

Bibliotekarstudentens nettleksikon om litteratur og medier

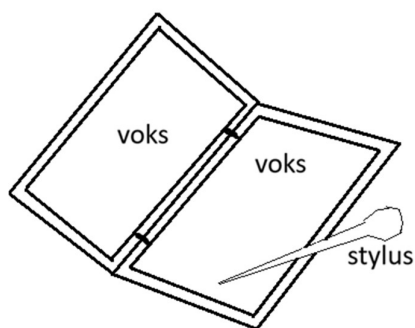
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Om leksikonet: https://www.litteraturogmedieleksikon.no/gallery/om_leksikonet.pdf

Vokstavle

En plate dekket med voks brukt som skrivemateriale ved at det ble risset inn i vokslaget. Noen tavler ble bundet sammen slik at de lignet det vi i dag kaller bøker.



“A form of writing material which had a continuous existence from antiquity right through the middle ages was the waxed tablet. A small frame of wood was filled with wax, which could be written on with a stylus. Because the writing could be erased and the tablet re-used, they were used as notebooks for various ephemeral writing purposes. [...] Tablets often were laced together in sets in the form of a book. The two outer leaves had wax only on the inside, while the interior leaves were double sided. [...] While these tablets were probably used prolifically in the middle ages, they were ephemera, and as such are rarely preserved. Miniatures in manuscripts occasionally show scribes writing on what appear to be waxed tablets. [...] Some very elaborate examples of tablet books have been preserved for posterity. These are carved with beautiful images in relief, with either secular courtly scenes or, less commonly, religious motifs on the outer leaves. The material may be ivory. [...] One can imagine these being swanked around in courtly gatherings, and it says something about the increasing social significance of lay literacy that the art of writing should have such posh and portable accoutrements. [...] Waxed tablets generally represent a stage of the writing process which has become lost to us. Ephemeral notes, preliminary drafts, notes taken by dictation and all manner of jottings may have passed through this medium before being committed to the more expensive and durable medium of parchment.” (Dianne Tillotson i <http://medievalwriting.50megs.com/forms/waxtablet.htm>; lesedato 17.03.17)

“A wax tablet was most commonly formed of two pieces of wood and was called a “diptych”. Sometimes tablets were made of three pieces, called a “triptych”, or more, called “polyptychon”.” (<http://rumblemuseum.org.uk/index.php/collections/departmental/41-classics-department-collection/333-roman-wax-tablet>; lesedato 11.09.24) Tavlene kunne være laget av tre, edelt metall eller elfenben, og ble noen ganger brukt til religiøse formål (Rehm 1991 s. 93).

Ordene “stil” og “stilistikk” stammer fra bruken av en stylus, dvs. en kort, spiss gjenstand (av treverk eller et annet hardt materiale) til å risse inn ord i vokstavler. Det latinske uttrykket “tabula rasa” (ren/tom tavle) kommer fra romernes bruk av vokstavler. I dag brukes det f.eks. om en ny begynnelse.

“The *cera* (Latin for *tabula cerata* – wax tablet) was a small writing board made of hard material such as boxwood, beech wood or even bone. In the center of this board was a hollowed-out surface filled with a layer of dark wax. On this wax layer, writing was done with a *stylus* – a pointed object made of metal, wood, or bone (Greek: *stýlos*, Latin: *stilus*). With this tool, one would scratch symbols [vanligvis bokstaver] into the wax. If necessary, these symbols could easily be erased or smoothed over, making the tablet reusable. These wax tablets were used for daily notes, reminders of tasks, debts, obligations, and as drafts of texts that were later transferred to papyrus or parchment. Sealed wax tablets also served official purposes, such as drafting wills, conveying secret orders, statements, receipts, and even reports. The oldest known archaeological example of a wax tablet dates back to the 7th century BC, found in Etruria (Italy).” (<https://www.celticwebmerchant.com/en-int/blogs/antiquity-romans/about-wax-tablets-cera-tabula-cerata>; lesedato 16.02.26)

