Yang Hwan:

"In my collection of near 2,000 ink sticks/cakes/blocks, none of them made by this person/or workshop. It makes his ink sticks very interesting. This 吉安 (Jí ān) city of (Jiāngxī) province has a long history of making ink sticks since some time in the Southern Song Dynasty (1127–1279, AD). However, it is out of people's awareness since late Ming dynasty."

Ancient Chinese Ink Sticks

1790 Chinese Ink Stick in Watercolour box of Thomas Reeves & Son

Watercolour box, dated between 1790 and 1799.



Tradecard watercolourbox, collection Jaap den Hollander (NL)



Fragment of front and back side of Chinese Ink stick in a watercolour box of Thomas Reeves & Son sold in London between 1790 and 1799.

Visible at the backside is a stylised cuttlefish, a water animal with tail and an overall **turtle shell** pattern as background. It is plausible that this inkstick was in the chest from the time of its purchase (between 1790-1799, according to the trade card). However, for sure?

=====

See footnote ⁹

⁹ In the 1770s Thomas and William Reeves devised their easily soluble watercolour cakes. The inspiration for these watercolours had come from the far less easily dissolved Chinese (stick) Inks which is doubtless why the brothers named their product Reeves British Ink - (their partnership was dissolved in 1783) (James Ayres, 2014)

Ancient Chinese Ink Sticks

1797 ca. Ink stick in Rudolph Ackermann watercolour paint box



Decorated (turtle shell pattern) ink stick from ca. 1800 in a box of R. Ackermann



The same type of stick is in another Ackermann Watercolour Box dated 1840. This image is rotated relative to the top one. Unfortunately, the backside is not visible.¹⁰



The text in the image reads with Google lens 螺川唐永 for the left half of the image. These are Chinese characters that may indicate a name or a place (Luochuan Tang Yong). Luochuan is the Central Chinese Loess Plateau.



Mister Tai-Yang Hwang clarified for me the characters on this ink stick. These are 螺川高永有製 (Luó Chuān Kao Yong Yǒu Zhì). It means made (製) by 高永有 (Kao Yong Yǒu) from the place 螺川 (Luó Chuān). The place 螺川 (Luó Chuān) is located in 吉安 (Jí ān) city of the (Jiāngxī) province. Not in the famous 徽州 (Hui-chou).

¹⁰ It looks that Rudolph Ackermann has bought a large stock that he could use for years to come.

Ancient Chinese Ink Sticks

1799 -1800 Different Ink Sticks in Watercolour Paint Box by William John Reeves



The ink stick at the left side is entitled 'The Twelve Gods' at the top. The broken middle stick is too stylized and not readable. The stick with the floral (front and back-side) fragment is...? All ink sticks are part of the content of a watercolour paint box sold between December 1799 and April 1800 in London with watercolour paint cakes of WmReeves. However, for sure?¹¹



See 1827

¹¹ The fragment of the stick at the top of this page at the right is cut at the right side. For recognition are three elements of importance, Pine branches, bamboo leaves and a lotus flower. This combination on a stick can give an entrance. (coll. JCdH). Perhaps are the three elements to relate to the Yellow Mountain area, in An-Hwei province, known as the Pine Smoke of Yellow Mountain.

Ancient Chinese Ink Sticks

1799 Ink stick in a William (John) Reeves Watercolour box

Produced between Dec. 1799 – April 1800 (collection Marjan Mentink (NL))

Part of the content of an incomplete watercolour box of Willam (John) Reeves, Son of Thomas Reeves, with some cakes of different colours and brands. In this box one (broken and repaired) stick of Indian ink is present.



Tradecard



On this side the stick shows an optically seemingly even pattern consisting of several decorated stripes.



Indian Ink stick (two sides of the same stick, black) in this box.

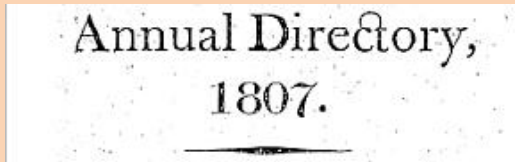
Translation of the characters 居用和昌期製 = “made during the Iyo Kazumasa or Kazumasa Iyo period” (Google translate). Reference to a samurai in the 16th century in Japan. Is this stick of ink a Japanese stick?¹²

¹² It is possible that this stick was present in the box at the moment of selling by William (John) Reeves in London around 1800. The stick is unfortunately incomplete (broken end at the top and glued) but the decoration is related to other sticks/cakes of ink, corresponding with the date of the trade card in the box.

Ancient Chinese Ink Sticks

1807 Writing Ink Makers. Listings in Post Office Directory London etc.

Unlike later Post Office Directory publications, this 1807 version lists the names of postal recipients only alphabetically, along with any industry or profession details and includes more addresses than just those in London.



For writing ink 2 manufacturers in London are mentioned:

(?- Lawrence Benj. Pen, Ink and Quill Warehouse, 12, Shoe-lane)

(?- Middleton N. Pocket - book and Pencil - maker to the King and Prince of Wales , Manufacturer of Writing and Dreffing Desks , 1.62, Strand)

- Senior John, Ink Powder-manufacturer, 59 Leadenhall-ftreet

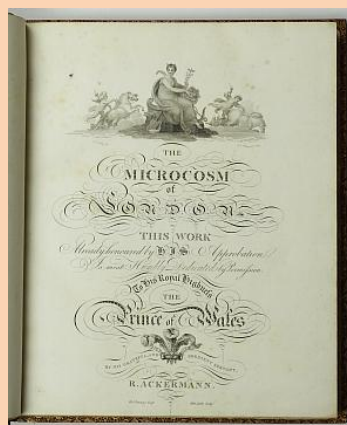
- Walkden and Darby, Manufacturers of the British Ink Powder, and Dealers in Quills, 5, Shoe-lane , Fleet -ftreet¹³

The pure, completely dried or boiled-down extract of oak gall nuts produces a dark brown ink after dilution with water.

In the 40 years between 1807 and 1847 the listing grows to 35 writing ink makers in London.¹⁴



'The Post Office' by Thomas Rowlandson and Augustus Charles Pugin from the Microcosm of London in 1808



The first major colour-plate work of Rudolphe Ackermann, depicting Regency London in all its forms, from the extravagant opulence of its grandest buildings and aristocracy to overcrowded slums and workplaces of the poor. It was issued by subscription in 26 monthly parts between 1808 and 1810.

¹³ In 1847 a long list of 35 names with British Ink Makers in London was published. They made specially powder or/and liquid ink for writing. Ink powder, most commonly iron-gall ink powder and carbon ink powder, was made by combining a powdered pigment with a binder. This powder has to be mixed with water before use. For iron-gall ink powder, the pigments were gallnuts and iron vitriol, and lampblack for carbon ink powder.

Gum arabic served as the binder in both types of ink. See to:

<https://blogs.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/archivesandmanuscripts/2023/05/15/the-gall-of-it/>

¹⁴ It is possibly that Reeves & Inwood , Superfine Water - colour - preparers to the Royal Family , 300 , Strand and Reeves & Woodyer , Colour -manufacturers , 80 , Holborn -bridge are sellers of writing ink (powder) in 1807.

Ackerman R. Printfeller ,&c. 101 Strand

Blackman George , Superfine Colourman to her Majesty , 362 , Oxford -ftreet

Newman J. Colourman to Artists, 24 Soho-fquare

? Wood & Innell , Colourmen , 5, Long - acre

In 1807 the listing of Oil & Colourman or Colourmen counts 84 names. In 1847 the listing of artists' colorman counts 21 instances.

Ancient Chinese Ink Sticks

1812 Japanese or Chinese Ink stick in Reeves & Inwood watercolour paint box

Complete with Reeves & Inwood cakes (1812-1827) (own collection)



Real length China ink stick 5,2 cm. at the left side of the watercolour box. Same measure as black crayons. All the ink stick photographs are from one stick.

Ancient Chinese Ink Sticks



Catfish image, fragment on the ink stick. There is a decorative, slightly undulating wavy hatching in the background. It looks the wave lines are handmade. They refer to water. More ink sticks from China before 1812 show similar hatching patterns. At the other side three characters in blue on a waver pattern. The smaller sides show similar patterns



Interpretation with Google Translate (images):

"Baotianchi" or "Shantianchi" is likely a misspelling of Tianchi (天池), which literally means "Heavenly Lake" in Chinese and refers to a mountain lake in Xinjiang, northwest China. The lake, also known as Heavenly Lake or Tianshan, is a famous World Heritage Site and a popular tourist destination. It is unclear if the region is the place of fabrication of the stick.



At the other side three Chinese or Japanese characters in a blue colour can be seen on a black wavy background. Depending on the angle of the light, the background pattern changes visually.

Ancient Chinese Ink Sticks

1814 Chinese Ink stick in Reeves & Woodyer Watercolour paint box



Reeves & Woodyer Watercolour paint box around 1814



front side. A new readout is needed to find matching characters on the front of a similar stick. This is not digitally readable from the front. The characters on the back of the ink stick, with the 3D lion lying on top, are not fully digitally readable. Only the top character for "Lion" is automatically translatable. "Lion's head" is 獅子頭 in Chinese characters. It appears that both characters represent the name "Lion's Head" on the back of the stick.



back side. Perhaps is the ink stick later (in 1875) adjusted.

Ancient Chinese Ink Sticks

1827 Chinese Ink stick in Rudolph Ackermann watercolour paint box

Ink stick in R. Ackermann Water Colour Paint Box 1827-1837



These stick of ink is already in a watercolour box of Reeves & Woodyer dated ca 1811.
Ackermann watercolour paint box 1827-1837 partly filled with James Newman watercolour cakes.
Cf. Occurrence elsewhere of Chinese Ink Stick.¹⁵

A travel paint box on Ebay in April 2009, dated around 1800, shows an Ink stick, at the left, as part of a paint box with a sliding lid and a Thomas Reeves Trade card, but with contents of Reeves and Woodyer (1800-1817/1818 – 1827?) cakes.



Translation of the Chinese Characters in English:
"The twelve divine healers" can refer to the Twelve Heavenly Generals in Buddhist tradition, protective deities who accompany Yakushi Nyorai, the Buddha of medicine.

