

A large number of votive or dedicative inscriptions have also been discovered. It is possible that some of the tablets found in the Indus valley contain votive inscriptions. The Piprahwa vase inscription records the dedication of the relic casket of Lord Buddha. The Besnagar Garuda Pillar inscription of Heliodoros also belongs to this category. Many of the dedicative inscriptions deal with the installation of images and the construction of temples. Reference may be made in this connection to the Mandasor inscription of the time of Kumaragupta II and Bhanduvarman and the Bhattari Pillar inscription of Skandagupta and the Aihole inscription of time of Pulakesin II.

The Number of donative inscriptions is very large as many occasions offered themselves for this purpose to rulers and the subjects. Some of the inscriptions refer to the donations of caves or other buildings for the residence of monks and ascetics. Some refer to the donation of money in the form of a permanent endowment. Out of these funds, the Brahmans and the needy were fed, lamps were lighted in the temples, etc. In some inscriptions there is a reference to the donation of lands and villages to the monasteries, educational institutions and the Brahmans.

The commemorative inscriptions record such events as birth, death or other important events. The Rummindei inscription of Ashoka mentions that a huge stone wall was constructed and a stone pillar was erected at the birth-place of Buddha. A large number of commemorative inscriptions refer to the Silaharas of Kolhapur, the Chalukyas of Kalyani, the Rashtrakutas and the Yadavas etc.

Some inscriptions contain poetic compositions and dramatic works and their purpose is primarily literary. From the Mahanirvana Stupa at Kusinagara in Uttar Pradesh was discovered copper plate containing 13 lines and recoding the Udana Sutta of Buddha. Inscriptions have been found on stone and copper plates and other materials. Ashoka tells us that he got his edicts engraved on stone pillars, slabs, pedestal or the back of images, rims and lids of vases, caskets, prisms of crystal, walls of temples, pavements and caves etc.

Copper was the material which was commonly used for the writing of inscriptions. A copper plate inscription was called Tamrapatta, Tamrapattra, Tamrasasana, Sasanapattra or Danapattra according to its contents. It is remarkable to note that land grants were invariably inscribed on copper plates and were handed over to the donee so that they may serve as title deeds. Fa-hien. Hien Tsang tells us that he found in many Buddhist monasteries copper plates which referred to the grants of land. Some of them were as old as the time of Buddha. The discovery of the Sohgaure copper plate of the Mauryan period confirms this statement of Fa-hien.

Huen Tsang tells us that Kanishka summoned a Buddhist council which prepared three commentaries and those commentaries were engraved on copper plates and kept in stone caskets which were placed in the Stupas built over them. It is also stated that the commentaries of Sayana on the Vedas were engraved on copper plates. Some specimens of books inscribed on copper plates are to be found in the British Museum. The use of copper for writing purposes was not very common up to the sixth century A.D. but it was quite popular for the next six centuries. Copper plates were of different sizes and thickness. Some of them were so thin that they could be bent easily and there were others which were very thick and heavy. The size of a copper plate depended upon the contents of the document and the size of the commonly used writing material in the district where the copper plate was issued. Sometimes a document was inscribed not on one copper plate but on very small many plates and in that case the copper plates were fastened together by