“Unfortunately (from our point of view) tablets were intended for reuse: the inscribed waxen surface was simply smoothed off to remove the existing text. This was easily done with a spatula [= en spatel, dvs. en liten, spade-formet redskap] [...] There would be no sign of reuse at the time, since it was concealed by the wax, but, in the wood under the wax, a second series of scratches had been created, a process repeated every time the tablet was reused. Often this resulted in rows of meaningless diagonal incisions or triangular dents.” (Scott Vanderbilt m.fl. i <https://romaninscriptionsofbritain.org/tablondbloomberg/form-epigraphy>; lesedato 16.02.26)

Vokstavler var i bruk i Mesopotamia på 600-tallet f.Kr. og antakelig enda tidligere (Rautenberg og Schneider 2015 s. 705).

“The wax tablet is a writing instrument consisting of wax and typically boxwood, and is used by carving onto its hardened wax surface. The earliest record of its use dates back to the 7th century B.C.E. in Italy, with the earliest specimens coming from Nimrud in Assyria. Wax tablets were widely used among the Greeks, who had

an abundance of beeswax at their disposal, and subsequently gained popularity amongst the ancient Egyptians. During Greco-Roman Antiquity (8th century B.C.E. – 6th century C.E.), the tablets entered into common use as they were cheap and reusable compared to the other writing surfaces available. They continued to be used sporadically up till the nineteenth century.” (Sophia N. S. Huei m.fl. i <https://blogs.ntu.edu.sg/history-of-the-book/2021/03/06/wax-tablet/>; lesedato 11.11.25)

“The Greeks and Romans used waxed writing tablets [...] for taking notes, a habit they probably acquired from the Near East where such tablets, dating from the 8th century BC, have been found in the Assyrian city of Nimrud. Greek and Roman writing tablets consisted of thin rectangular boards with a slightly hollowed-out surface filled with black wax. They were used together with a metal stylus, pointed at one end (for writing) and flattened at the other (for erasing the script and smoothing the wax surface).” (Gaur 1987 s. 39)

I antikken var det en “information-processing technology at hand for day-to-day purposes: the wax tablet. In its simplest form, this was a slab of wood, hollowed out in the center and filled with melted wax. A dry stylus would incise letters which the thumb could then erase at will. These tablets were excellent for memoranda, transient book-keeping, and daily business. Several of them bound together by thongs made something roughly like a small notebook. Somewhere in the first centuries of the common era, the notion of making a formal literary medium out of bound pages on the model of the wax tablet suddenly began to catch on. Though the codex – for such is the name given to the form in antiquity – could have pages of either papyrus or animal skins” (O’Donnell 2000 s. 51). Codexen er den typen bok som er lagd med firkantete dokumentflater bundet sammen på den ene av de fire sidene (det vi Norge i dag kaller en bok).

“The earliest documented use of wax tablets dates from Italy in the 7th century BC. The Etruscans used them not only for writing but also as amulets. Their wider use started with the Greeks, who were great beekeepers and had plenty of beeswax at their disposal. For a short period, there was a ban on the export of papyrus from Egypt, meaning that wax tablets were in regular use. [...] A flat, rectangular block would have been hollowed out and filled with wax, often black or natural or with a sooty coating, so that the lighter colour showed through when written on. [...] Cheap and easy to re-use, wax tablets were ideal for teaching children to write. [...] The styluses were often stored with the tablets themselves: the last part of a set of tablets often contained a little groove in which to store the stylus.” (Peter Toth og Alan E. Cole i <https://www.bl.uk/stories/blogs/posts/keep-taking-the-wax-tablets>; lesedato 11.11.25)

I Romerriket var bruk av vokstavler svært vanlig i barns undervisning. Papyrus var et dyrt skrivemateriale sammenlignet med vokstavler som kunne skrives på mange ganger. På en vokstavle fra 100-tallet e.Kr., bevart i British Library, har en lærer

skrevet to moralske ordtak og eleven kopiert ordtakene to ganger (Bouquiaux-Simon 2004 s. 20).