At the backside: 九州禪聖玄智
(Jiuzhou Chen Sheng Xianzhi)

See for a comparable ink stick:

<https://otagomuseum.nz/collections/search-the-collection/F73.97>

¹⁵ "Ebay, 22 April 2009: A very rare circa 1783-1795, T Reeves & Son, 12 cake travelling paint box with slide lid. The set is complete with paint cakes, Chinese ink stick, quill brushes (hair pencils), bone handle, and ceramic palette. The box measures 8 1/2" x 3 3/4" and has a Tho's. Reeves & Son. 80 Holborn Bridge paper label dated 1781. There is one cake original to the box the rest (Reeves & Woodyer) were replaced around 1800. The palette measures 7 1/4" x 4 3/4". They are fragile and seldom survive. It has a REEVES & CO. 80 HOLBORN BRIDGE incised stamp. It is later from around 1805-1810. There is some crazing and a small chip but overall it is in very good condition. It is not unreasonable to believe that Thomas Reeves was probably personally involved in the making of part of this set. "

Chapter 6. Ink sticks in Victorian Watercolour boxes and later date

Queen Victoria (Queen from 20 June 1837 until her death in 22 January 1901)

1862 ca. Chinese ink stick in a James Newman watercolour paint box

Possibly ink sticks by Zhan Chenggui (Whimsie website)



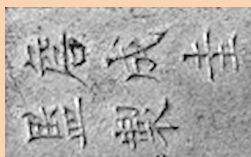
1862 (in Whimsie collection)

It is widely accepted that the Yongzheng and Qianlong courts made copies of famous old inks but it is still debatable if the court also recycled incomplete or used inks into new sticks. Ink connoisseurs believed that imperial inks marked with the dates 1737 and 1771 were recycled products. The effort of copying old imperial inks was not limited to the court. The eighteenth-century Wuyuan ink maker Zhan Chenggui was good at revitalizing fifteenth-century inks of the Yongle court.

Translation of text on stick with Google Lens at the left: Soft Gold Family Fun, produced by Zhan Chenggui



Shujinjiayang



Produced by Zhan
Chenggui

Jiao Jin Jiazang

Shunjin jiazang produced by inkmaster Zhan Cheng gui

Ancient Chinese Ink Sticks

Brand: Kuretake Seishodo /
Name: Happō Reitan
Type: Pure blue pine soot ink (aosei), gold wrapped
Supervisor: Zhan Chenggui (noted ink master)
Size: Approx. 70 mm x 12 mm x 8 mm
Weight: About 11 grams
Rarity: Highly scarce and collectible item
Zhan Chenggui (noted ink master)

An other image of both sides of the same type of stick in a James Newman Watercolour box.
The James Newman box has name strokes for the colours, so the box is earlier than 1830.



Part of the following Indian ink sticks collection (Ebay image, 2012) in a James Newman Watercolour box (before 1830) (instead of 1900, mentioned on Ebay)).



Translated through a native speaker/ reader:

漱金家藏慎餘堂高永有製

Made by Gao Yongyou of Shenyutang, collected by the Sujin family.

Ancient Chinese Ink Sticks



The location of the sticks in the box.

In other old watercolour boxes of James Newman are the following Indian ink sticks present:



1839?



1860?



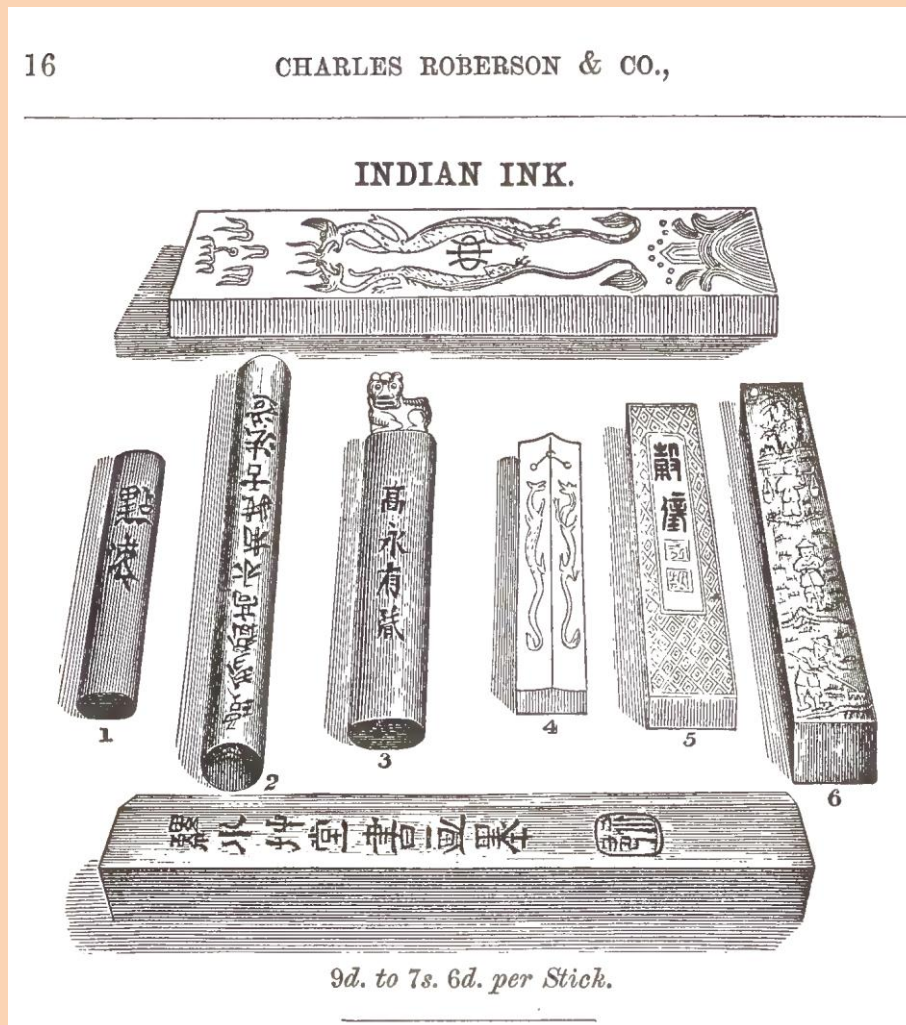
1830

The gold coloured ink stick (right) is, considering the way of decorating, from the period around 1800.

The characters on the left stick are 御寶.(Royal Treasure)

Ancient Chinese Ink Sticks

1875 Indian ink sold by Charles Roberson & Co., London, since 1810



Roberson, Charles & Co. CATALOGUE OF MATERIALS FOR DRAWING, PAINTING, &c. CHARLES ROBERSON, Artists' Colour Maker, No. 99, LONG ACRE, LONDON. 1875 , p. 16. Indian ink
All these ink sticks are Chinese. The second from left (nr. 2) is standing upside down.

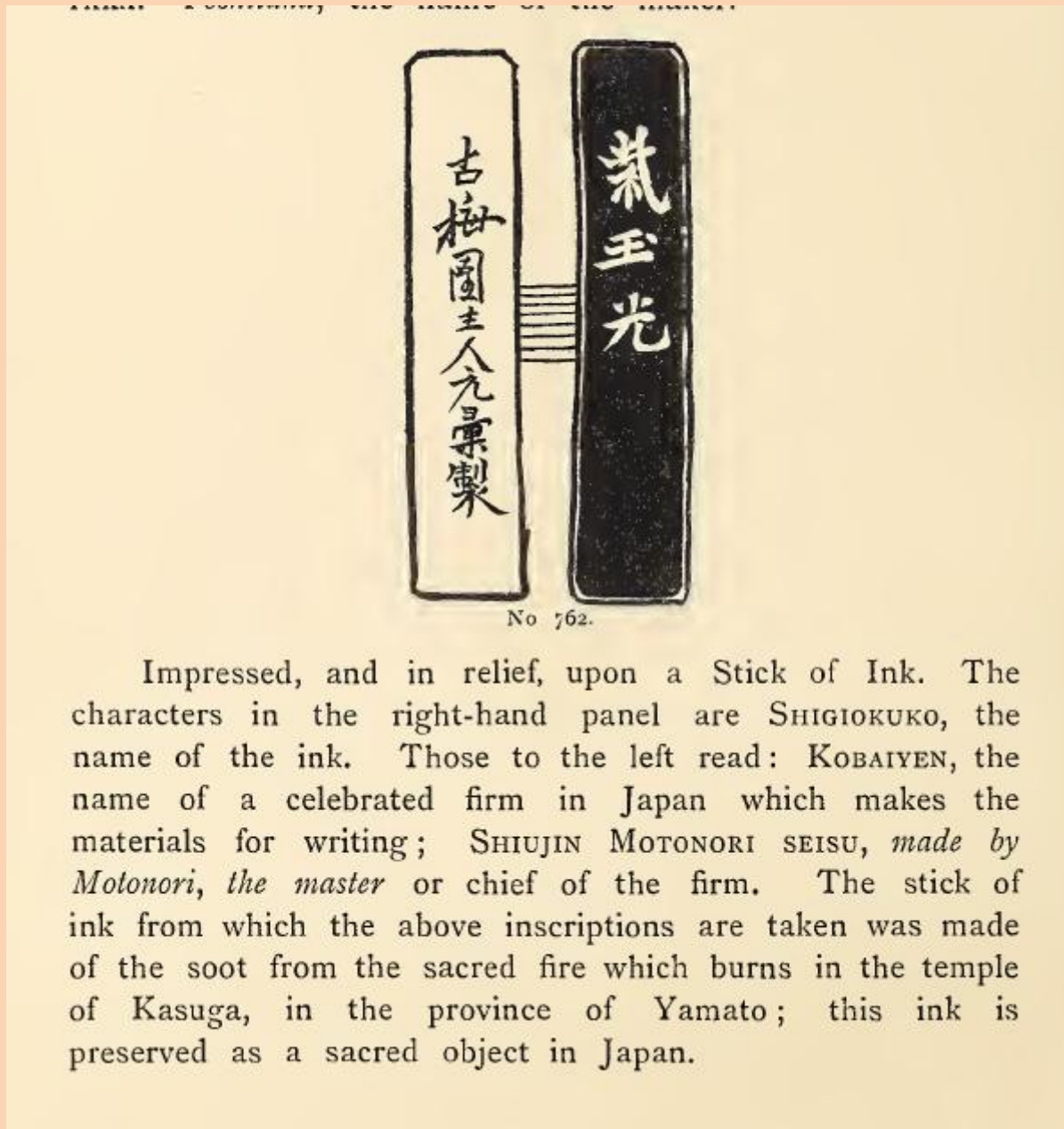
The Indian ink header above suggests ink cakes/ sticks from India. Why Indian Ink instead of Chinese ink? Perhaps while India was part of the British Empire since 1857 and there was a close relation between the Royal Academy and Royals in the Regency time and later between Roberson & Co. and Queen Victoria. By the 4th century BC, a robust network of caravan routes, which would later be encompassed by the term "Silk Road," was connecting the East and West. Chinese inksticks originated around 3000 BC and were imported overland to the West early on, via India.



ill. of an ink merchant (1872, L'enseigne son histoire sa [...], John Grand Carteret).

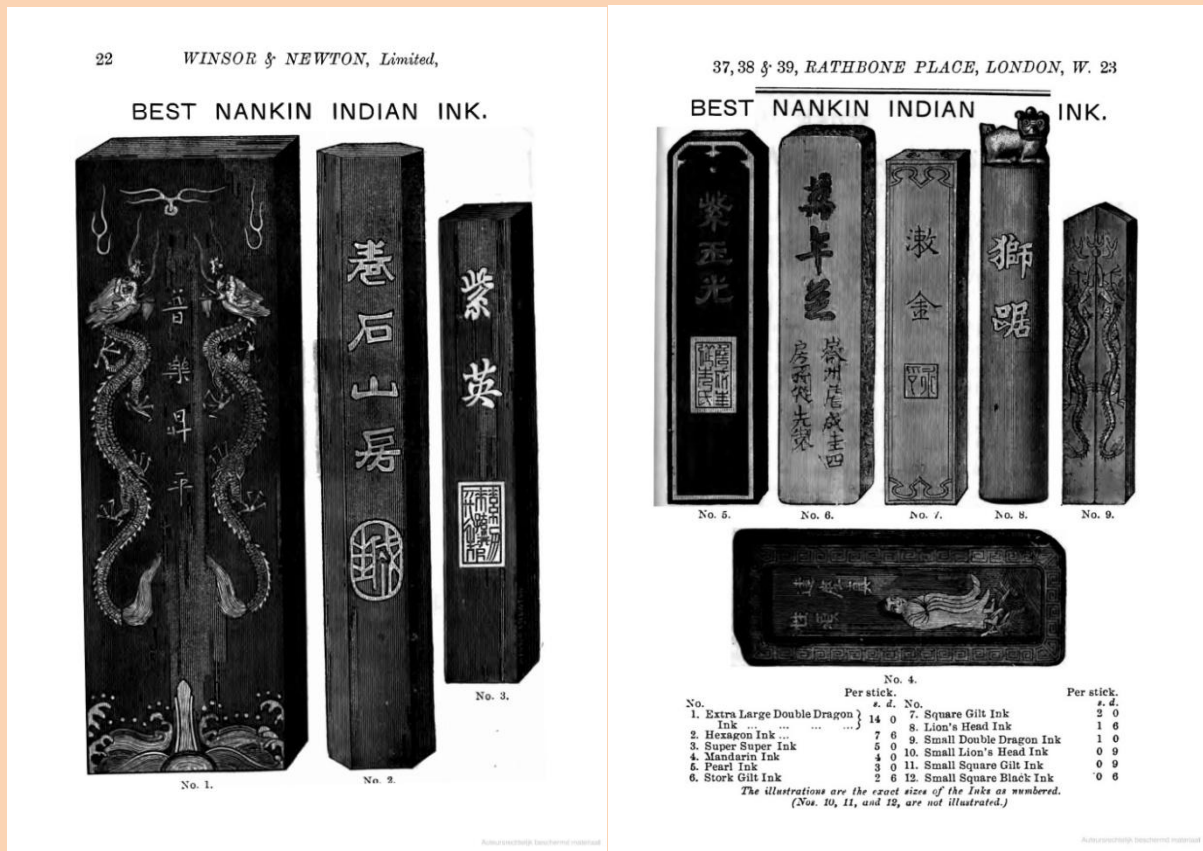
1882 Japanese Marks And Seals

James Lord Bowes, Japanese Marks and Seals, Part III . Lacquer , Enamels, Metal, Wood , Ivory, &C . By James Lord Bowes, London, Henry Sotheran & Co. , 1882. Only one example of a stick on page 336



Ancient Chinese Ink Sticks

1884 Best NANKIN Indian Ink sticks sold by Winsor & Newton



Winsor and Newton's Catalogue of Colours and Materials for Water Colour Painting, Pencil, Chalk, and Architectural Drawing (London: Winsor & Newton, Limited, 1884), p. 22 and 23

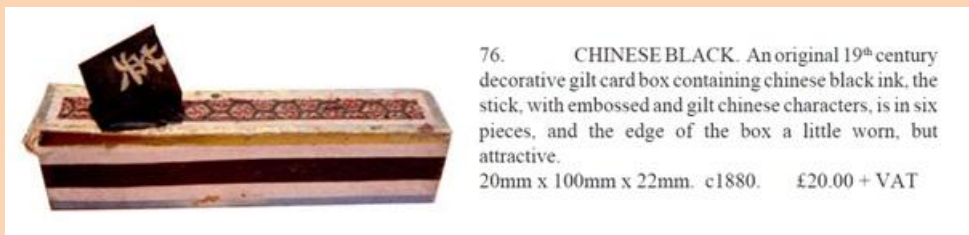
Page 22 translations in English with Google Lens - left stick: Pul(s?)e Morning General, middle stick: After cooking of (in?) the mountain house, Right stick: Ziying. (JdH: It looks all translations are doubtfull.) (All sticks are Chinese as opposed to the concept of Indian ink at the top).



Ancient Chinese Ink Sticks



Nankin stick W&N no 6, Outside and Inside packaging (stick with stork and pine tree on gold fond). Side view, Characters at front view.



Ken Spelman Rare Books 70 Micklegate, York YO1 6LF 2012 - catalogue 66 section 2

Explanation in the catalogue: According to the characters on this ink stick, it was made by Zhan congxian during Qianlong reign of Qing dynasty in Wuyuan (婺源) During the Qianlong reign (1736-1795) of the Qing Dynasty, Wuyuan experienced a period of prosperity and transformation, particularly in the realm of commerce and culture. While specific details about Wuyuan's development during this time are limited, it's clear that the region benefited from the overall growth and stability of the Qing empire under Qianlong's rule.

The Three Chinese characters in blue are of stick no 6 of the W&N catalogue: 萬年青. Name of the ink stick, in blue characters at the stick above. About the Blue characters. This is an image of Chinese characters written in a vertical column. The characters are painted in a vibrant blue, which contrasts with the gold coloured background. It is difficult to determine the exact meaning of the characters without further context. Here is a translation: The image shows three Chinese characters, from top to bottom: The top character is '雲' (yún), which means 'cloud'. The middle character is '海' (hǎi), which means 'sea'. The bottom character is '樓' (lóu), which means 'building' or 'tower'. Together, these characters can be interpreted as "Cloud Sea Tower," which could be a poetic name for a building or a place.

徽州詹成圭四房孫從先製 (Made by Zhan congxian, grandson of Zhan chengui)



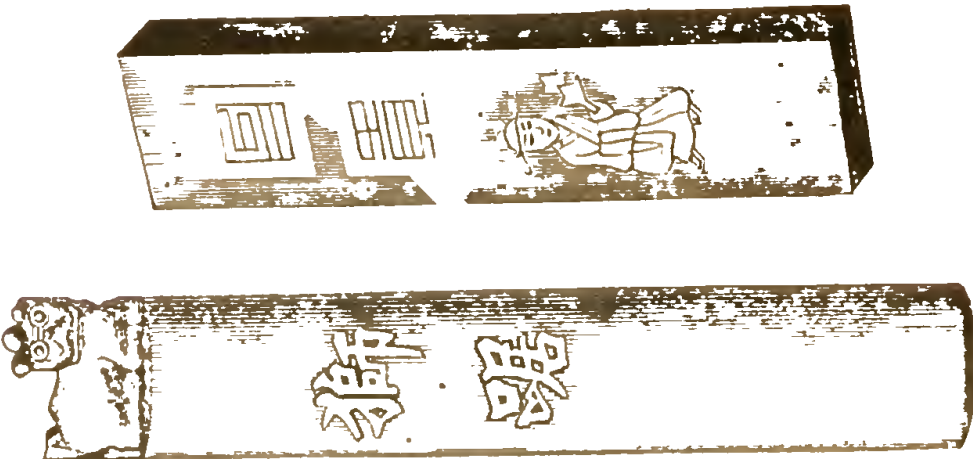
Cat. 1905 Le Franc et cat. Bourgeois – Aîné 1925 b/w no 491.
The same ink stick, from different suppliers, in different countries!

Ancient Chinese Ink Sticks

1887 India Ink Sticks sold by S. Goldberg, N.Y., USA

34 S. GOLDBERG, 299 SIXTH AVE., N. Y., Catalogue

INDIA INK.



Super Square, Large.....	By stick, \$	.50
“ “ Medium.....	“	.35
“ “ Small.....	“	.25
“ Round, Lion Head, Large.....	“	.25
“ “ “ “ Small.....	“	.15
Ordinary	“	.10

Both sticks are Chinese.

Ancient Chinese Ink Sticks

1892 Chinese inks imported in finest sticks by Thornton, Manchester UK

109 Deansgate, Manchester (same types are already in 1875 on the market). Here in combination with John Heywood's Catalogue of Artists' and Drawing Materials. Also selling Faber's, Wollf's, Reeves' (fixed), Harling's, W&N Liquid ink.

109 DEANSGATE, MANCHESTER. 97

CHINESE INKS.



4056	Small Square	...	Per Stick	s. d.	4062	Best Hexagon Small	...	Per Stick	s. d.
4057	Fine Round	...	...	0 1	4063	Finest Square Gilt	...	...	2 6
4058	S. Fine do.	...	...	0 5	4064	Do. Hexagon, large	...	...	3 0
4059	Fine Square, Gilt	...	...	0 6	4065	Extra Quality Square	...	...	4 0
4060	Fine Lion Top Oval	...	...	0 9	4066	Do. very large.	...	...	4 0
4061	Best Hexagon	...	...	0 10			...	...	7 6
			...	1 6					

Special Ex. Quality, Genuine and Pure.

Dense Black and Permanent. Allowed to be the finest Ink imported.

4067	Large Flat Hexagon	...	Per Stick	s. d.
4068	Treble Large. do.	...	...	7 6
		...	...	15 0

Reduction when either of above are ordered by the lb.

4069 Broken Sticks Best Chinese Ink 20/- per pound.

The origin of the sticks is not specified. They are imported copies of recognized quality. Broken sticks are sold per pound for a reduced price.

Ancient Chinese Ink Sticks


1905 Ink sticks Encre de Chine de Nan-king sold by LeFranc & Co. Paris

Catalogue, Ink sticks sold by Le Franc & Co

LEFRANC & C^{ie} PARIS

ENCRE DE CHINE LIQUIDE ET CONCENTRÉE
INDELÉBILE ET INALTÉRABLE
EN FLACONS CARRÉS (Modèles déposés)
ET EN TUBES

SPECIMENS REAUX DES FLACONS



N^o. 954 N^o. 955 N^o. 956
MODÈLE ÉCOLE PETIT MODÈLE GRAND MODÈLE

ENCRE DE CHINE LIQUIDE			
N ^o . 954	En flacons, modèle école	Le flacon	20
N ^o . 955	En flacons carrés, petit modèle		40
N ^o . 956	En flacons carrés, grand modèle		75
N ^o . 957	En tubes, modèle école		30
N ^o . 958	En tubes, modèle école		40
N ^o . 959	En tubes, modèle école		75


ENCRE DE CHINE CONCENTRÉE

ENCRE DE CHINE CONCENTRÉE			
N ^o . 957	En tubes n ^o 1 (petit)	Le tube	40
N ^o . 958	En tubes n ^o 2 (moyen)		75
N ^o . 959	En tubes n ^o 3 (grand)		1 25

ENCRE DE CHINE
Voir les échantillons ci-contre.