“The Latin term for a stylus writing tablet, *tabula cerata*, usually abbreviated to *cera* (‘wax’), derives of course from its wax coating; *cera* was explicitly beeswax, and its use was taken for granted. When his girl sent him tablets (*tabellae*) with a negative message, Ovid comments (*Am* 1.12, ll 8-10) that the wax must have been collected by Corsican bees from hemlock flowers. The wax of these tablets, as it happens, was coloured red with vermilion (‘like blood’, Ovid adds sourly), but the usual colour was black. Vitruvius (*Arch* 7.10) and Pliny the elder (*Nat Hist* 35.41) describe how the black colorant (*atramentum*), as used in paint and ink, was made by burning resin or resinous wood in a confined chamber, ordinary soot being a cheap substitute. This lampblack (ie carbon black) was stirred into the melted beeswax, which was then poured on to the tablet, ‘*cera ... rasis infusa tabellis*’ (Ovid, *Ars Am* 1, l 437). If need be, it could be smoothed off with a hot spatula” (Scott Vanderbilt m.fl. i <https://romaninscriptionsofbritain.org/tablondbloomberg/form-epigraphy>; lesedato 16.02.26).

“To construct a wax tablet, a flat, rectangular block would be hollowed out and filled with a mixture of beeswax tempered with resin, turpentine or linseed oil, and coloured with the same agents used in the embellishments of illuminated manuscripts. Black was the most common colour, followed by green, whereas red and yellow were rarely seen. Darker colours were favoured so that the text carved on the wax could be seen. These wooden blocks were then bound together with leather, parchment or linen thongs. Though wood was usually the preferred choice, wax tablets were also occasionally made of bone, ivory and metalwork. A stylus of metal, bone, or wood would be used like a pencil with an eraser end, the sharp end for writing onto the wax, and the wide, flattened end working like an eraser. A metal stylus could be heated and its blunt end used to smooth the wax for reuse or to erase mistakes. To erase an entire tablet of characters, however, the wax would need to be held close to a flame till it melted. The tablet would be turned over and a stylus used to gently smooth over the surface, or the tablet rocked, to even out the melted wax. When not in use, the stylus could sometimes be embedded in the wax or placed in the owner’s pen case, which in some cases were incorporated within the tablet.” (Sophia N. S. Huei m.fl. i <https://blogs.ntu.edu.sg/history-of-the-book/2021/03/06/wax-tablet/>; lesedato 11.11.25)

“Wax tablets served as learning aids in the classroom (especially throughout Antiquity), as a means for drafting texts, and for compiling things such as library inventories. They were also used for keeping administrative records – especially financial transactions (from royal accounts to gaming tallies), but stopped being used for legal records during the Middle Ages. They were even used as decorative objects or love tokens, and used in religious contexts. The Etruscans of ancient Italy, for example, used them as amulets. Tablets took on different forms – as a single block, as diptychs (consisting of two blocks of wood), polyptychs (more than

three blocks), the occasional concertina (which could open or close in multiple folds) and, during Antiquity, larger notice-boards or posters. Small sets of wax tablets were used as notebooks, and were dubbed ‘girdle books’ when suspended from the belt.” (Sophia N. S. Huei m.fl. i <https://blogs.ntu.edu.sg/history-of-the-book/2021/03/06/wax-tablet/>; lesedato 11.11.25)

“While major books were on papyrus – and later on parchment – the cost of the material was so high that most writing, particularly of an ephemeral nature, was confined to wax tablets, ostraca, wooden boards and other inexpensive surfaces. Extant correspondence, poems, plays, etc. often refer to the use of writing tablets, and rarely to papyrus.” (Katz 1995 s. 46)

Fra 200-tallet f.Kr. er det bevart en vokstavle-bok som “consists of nine leaves, including those serving as covers, and is fastened together with leather laces. The notes are written in Greek longhand and shorthand, some of the latter evidently for practice. [...] A number of tablets laced together formed a book, or, as it was referred to, a *codex*.” (Gaur 1987 s. 35 og 39)

En “diptych” er en “portable tablet consisting of two shallow hinged boxes made of wood, ivory, or metal filled with a layer of beeswax on the inside, on which the ancient Greeks and Romans wrote with a stylus. When warm, the wax surface could be easily erased by rubbing, and written over. Also refers to a picture or design painted or carved on the inside surfaces of two hinged tablets [...] In medieval Europe, three tablets called a triptych were also used for the same purpose, hinged in such a way that the outer tablets folded over the center panel” (Joan M. Reitz i http://lu.com/odlis/odlis_c.cfm; lesedato 30.08.05).