N ^o . 950. — NAN-KING EXTRA-FINE, en bâtons.			
N ^o . 4	Petit bâton	Le bâton	25
N ^o . 5	Grande variété		30
N ^o . 6	Petit bâton		40
N ^o . 7	Grande variété		40
N ^o . 8	Grande variété		40
N ^o . 9	Grande variété		40
N ^o . 10	Grande variété		40
N ^o . 11	Grande variété		40
N ^o . 12	Grande variété		40
N ^o . 13	Grande variété		40
N ^o . 14	Grande variété		40
N ^o . 15	Grande variété		40
N ^o . 16	Grande variété		40
N ^o . 17	Grande variété		40
N ^o . 18	Grande variété		40
N ^o . 19	Grande variété		40
N ^o . 20	Grande variété		40
N ^o . 21	Grande variété		40
N ^o . 22	Grande variété		40
N ^o . 23	Grande variété		40
N ^o . 24	Grande variété		40
N ^o . 25	Grande variété		40
N ^o . 26	Grande variété		40
N ^o . 27	Grande variété		40
N ^o . 28	Grande variété		40
N ^o . 29	Grande variété		40
N ^o . 30	Grande variété		40
N ^o . 31	Grande variété		40
N ^o . 32	Grande variété		40
N ^o . 33	Grande variété		40
N ^o . 34	Grande variété		40
N ^o . 35	Grande variété		40
N ^o . 36	Grande variété		40
N ^o . 37	Grande variété		40
N ^o . 38	Grande variété		40
N ^o . 39	Grande variété		40
N ^o . 40	Grande variété		40
N ^o . 41	Grande variété		40
N ^o . 42	Grande variété		40
N ^o . 43	Grande variété		40
N ^o . 44	Grande variété		40
N ^o . 45	Grande variété		40
N ^o . 46	Grande variété		40
N ^o . 47	Grande variété		40
N ^o . 48	Grande variété		40
N ^o . 49	Grande variété		40
N ^o . 50	Grande variété		40
N ^o . 51	Grande variété		40
N ^o . 52	Grande variété		40
N ^o . 53	Grande variété		40
N ^o . 54	Grande variété		40
N ^o . 55	Grande variété		40
N ^o . 56	Grande variété		40
N ^o . 57	Grande variété		40
N ^o . 58	Grande variété		40
N ^o . 59	Grande variété		40
N ^o . 60	Grande variété		40
N ^o . 61	Grande variété		40
N ^o . 62	Grande variété		40
N ^o . 63	Grande variété		40
N ^o . 64	Grande variété		40
N ^o . 65	Grande variété		40
N ^o . 66	Grande variété		40
N ^o . 67	Grande variété		40
N ^o . 68	Grande variété		40
N ^o . 69	Grande variété		40
N ^o . 70	Grande variété		40
N ^o . 71	Grande variété		40
N ^o . 72	Grande variété		40
N ^o . 73	Grande variété		40
N ^o . 74	Grande variété		40
N ^o . 75	Grande variété		40
N ^o . 76	Grande variété		40
N ^o . 77	Grande variété		40
N ^o . 78	Grande variété		40
N ^o . 79	Grande variété		40
N ^o . 80	Grande variété		40
N ^o . 81	Grande variété		40
N ^o . 82	Grande variété		40
N ^o . 83	Grande variété		40
N ^o . 84	Grande variété		40
N ^o . 85	Grande variété		40
N ^o . 86	Grande variété		40
N ^o . 87	Grande variété		40
N ^o . 88	Grande variété		40
N ^o . 89	Grande variété		40
N ^o . 90	Grande variété		40
N ^o . 91	Grande variété		40
N ^o . 92	Grande variété		40
N ^o . 93	Grande variété		40
N ^o . 94	Grande variété		40
N ^o . 95	Grande variété		40
N ^o . 96	Grande variété		40
N ^o . 97	Grande variété		40
N ^o . 98	Grande variété		40
N ^o . 99	Grande variété		40
N ^o . 100	Grande variété		40

SPECIMENS DES ENCRE DE CHINE
NAN-KING



N^o. 1 N^o. 2 N^o. 3 N^o. 4 N^o. 5
N^o. 6 N^o. 7 N^o. 8 N^o. 9 N^o. 10

Voir les prix ci-contre.

Ancient Chinese Ink Sticks

1909 Encre de Chine Ink sticks sold by Nicolas Ainé, Lyon

Artists supplier in Lyon Catalogue 1909-1910

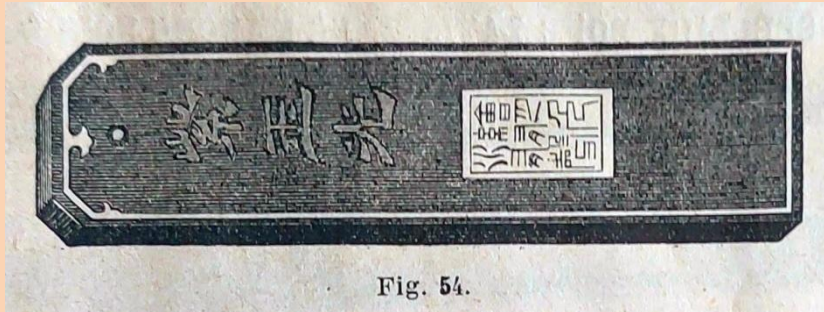


Fig. 54.

The three characters at the left side : are to translate in **purple jade light**. (紫玉光)

Soot Black Inkstick with such words as "clean soot", "top soot", "tribute soot", "purple jade light", "green dragon pearl", "eternal light", "two hundred and fifty kilograms of oil". Grinding Ink Before ink grinding, the inkstone must be cleaned.

THE INK

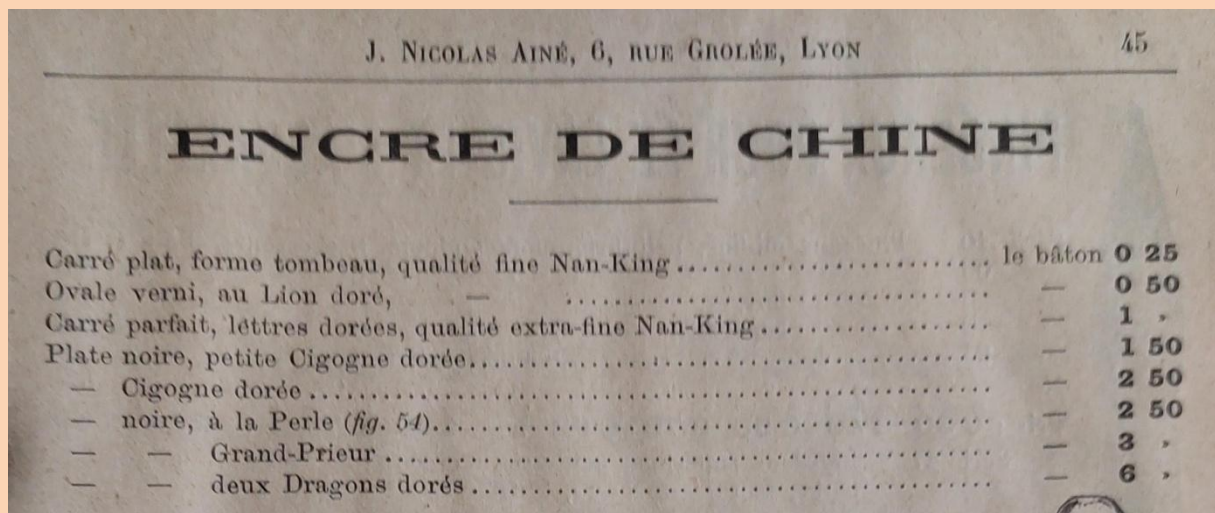
In Chinese traditional art, water color has been the formal medium for both calligraphy and painting. Oil has never been used as a base in mixing pigments, except the vermilion ink for seals. Even in the cave linen frescoes, as in Tun Huang, opaque colors were used, somewhat like egg tempera, but they were all prepared in glue (undoubtedly from animals) and water.

Chinese ink, which dates back to archaic times, is made from the soot of burnt wood. The most famous ink is made of the pine in the Yellow Mountain area, in An-Hwei province, known as the Pine Smoke of Yellow Mountain. The ink is prepared by first burning the pine, then grinding the soot of the smoke, purifying it, and the resulting fine powder is mixed with animal glue. It is then molded into various shapes, either in the cylindric or in the more popular rectangular block bar. The ink sticks are often decorated with landscape designs in rich colors, such as turquoise blue and green, gold and silver. The ink comes also in other shapes, such as hexagonal, round, oblong, etc. For the purpose of collection or use for special gifts, one can have the ink made to order in whatever shape and pattern one desires, and with special inscriptions molded on the bar. Popular inks often bear brand names. Among the most popular are "Dragon Gate," "**Lavender Jade Light**," etc.

Ink sticks vary a good deal in size. Some weigh one "catty" (16 ounces), and are ten inches high and one-and-a-half inches in diameter, made for the use of professional artists. For everyday use two or four ounce bars are sufficient,

The superiority of Chinese ink lies in its delicate, fine, and smooth color tone. It is transparent. It is water-proof, i.e., once it is used on the paper it becomes permanent and will last for centuries without fading. The ink on early scripts and paintings excavated from the Chu tomb in Ch'ang Sha (see Fig. 20) has remained unchanged, although dating back as far as the 5th century B.C. The color of the ink in the widely reproduced painting. Admonitions of the Instructress, (5th cent. A.D.) now in the British Museum (see Fig. 93), is still as fresh as ever, although the paper has turned a greyish brown.

Ancient Chinese Ink Sticks



J. NICOLAS AINÉ, 6, RUE GROLÉE, LYON

45

ENCRE DE CHINE

Carré plat, forme tombeau, qualité fine Nan-King le bâton	0,25
Ovale verni, au Lion doré,	0,50
Carré parfait, lettres dorées, qualité extra-fine Nan-King	1,00
Plate noire, petite Cigogne dorée	1.50
Plate Cigogne dorée	2,50
Plate noire, à la Perle (<i>fig. 54</i>).	2,50
Plate noire, Grand-Prieur	3,00
Plate noire deux Dragons dorés	6,00

Ancient Chinese Ink Sticks

1925 Ink sticks sold by Bourgeois Aîné, Paris

Sticks of ink made in Nan King. Nanjing is the capital of Jiangsu, a province in East China. Made in France: Nan-King ink is anno 2025 produced by Lefranc & Bourgeois in France.



N.B. The lowest stick at the left is pictured upside down.

Ancient Chinese Ink Sticks

BOURGEOIS AINÉ — PARIS		112			
NUMÉROS	DÉSIGNATIONS	NOMBRE de BATONS au paquet	PRIX du PAQUET	PRIX de la DOZAIKE	PRIX de la PIÈCE
FINE (NAN-KING) (suite)					
244	Carré noir, épée dorée	20	66 »	43 80	4 50
243	Tisserand (voir figure)	20	96 »	63 60	6 25
266	Rond verni	16	100 »	85 »	8 »
319	Hexagone noir, Dragon doré	10	145 »	193 »	17 »
416 bis	Rond verni	4	120 »	260 »	35 »
FINE (NAN-KING)					
<i>Chaque bâton dans un étui.</i>					
256 ter	Carré plat tout doré, forme Tombeau	64	168 »	38 »	3 75
247	Carré doré au Dragon	32	160 »	64 80	6 25
359	Cigogne dorée (imitation) (voir figure)	32	170 »	76 20	7 25
246	Perle plate, forme Tombeau (imitation). (voir figure).	32	170 »	70 20	7 25
EXTRA-FINE (NAN-KING)					
492	Hexagone pailleté En étuis	64	220 »	44 »	4 50
490 bis	Perle plate, forme Tombeau (véritable). . . —	64	370 »	77 »	8 »
484	Carré parfait —	40	210 »	65 »	7 »
486	Tour —	40	590 »	200 »	20 »
487	Hexagone pailleté —	32	210 »	90 »	9 »
490	Perle plate, forme Tombeau (véritable) . . . — (voir figure).	32	295 »	122 »	11 50
483	Perle carrée, au Dragon (voir figure). —	32	295 »	122 »	11 50
491	Cigogne dorée (véritable) (voir figure). —	32	370 »	150 »	14 50
496 bis	Carré verni —	24	175 »	95 »	9 50
500 bis	Lion impérial —	20	370 »	240 »	23 »
495 bis	Phénix —	16	370 »	300 »	30 »
498	Carré verni (voir figure) —	12	175 »	175 »	18 »
497 bis	Neuf personnages —	10	370 »	444 »	40 »
499	Grand Dragon —	8	390 »	588 »	52 »
Prix réduits pour Commandes importantes.					
Les prix au paquet ne sont pas applicables pour une quantité moindre.					
N. B. — Toutes nos livraisons étant vérifiées au départ, nous prévenons nos clients que nous déclinons toute responsabilité au sujet de la casse susceptible de se produire chez eux dans certaines sortes.					

Lefranc Bourgeois has its main paint production factory in Le Mans, France, and it is the location where NanKing ink would be produced in 2025. This factory, located at 5, rue René Panhard, CS 82120, Z.I. Nord, 72021 Le Mans Cedex 2, is where the company manufactures its oil paints, acrylics, and gouache.

Ancient Chinese Ink Sticks

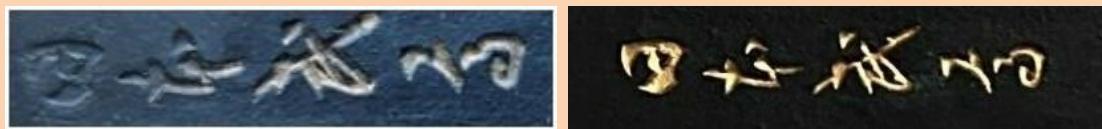
1964 Japanese ink stick with drake

(or earlier, newly bought in 1964 in Amsterdam, own collection)



The text on the label of the box reads "日本武尊" (Yamato Takeru).

Yamato Takeru: A legendary prince in Japanese mythology, the son of Emperor Keikō. He is known for his courage and military prowess and is often depicted as a heroic figure who defeated various enemies and restored order to ancient Japan.



Via an image of an vintage ink stick on Ebay in August 2025, with the complete text, a translation of the Japanese Characters was possible: 他にもある 'Hoka ni mo aru' 'There are others'.

"Hoka ni mo aru" (他にもある) is a Japanese phrase that translates to "there are others" or "there is also" in English. It implies the existence of more than one thing or option beyond what has already been mentioned or considered.



Hoka (他に): This means "other" or "another".

Ni (に): This is a particle indicating direction or existence.

Mo (も): This particle means "also" or "too".

Aru (ある): This is a verb meaning "to exist" or "there is".

Therefore, "hoka ni mo aru" literally means "to other things, there is also," but it's commonly understood as "there are others" or "there is also something else".

Example: If someone is talking about different types of food, and you want to say "there are also other types of food," you would say "hoka ni mo tabemono ga aru" (他に食べ物もある).

Emperor Keikō (景行天皇, Keikō-tennō), also known as Ootarashihikooshirowake no Sumeramikoto (大足彦忍代別天皇) and Ōtarashihiko-oshirowake no Mikoto (大帯日子淤斯呂和氣天皇), was the 12th legendary Emperor of Japan, according to the traditional order of succession.

All with help of Google AI and Google Translate (via Images) and a lot of searching on the Internet.

Ancient Chinese Ink Sticks



Under different lighting angles for better deciphering.

Attachment 1: Periods of eight Chinese Emperors (1661-1908)

See for period before 1649: <http://www.chinaknowledge.de/History/Ming/ming-rulers.html>

Kangxi was Emperor of China from 1662 – 1722, was the third emperor of the Qing Dynasty and the second of the dynasty that ruled China. A regency existed until August 1667. Kangxi was the son of the previous emperor Shunzhi Emperor and his consort Xiao Kang Zhang.

Yongzheng was Emperor of China from 1723 – 1735, also known by his temple name Emperor Shizong of Qing, personal name Yinzhen, was the fourth emperor of the Qing dynasty, and the third Qing emperor to rule over China proper.

Qianlong was Emperor of China from 1736 - 1796. He was the fifth emperor of the Qing Dynasty and the fourth of the dynasty that ruled China. He abdicated in February 1796, out of respect for his grandfather Kangxi, who had reigned for 61 years, and decided not to rule longer than he wished. Qianlong was succeeded by his fifteenth son, Jiaqing (1760–1820). Qianlong effectively retained power until his death in 1799.

Jiaqing was Emperor of China from 1796-1820 also known by his temple name Emperor Renzong of Qing, personal name Yongyan, was the sixth emperor of the Qing dynasty and the fifth Qing emperor to rule over China proper. He was the 15th son of the Qianlong Emperor.

Daoguang was Emperor of China from 1820 – 1850, also known by his temple name Emperor Xuanzong of Qing, personal name Mianning, was the seventh emperor of the Qing dynasty, and the sixth Qing emperor to rule over China proper. His reign was marked by "external disaster and internal rebellion".

Xianfeng was Emperor of China from 1850-1861, born in 1831 under the name "Yizhu". He was the fourth son of Emperor Daoguang and the Imperial Consort Quan. Yizhu's talent in literature and administration far surpassed his brothers and impressed his father, Daoguang who later decided to make him his successor.

Tongzhi was Emperor of China from 1861-1875. Tongzhi (Aisin-Gioro Zaichun) was the eldest and only surviving son of Emperor Xianfeng and one of his concubines, known as Empress Dowager Cixi. His father died at the age of 30.

Guangxu was Emperor of China from 1875-1908. He ruled during the Qing dynasty, from the age of four until his death at the age of 37. During his reign, he was heavily influenced by Empress Dowager Cixi, who effectively controlled the government.

Four Emperors Kangxi, Qianlong, Jiaqing and Daoguang preferred a standard imperial ink known as Hanyun (Han clouds) for use in studios at the Yuanming Yuan Summer Palace as well as imperial gifts to subordinates. Qianlong's interest in ink-making activities was noted by contemporary scholars. The early nineteenth-century court official Wu Zhenyu in his Yangjizhai Conglu talks about a hundred types of ink cakes and sticks being stored at the Imperial Book Place (Yushu chu), twenty-six of them are known to have been made for the Qianlong court. Wu also points out that some inks were named with literary titles such as Momiao Xuan (Fantastic ink studio) and Sanxi Tang (The Three Rarities Hall).

It is widely accepted that the Yongzheng and Qianlong courts **made copies of famous old inks** but it is still debatable if the court also recycled incomplete or used inks into new sticks. **Ink connoisseurs believed that imperial inks marked with the dates 1737 and 1771 were recycled products.**

The effort of copying old imperial inks was not limited to the court. The eighteenth-century Wuyuan ink maker **Zhan Chenggui** was good at revitalizing fifteenth-century inks of the Yongle court.

(The Yongle Emperor (2 May 1360 – 12 August 1424), also known by his temple name as the Emperor Chengzu of Ming, personal name Zhu Di, was the third emperor of the Ming dynasty, reigning from 1402 to 1424. He was the fourth son of the Hongwu Emperor, the founding emperor of the dynasty.)

Attachment 2: Periods of fifteen Japanese Sjuguns (1603-1867)

From 1603 to 1867, the Tokugawa clan ruled Japan as shoguns during the Tokugawa period, or Edo period. The dynasty began with Tokugawa Ieyasu and ended with Tokugawa Yoshinobu, the fifteenth shogun, who was forced to step down in 1867, leading to the Meiji Restoration and the return of power to the Emperor. This was a period of centralized military rule, with the shogunate's capital in Edo (modern-day Tokyo).

Here is a list of the Tokugawa shoguns, their terms during this period and their name in Japanese characters:

[Tokugawa Ieyasu](#): (1603–1605) 徳川 家康
[Tokugawa Hidetada](#): (1605–1623) 徳川 秀忠
[Tokugawa Iemitsu](#): (1623–1651) 徳川家光
[Tokugawa Ietsuna](#): (1651–1680) 徳川 家綱
[Tokugawa Tsunayoshi](#): (1680–1709) 徳川 綱吉
[Tokugawa Ienobu](#): (1709–1712) 徳川家宣像
[Tokugawa Ietsugu](#): (1713–1716) 徳川 家継
[Tokugawa Yoshimune](#): (1716–1745) 徳川 吉宗
[Tokugawa Ieshige](#): (1745–1761) 徳川 家重
[Tokugawa Ieharu](#): (1761–1786) 徳川 家治
[Tokugawa Ienari](#): (1787–1837) 徳川 家斉
[Tokugawa Ieyoshi](#): (1837–1853) 徳川 家慶
[Tokugawa Iesada](#): (1853–1858) 徳川 家定
[Tokugawa Iemochi](#): (1858–1866) 徳川 家斉
[Tokugawa Yoshinobu](#): (1866–1867) 徳川 慶喜

Attachment 3: Ancient Sogdian Letters

Explorer and archaeologist Sir Marc Aurel Stein found these letters in 1907 at a watch-tower to the west of Dunhuang 敦煌, part of the “Jade Gate” complex that once guarded the western frontier of China. The letters appear to be the contents of a mailbag lost or confiscated in transit. Written on paper in the early 4th century CE by Sogdian merchants and their family members in western China, they were addressed to compatriots in the Sogdian homeland or in the oasis of Loulan 楼兰/樓蘭 (in present-day Xinjiang). These documents provide a unique glimpse into the lives and preoccupations of the foreign merchants in China. They mention Sogdians living in the Chinese capital at the time, Luoyang 洛阳/洛陽, in Henan province; and in some of the major staging-posts on the route to China, such as Dunhuang and Jiuquan 酒泉 (ancient Suzhou), in Gansu Province; Wuwei 武威 (formerly called Liangzhou 涼州), in Gansu Province; and Jincheng 晋城/晋城, in Gansu Province 山西省. As one might expect, they are largely concerned with commercial matters, naming many of the commodities traded, including gold, silver, camphor, pepper, musk, wheat, silk, and other kinds of cloth. Remarkably, two of the letters are written by women.” The letters are dated ca. 312-313 AD. by Henning, based on the events in letter II.