“In affluent Roman households, archives with wax tablets were stored in a special room, the tablinum (derived from tabula = tablet). The Roman encyclopedist Pliny the Elder described such archives in his *Naturalis Historia* (Book XXXV, chapter 7). [...] Prominent Romans often used luxurious writing tablets, made of ivory and sometimes adorned with gold and detailed reliefs on the outside. It was customary for Roman consuls to give expensive writing tablets as New Year’s gifts to friends and associates on January 1st. Businessmen and politicians first drafted versions of documents or letters on them, which were then dictated to professional scribes (*librarii*). According to Cicero, Julius Caesar had no fewer than seven scribes with him (see *Pro Sulla*, 14).” (<https://www.celticwebmerchant.com/en-int/blogs/antiquity-romans/about-wax-tablets-cera-tabula-cerata>; lesedato 16.02.26).

“Important finds of Roman writing tablets were made during excavations on July 3-5, 1875, in the house of the banker Lucius Caecilius Iucundus in Pompeii. Similar finds were later also made in Herculaneum. Above the portico of Iucundus’ house, a chest was found containing 127 diptychs and triptychs. Despite damage from volcanic ash and partial charring, a significant portion of them could be deciphered. Most documents on these tablets date from 53-62 AD, with some older examples

from 15 and 27 AD. The Pompeian triptychs consisted of tablets with a wax layer on which writing was usually done on the 2nd, 3rd, and 5th pages. The main text was on pages 2 and 3. The tablets were then folded so that these pages were invisible. On page 4, a cord was passed through a special groove and sealed with the seals of witnesses. These witnesses signed next to their seal, written in ink on the wood. Most documents concerned receipts and payment confirmations.” (<https://www.celticwebmerchant.com/en-int/blogs/antiquity-romans/about-wax-tablets-cera-tabula-cerata>; lesedato 16.02.26).

“Egypt, Herculaneum, Pompeii, and Romania have been fruitful sources of tablets. Twenty-five deeds dated A.D. 131 to 167 have been recovered from the vicinity of modern Verespatak in Romania. In 1875 a box that contained 127 tablets dated A.D. 15, 27, and 52-62 was unearthed at Pompeii. In all, more than 200 tablets have been retrieved in Pompeii and neighboring Herculaneum. Two polyptychs from Herculaneum differed from all the other Herculanean, Pompeian, and Dacian finds in dimension, form, material, and structure; one is a pentaptych and the other an octoptych, both obviously dated before A.D. 79. Each is made of fine, compact boxwood (whereas most tablets were made of fir), skillfully fashioned and highly polished. Giovanni Pugliese Carratelli has described in detail the octoptych, which is held together by two sets of double threads so anchored in the front and back cover that they do not protrude on the outer surfaces.” (Kilgour 1998 s. 51)