Nicholas Sims-Williams, University of London, translated some of these ancient letters. Introduction by Prof. Daniel C. Waugh, “The Sogdian Ancient Letters 1, 2, 3, and 5”, 2004. See: <https://sogdians.si.edu/ancient-letters/>

Other translations and more background informations are of Vladimir A. Livšic, Russian Scientist, St. Petersburg at his SOGDIAN “ANCIENT LETTERS” (II, IV, V). See: https://brill.com/view/journals/scr/5/1/article-p344_21.pdf?srsId=AfmBOoqKJ977Q20PxS0aZpZsWf720fOsh3APWK5b_UCGgpGbwoG7YqPi

The transcriptions of these early letters give some insights in the situation around 300 AD in Ancient China.



Sogdian Ancient Letter No. 1 [JdH: Names of merchandise have hereafter been indicated by me in bold.]

[Verso] From her daughter, the free-woman Miwnay, to her d[ear] mother [Chatis].

[Recto] [From her dau]ghter, the free-woman Mi[wnay], to her dear [mother] Chatis, blessing and homage. It would be a good day for him who might [see] you healthy and at ease; and [for me] that day would be the best when we ourselves

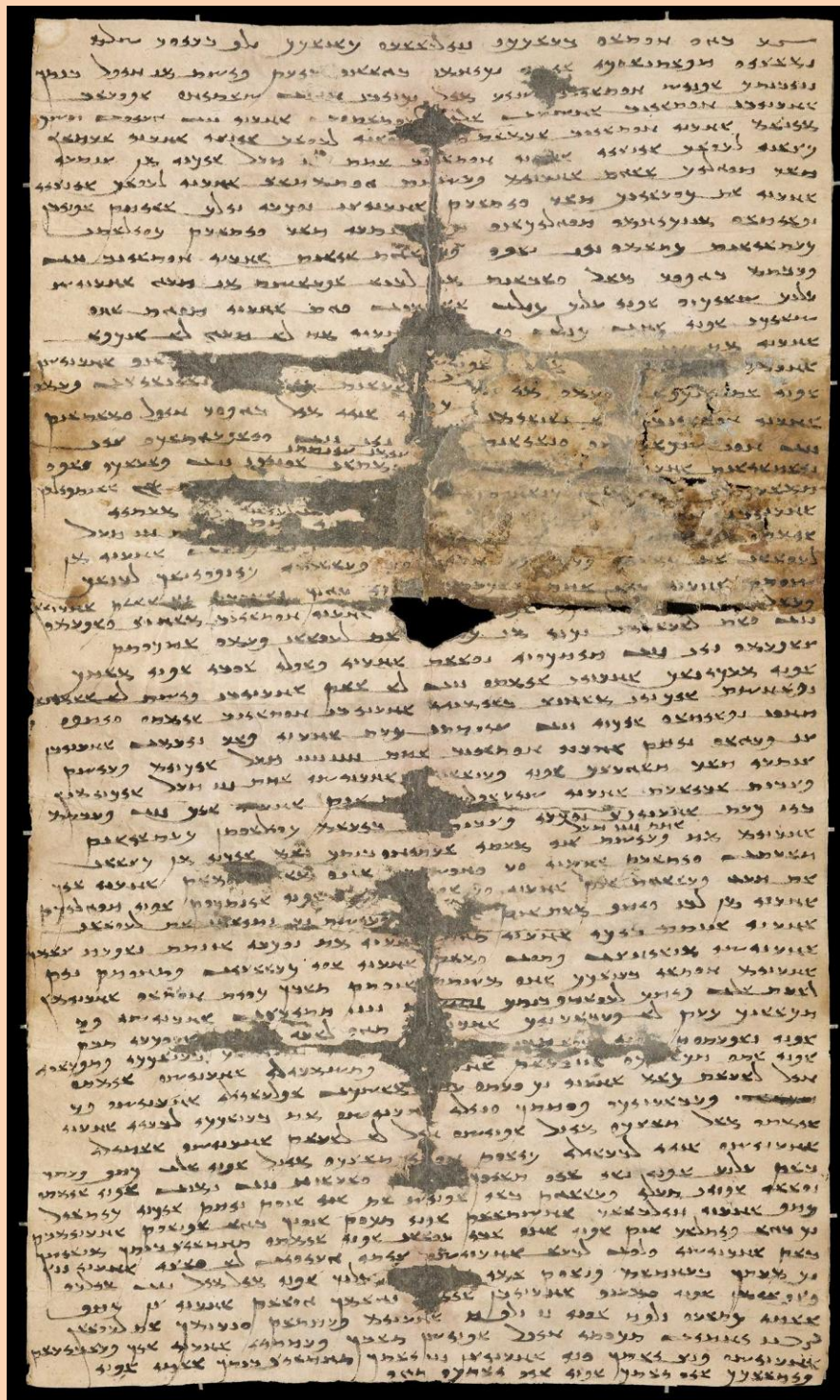
Ancient Chinese Ink Sticks

might see you in good health. I am very anxious to see you, but have no luck. I petitioned the councillor Sagharak, but the councillor says: Here there is no other relative closer to Nanai-dhat than Artivan. And I petitioned Artivan, but he says: Farnkhund ..., and I refuse to hurry, I refuse to ... And Farnkhund says: If your husband's relative does not consent that you should go back to your mother, how should I take you? Wait until ... comes; perhaps Nanai-dhat will come. I live wretchedly, without clothing, without money; I ask for a loan, but no-one consents to give me one, so I depend on charity from the priest. He said to me: If you go, I will give you a camel, and a man should go with you, and on the way I will look after you well. May he do so for me until you send me a letter!

Letter 1

Summary: Written by Mewnai to her mother, Catisa, this letter is a personal plea. Mewnai describes her difficult situation after following her husband to Dunhuang and asks her mother for permission to return home, referencing an offer from a priest to help her and her daughter.

The first and the third letter were dictated by a woman named Myovnai (lit. "Little Tiger"), left by her husband, a Sogdian merchant Nanaidat (lit. "Created by the Goddess Nanai") in Dunhuang.



Sogdian Ancient Letter No. 2

[Envelope] . . . should send and bring [this] letter to Samarkand. And [the noble lord Varzakk . . . should receive(?)] it all(?)[complete(?)]. Sent [by his] servant Nanai-vandak.

[Verso] To the noble lord Varzakk (son of) Nanai-thvar (of the family) Kanakk. Sent[by] his servant Nanai-vandak.

[Recto] To the noble lord Varzakk (son of) Nanai-thvar (of the family) Kanakk, 1,000 (and) 10,000 (times) blessing (and) homage on bended knee, as is offered to the gods, sent by his servant Nanai-vandak. And, sirs, (it would be) a good day for him who might see you happy (and) free from illness; and, sirs, (news of) your (good) health having been heard (by me), I consider myself immortal! And, sirs, Armat-sach in Jiuquan (is) safe (and) well and Arsach in Guzang (is) safe (and) well. And, sirs, it is three years since a Sogdian came from "inside" [i.e. from China]. I settled(?) Ghotam-sach, and (he is) safe (and) well. He has gone to Kwr'yuk, and now no-one comes from there so that I might write to you about the Sogdians who went "inside," how they fared (and) which countries they reached. And, sirs, the last emperor, so they say, fled from Luoyang because of the famine, and fire was set to his palace and to the city, and the palace was burnt and the city [destroyed].

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Luoyang (is) no more, Ye (is) no more! Moreover, the . . . Huns(?), and they . . . Changan, so that they hold(?) it(?) . . . as far as N'yn'yeh and as far as Ye, these (same) Huns [who] yesterday were the emperor's (subjects)! And, sirs, we do not know wh[ether] the remaining Chinese were able to expel the Huns [from] Changan, from China, or (whether) they took the country beyond(?). And [. . . in . . . there are] a hundred free men from Samarkand . . . in [. . .] Dry'n there are forty men. And, sirs, your [. . . it is] three years since [. . . came] from "inside" . . . **unmade (cloth)(?)**. And from Dunhuang up to Jincheng in . . . **to sell, linen cloth** is going [= selling well?], and whoever has **unmade (cloth)(?) or raghzak** (which is) not (yet) brought (to market)(?), not (yet) taken, [can](?) sell [all](?) of it . . . And, sirs, as for us, whoever dwells (in the region) from Ji [ncheng](?) up to Dunhuang, we (only) survive [lit. "have breath"] so long as the . . . lives, and (we are) without family(?), both old and on the point of death. If this were not(so), [I would] not be ready(?) to write to you (about) how we are. And, sirs, if I were to write to you everything (about) how China has fared, (it would be) beyond(?) grief: there is no profit for you (to gain) there from. And, sirs, it is eight years since I sent Saghrak and Farn-aghath "inside" and it is three years since I received a reply from there. They were well . . ., (but) now, since the last evil occurred, I do [not] receive a reply from there (about) how they have fared. Moreover, four years ago I sent another man named Artikhu-vandak. When the caravan departed from Guzang, Wakhush[akk] the . . . was there, and when they reached Luoyang, bo[th] the . . .] and the Indians and the Sogdians there had all died of starvation. [And I] sent Nasyan to Dunhuang, and he went "outside" [i.e. out of China] and entered (Dunhuang), (but) now he has gone without (obtaining) permission from me, and he has (received) a great retribution and was struck dead in the . . . Lord Varzakk, my greatest hope is in your lordship! Pesakk (son of) Dhruwasp-vandak holds 5[...4] staters from me and he put it on deposit(?), not to be transferred, and you should hold [it . . .] sealed from now (on), so that without (my) permission . . . Dhruwasp-van[dak] . . . [Lord] Nanai-thvar, you should remind Varzakk that he should withdraw(?) this deposit(?), and you should (both) count [it], and if the latter is to hold it, then you should (both) add(?) the interest to the capital and put it in a transfer document, and you (Nanai-thvar) should give this too to Varzakk. And if you (both) think (it) fit that the latter should not hold it, then you should (both) take it and give it to someone else whom you do think fit, so that this money may thereby become more. And, behold, (there is) a certain orphan . . . dependent(?) on this income(?), and if he should live and reach adulthood [lit. "years"], and he has no hope of (anything) other than this money, then, Nanai-thvar, (when) it should be heard that Takut has departed(?) to the gods – the gods and my father's soul (will) be a support(?) to you! -- and when Takhsich-vandak is grown up [lit. "big"], then give him a wife and do not send him away from yourself. Mortal(?) gratification(?) has departed(?) from us(?) in the . . ., because (from) day (to) day we expect murder(?) and robbery. And when (the two of) you need cash, then you (Nanai-thvar) should take either 1,000 staters or 2,000 staters out of the money. And Wan-razmak sent to Dunhuang for me 32 (vesicles of) **musk** belonging to Takut so that he might deliver them to you. When they are handed over you should make five shares, and there from Takhsich-vandak should take three shares, and Pesakk (should take) one share, and you (should take) one share.