“In the fifth century Herodotus tells of the fascinating use of a waxed tablet by Demaratus to secretly inform the Lacedaemonians of the Persian king Xerxes’ intended invasion of Greece: “After it seemed good to Xerxes to lead an host against Greece, Demaratus, being in Susa and learning thereof, desired to send word to the Lacedaemonians. And there was no other way in which he could signify it, because of the danger lest he be discovered, except this which he devised. He took a folding tablet, and scraped off the wax thereof, and thereafter wrote the king’s intent upon the wood of the tablet. And when he had done it, he spread the wax over the letters again, that the tablet being carried empty might make no trouble with the guards upon the road. But when at last it came to Lacedaemon, the Lacedaemonians were not able to comprehend the matter, until, as I learn, Cleomenes’ daughter who was the wife of Leonidas, to wit, Gorgo, perceived it and advised them to scrape off the wax, and they should find writing upon the wood. And they did so and found the writing and read it, and thereafter sent tidings to the other Greeks.” ” (Kilgour 1998 s. 51) “[T]he Persian military buildup had been witnessed by Demaratus, a Greek who had been expelled from his homeland and who lived in the Persian city of Susa. Despite being exiled he still felt some loyalty to Greece, so he decided to send a message to warn the Spartans of Xerxes’ invasion plan. The challenge was how to dispatch the message without it being intercepted by the Persian guards.” (Singh 1999 s. 4)

“The challenge of reading these scratches [bak vokslaget] is illustrated by the story of the Carthaginian who disguised a secret letter ‘by taking new tablets not yet

coated with wax, and incising his text on the wood; he then coated them with wax in the usual way, and sent them off as if uninscribed'. The recipient scraped off the wax and duly read the letter underneath (Aulus Gellius, *Noct Att* 17.9.16-17). Evidently the scratches were quite legible. A similar story, centuries earlier, is told by Herodotus (*Hist* 7.239)." (Scott Vanderbilt m.fl. i <https://romaninscriptionsofbritain.org/tablondbloomberg/form-epigraphy>; lesedato 16.02.26)

I Romerriket ble det etablert festninger i nærheten av Hadrians mur i det nordlige England. En av festningene het Vindolanda, der romerske soldater, ofte med sine familier, holdt til fra ca. år 85 e.Kr. og i nesten tre hundre år etter det. På en vokstavle funnet i Vindolanda "an address was scratched 'to Albanus at Catterick' (*Cataractonio Albano*), but inside on the wax was a letter which began with Albinus' greetings to his friend Bellus (*Albinus Bello suo salutem*). To write to Bellus at Vindolanda, Albinus (or Albanus) was reusing a tablet sent to him previously at Catterick (Yorkshire). Regular correspondents would have taken this interchange for granted. When Augustine wrote a letter (*Epp* 15) to his friend and patron Romanianus, he apologised for using parchment, on the excuse that he had already used his 'ivory tablets' (*tabellas eburneas*) to write a more urgent letter to Romanianus' own uncle. He went on: would Romanianus please send back any of his (Augustine's) tablets he happened to have, so that he could meet such needs in the future? [...] it is unusual to find a tablet which has almost certainly been used only once" (Scott Vanderbilt m.fl. i <https://romaninscriptionsofbritain.org/tablondbloomberg/form-epigraphy>; lesedato 16.02.26).

"A new study of five wax tablets from the Second Century, found in the Albanian city of Durres, offers fascinating insights into the role of women in ancient Illyrian culture. When Albanian archeologist Fatos Tartari excavated the ancient necropolis of Durres in 1979, he came across a staggering find. In the Roman concrete basement of the monumental tomb lay buried a glass urn filled with a black liquid resembling wine, containing two styluses, an ebony comb and five wax tablets used for writing, which were in good condition. [...] the tablets were not made of wood as previously thought but of ivory [...] The find of an ivory wax tablet is unique for Albania, there are only a few found in Egypt, but none in continental Europe [...] Because of the comb and other artefacts found in the tomb, it is believed to be that of a rich and possibly aristocratic woman. When first discovered, the tablets were believed to be a marriage contract or an act of inheritance. However, more recent scrutiny by researchers has found that they are actually books of debts, with the exact dates when the money was lent and the amount, including interest [...] analysis of the writing has revealed that only one person registered the debts, believed to be the woman buried in the tomb [...] the wax tablets support ancient writers' accounts that in Illyria, women were more equal to men than anywhere else [...] There are ancient writers' accounts of Illyrian women going with their husbands to a banquet, drinking with them and even raising a toast, something unacceptable in ancient Greece or Rome [...] It's unclear why this ancient woman from the second century AD took her debts to her grave to be buried with her."