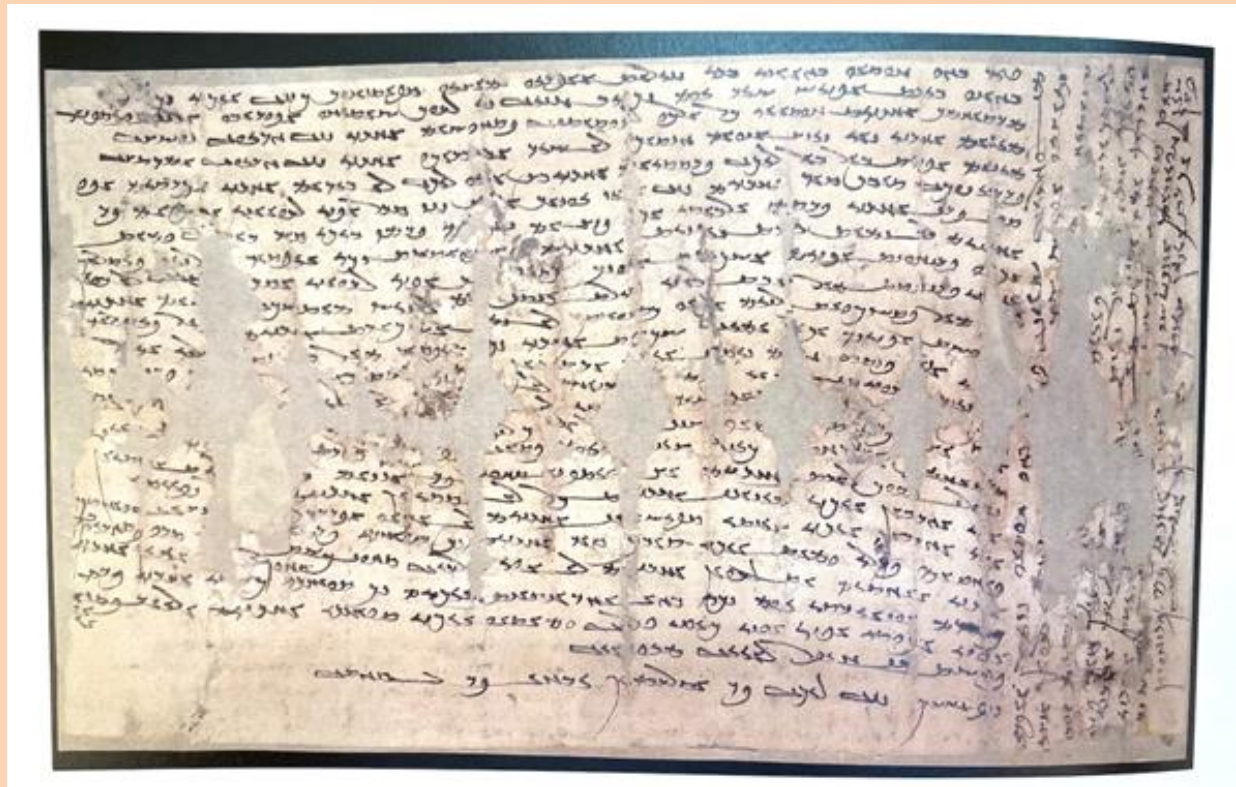
[Verso] This letter was written [lit. "made"] when it was the year thirteen of Lord Chirth-swan in the month Taghmich.

[JdH: It looks that Lord Chirth-swan is the name of an other businessman or merchant].

Letter 2

Summary: A commercial letter from a merchant in Jincheng to a "home office" in Samarkand. It discusses the destruction of Chinese cities by the Huns and concerns over managing funds, including distributing assets and handling the affairs of a minor son, Takhsich-vandak.

The second, the fourth, and the fifth letter represent messages sent to Sogdian merchants by their contractors, who were making business transactions in China. As with other Sogdian texts, found or procured by Stein [Stein], the "Ancient Letters" are kept in the British Library in London.



Sogdian Ancient Letter No. 3

[Verso] From (his) daughter Shayn to the noble lord Nanai-dhat. [On another part of the verso] From (his) servant [left unfinished]. [Recto] To (my) noble lord (and) husband Nanai-dhat, blessing (and) homage on bended knee, as is offered to the gods. And (it would be) a good day for him who might see you healthy, happy (and) free from illness, together with everyone; and, sir, when I hear(news of) your (good) health, I consider myself immortal! Behold, I am living ..., badly, not well, wretchedly, and I consider myself dead. Again and again I send you a letter, (but) I do not receive a (single) letter from you, and I have become without hope towards you. My misfortune is this, (that) I have been in Dunhuang for three years thanks(?) to you, and there was a way out a first, a second, even a fifth time, (but) he(!) refused to bring me out. I requested the leaders that support (should be given) to Farnkhund for me, so that he may take me to (my) husband and I would not be stuck in Dunhuang, (for) Farnkhund says: I am not Nanai-dhat's servant, nor do I hold his capital. I also requested thus: If he refuses to take me to (my) husband, then ... such support for me that he may take me to (my) mother. The leaders say: Herein Dunhuang there is no other relative closer than Artivan, (but) Artivan [say]s:Farnkhund ... whatever ... to do for you. If(?) I(?) (had) no guarantee, no protection, my father ... I have become ... not ... How much more would I have ... by my father if ... a servant of the Chinese! A free man ... who found ... and ... keeps (his) clothing in good condition(?). And you write (your) bidding to me about everything in ... so that I should... you and I should know how to think, and if I do not ... you, then you write to me so that I should know how to serve the Chinese. In my paternal abode I did not have such a restricted ... as with(?) you. I obeyed your command (lit. took your command upon my head) and came to Dunhuang and I did not observe (my) mother's bidding nor (my)brothers'. Surely(?) the gods were angry with me on the day when I did your bidding! I would rather be a dog's or a pig's wife than yours! And for me ... Sent by (your) servant Miwnay. This letter was written in the third month on the tenth day. [Added in the margin] From (his) daughter Shayn to the noble lord Nanai-dhat, blessing (and) homage. And (it would be) a good [day] for him [who] might see [you] healthy, rested (and) happy. ... I have become ... and I watch over a flock of domestic animals. Differently to you, I had a ..., and ... went out. I am ... and I know that you do not lack twenty staters(?) to send. It is necessary to consider the whole (matter). Farnkhund has run away; the Chinese seek him but do not find him. Because of Farnkhund's debts we have become the servants of the Chinese, I together with (my) mother.

Letter 3

Summary: Written by Mewnai to her husband, Nanai-dhat. In this letter, she expresses her frustration with her situation, noting that her husband's relative, Farnkhund, is refusing to let them leave. She also mentions her daughter, who adds a brief postscript.

The first and the third letter were dictated by a woman named Myovnai (lit. "Little Tiger"), left by her husband, a Sogdian merchant Nanaidat (lit. "Created by the Goddess Nanai") in Dunhuang

Unfortunately no Image of letter 4 .

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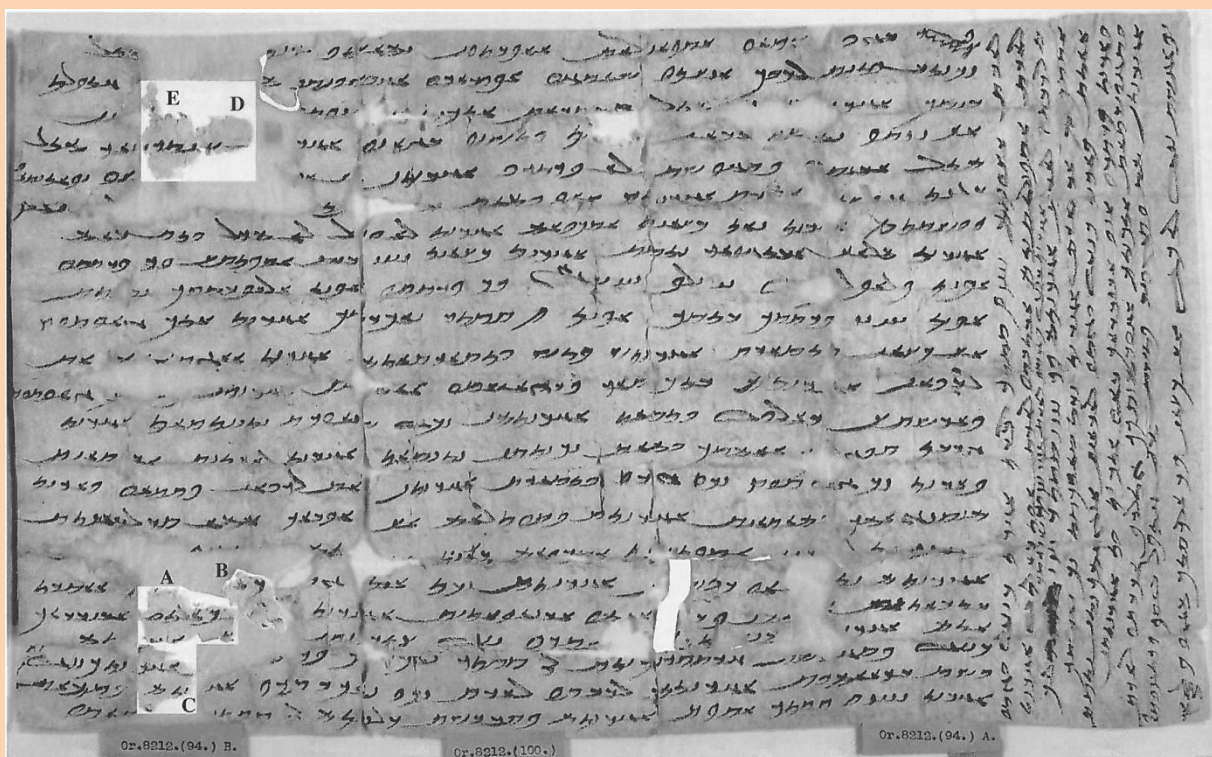
Sogdian Ancient letter no 4

Address on Verso: To Master, Lord Neveyart, 33 [the son of] Yodraz-mak, 34 sent by his poor servant. Text of the Letter. Recto: (1) To Master, Lord Neveyart, [the son of] Yodrazmak, A thousand greetings, kneeling obeisance (2), the way the gods receive it. And, o Master, the **g[old]**, that was delivered from you and from (3) Nanak, 35 [this] **gold was sold for 800 [staters of silver]**. And I, Vagichan, handed (?) 36 323[] **bronze [Chinese coins]**. And I received a letter from you (4): "Buy vegetables for me." 37 And I saw this letter. Write me, which (5) vegetables you ordered me to buy, and I will deliver [them] all, wherever you want me to. 38 And so far (?) it is not possible to get the **wine** [here], (6) for you to sell [it]. But I will probably be able to send the wine [to you]. It is not possible to get cups 39 here. (7) In Drutan [I] did not die. And, o Master, may you have no hardships. And this scoundrel 40 Evyamanvandak 41 (8), let him remember **the copper**, 42 (he) needs to be told about it. (On the right margin of the page:) (9) This letter was written on the 15th day of the tenth month.

[JdH: nrs. (1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9) are footnotes of ??? nrs 33,34,35,36,37,38,39,40,41 and 42 are footnotes of Vladimir A. Livšic St. Petersburg at his SOGDIAN "ANCIENT LETTERS" (II, IV, V).- Vladimir A. Livšic: Scrinium V (2009). Symbola Caelestis p. 350.]

Letter 4

Summary: This is a commercial letter written from one merchant to another. It likely concerns business matters, possibly a response to an earlier letter about a commercial deal.



Sogdian Ancient Letter No. 5

[Verso] To the noble lord, the chief merchant Aspandhat. -- [Sent] by your servant [Fri-khwataw]. [Recto] To the noble lord Aspandhat, blessing (and) homage. And (it would be) a [good] day [for him] who might see you healthy (and) safe, happy, free from illness (and) content. Fr[om Fri-khwataw] your servant. And [for me the] day (would be still) better if [I might see] you [my]self [and] might pay homage to you from nearby, [as] (homage is offered) to the gods. [From] inside (China) [I] have heard worse, not better, (news) day (by) day, and whatever I might write concerning A[khurmastakk](?), how he himself went (away) and what he had . . . I have become isolated, and, behold, I stay here in Guzang and I do not go hither (and) thither, and there is no caravan(?) (departing) from here. In Guzang (there are) **4 bundles of "white"** for dispatch, and 2,500 (measures of)(?) **pepper** for dispatch, and a double prasthaka of n(••y)t, and 5 prasthakas of rysk, and half a stater of **silver**. When Ghawtus went (away) from Guzang I went after him, and I came to Dunhuang, (but) I was prevented(?) from straying(?) outside (China). (If) . . . Ghawtushad seen [=found?] a level route, then I would have brought out the "Blacks." Many Sogdians were ready to leave, (but) they could not leave, for Ghawtus went by(?) the mountains. I(?) would (have) remain(ed) at Dunhuang, but they [=the Sogdian inhabitants] were destitute. I depend(?) on charity(?) from your 'pr'k, for I am serving(?) . . . in Guzang, and [they . . .] me, and they make me . . . , and they obtain my . . . , [and] they increase (it) with our . . . And . . . I am very wretched, and . . . the . . . I heard thus: Kharstrang [owed(?)] you twenty staters of silver, and he declared(?) thus: I (will) bring(?) (it). He gave me the silver, and I weighed it, and (there were only) four and a half staters altogether. I asked: If he [sent] twenty staters, why do you give me four and a half staters? He said thus: Aspandhat found

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me on the way and he gave (it) tome(?). {He said thus: (There are) seven and a half staters of silver.} And for four staters I obtained four loads of 'st(k)[•](m). And the "Blacks" took the silver, for they said thus: We(?) have no money. For (according to them it is) better (that) I should be wretched than they! (If) you should hear how Akhurmaztakk has done me harm, then you should pay heed (to this) too. Sent by your servant Fri-khwataw. This letter was written from Guzang in the third month on the thirtieth (day).

Letter 5

Summary: *A commercial letter written from Guzang (modern Wuwei) by a merchant who was possibly a partner to the recipient. It may concern a deposit of money and mentions a debt related to a man named Farnkhund, who has run away and is causing financial trouble.*

See also: https://archive.org/stream/ppv-1969-1972_202008/Rus/PPV_16_4_39_2019_djvu.txt

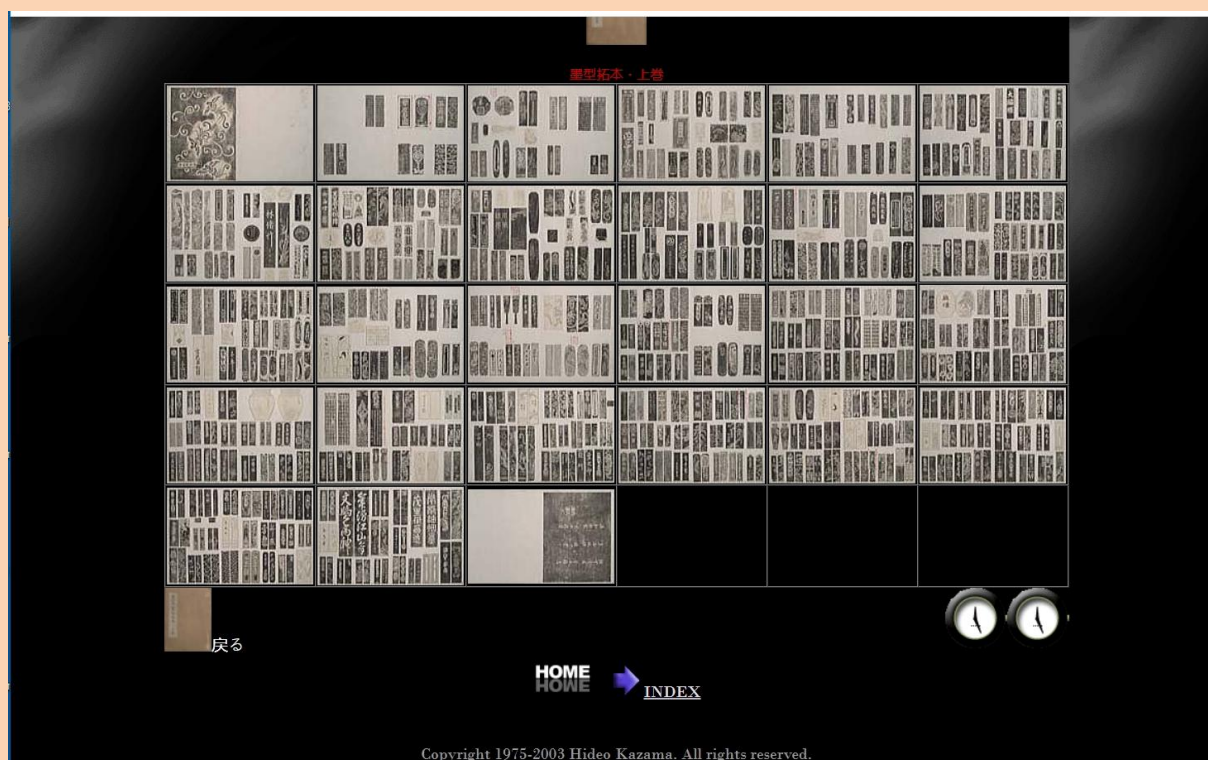
Epilogue

This study, I hope, offers a useful overview for identifying the provenance of certain 19th-century Chinese ink sticks using images, characteristics, and descriptions. Just as there are collectors of antique watercolour boxes and their contents (true time capsules), so, I discovered, there are collectors of antique ink sticks (such as par example **Hideo Kazama**).

The Chinese chemist **Zhang Zigao** (1886-1976) was well-known as a collector of antique ink-sticks. He amassed a collection of nearly one thousand sticks, many of them priceless pieces from the Ming and Qing dynasties. He wrote a large number of articles on the authenticity of antique ink-sticks, and together with three other collectors, **Ye Gongchuo** (1881-1968), **Zhang Jiongbo** (1885-1969) and **Yin Runsheng** (1908-1982), he compiled A Guide to Four Private Collections of Ink-Sticks. The characteristics of good ink-light viscosity, fine colouring, and appropriate ageing-are naturally related to the concerns of colloid chemistry. Zhang Zigao studied chemistry, and later specialised in the history of chemistry. Unfortunately, the guide got stuck somewhere and we have to make do with descriptions of individual collections.

This study focuses primarily on the English Regency period due to the rise and production of luxury watercolour painting boxes. The heyday of the Chinese ink stick's development does not run parallel to this period occurs much earlier. But with Hu Kaiwen (active) 1780-1800) and his relatives there is some relation with the Regency period.

Both regions share the common trait of flourishing primarily under the patronage of emperors and kings.



The (digital) collection of collector Hideo Kazama.

http://www.st103.com/sumi/contents//sub12_aTOP.htm#a7

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A message from director Terrace Miyatake, of the Shunsoen Old Ink Museum

Ink was introduced to Japan over 1,300 years ago. Throughout this time, ink served as the only writing implement, conveying Japan's history and fostering its culture. However, after the Meiji period, it was overwhelmed by the wave of Westernization. After World War II, the emergence of a wide variety of writing implements meant that ink only maintained its presence in school education and the fields of calligraphy and art.

"There are few examples of a collection of genuine Nara ink from the Edo period, making this an extremely valuable museum."

Shunshoen Old Ink Museum

Director: Terrace Miyatake ¹⁶

In many museums in China and Japan and abroad are objects related to Chinese and Japanese ink sticks or inksticks:

the Wuxi Museum, a cultural institution in the city of Wuxi, China,

the Palace Museum, 故宫博物院 Locatie, Peking, China.

the Tianjin Museum. 天津博物馆 is the largest and most visited museum in the port city of Tianjin, China.

the National Museum of China, is an art and history museum located on the eastern side of Tiananmen Square in Beijing.

the National Central Library in Taiwan,

the National Palace Museum , Taipei, Taiwan

An important private collection of ink sticks (cakes, blocks), which can be seen and is discussed online, was built up over 30 years by Mr. Tai-Yang Hwang. Although I would love to show much more of his collection, that would make my study too extensive. However, I refer you to his website: <https://inkstickman.com/>

(See for buying new inksticks this interesting website of INKSTON (Sjanghai) trading Co., Ltd. incorporated in China : <https://www.inkston.com/stories/guides/inksticks-buyers-guide/>)

¹⁶ Unfortunately, this museum is untraceable, but perhaps an observant reader knows it. The forgotten? website is made between 1975 and 2003. A lot can happen in 22 years.

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U1r1EROkMw0>

With a lot of informative images of paint boxes, maps, documents etc.

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