(Besar Likmeta i <https://albanianeconomy.com/2014/10/27/wax-tablets-reveal-secrets-ancient-illyria/>; lesedato 07.03.26)

“During the middle ages wax tablets were in general use. Daily life cannot be imagined without them: students were supposed to carry a diptych at their belt for easy use, while writers used them for rough notes. They were also employed in private correspondence. Above all, medieval accounts were kept to a large extent on wax tablets, and most of the surviving examples served this purpose; even books of wax tablets were formed. In some places the use of wax tablets for accounting continued up to the nineteenth century” (Bernhard Bischoff, *Latin Palaeography. Antiquity & the Middle Ages*, 1990 s. 14; her sitert fra <http://www.historyofinformation.com/>; lesedato 30.03.12).

“Since vellum and linen paper were difficult to make, wax tablets were used for temporary writing in the Middle Ages. They were especially useful for students, who could use them to jot down notes quickly during their lectures, so we often hear about them in this context. [...] If you don't want to scrape off your last bit of writing, you can simply put the tablet in the sun for fifteen minutes (more or less), and then reshape the wax with your fingers. [...] They're easy to make, use, and reuse; they're light and durable; they're portable; and they have lots of room for making mistakes.” (Danièle Cybulskie i <https://www.medievalists.net/2014/07/tablet-medieval-style/>; lesedato 21.02.26)

Franskmannen Louis de Jaucourt skrev i 1765 om vokstavler som var bevart fra middelalderen og senere århundrer, og som han selv hadde sett: “The information these sorts of *tablets* provide on the ancient usages of the court, the King, or of the nation, give us precious insight into bygone eras of which few vestiges remain. We learn with pleasure the price of various things of that time. For instance, the Geneva tablets stipulate that pack horses and German horses (*roussin*) cost 8 pounds, a palfrey [en rolig ridehest] 10 pounds. The draft horse, simply called *equus*, 12, 14 and 16 pounds. A large horse without a question a war horse would cost 32 pounds. For having spent 24 days traveling from England, the Sieur de Trie asked for 150 pounds, but for his palfrey and two German horses, which had died, he requested 120 pounds, a considerable sum. A valet of the king is given 2 sols 6 deniers (2 shillings 6 pence) per day for his wages, and the cook double that of the valet: which is very expensive, if one compares the value of the money of that time to ours. [...] Abbé Chatelain of Notre-Dame de Paris testifies that in 1692 the tables of the choir of Saint Martin de Savigny, in the diocese of Lyon, which is a house of former Cluny monks, were of green wax, and that were written on with a silver stylus. The same thing is attested at the end of the same century, with regard to Rouen cathedral, by the Sieur Brun des Marettes, author of the liturgical journey composed at the time and printed in 1718, except that the names of officiants were written with a simple pick. Perhaps this custom no longer exists today in Rouen; but it was still in force in 1722. For at that time M. le Beuf saw the names of the officiants for the current week inscribed *in tabulis* in wax. The Romans used

[vokstavler] for other purposes, and almost always for the letters they wrote at table, often between two courses, at the Senate, at the theater, traveling in their litters [bærevogner], and so on. They called these little boards or *tablets* coated with wax, *codicillos*. Cicero gladly used them for his letters to Atticus.” (Jaucourt sitert fra <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/d/did/did2222.0003.656/--wax-tablet?rgn=main;view=fulltext>; lesedato 21.02.26)

Delstaten Nordrhein-Westfalen i det vestlige Tyskland “preserves a particularly high number and wide variety of wax tablets, spanning different periods, functions, and contexts of use. Within a relatively limited geographical area, the region brings together archaeological finds and archival survivals that offer complementary perspectives on erasable writing. In several cases, excavations have yielded wax tablets preserved in good or even exceptional conditions, while municipal and museum collections safeguard objects that remained in use or in institutional custody over long periods. [...] Made available thanks to Dr Michael Ganzelewski, a large wax tablet book dated to 1768 offered an unusually complete picture of long-term administrative practice in a Modern context. Composed of fourteen tablets and still retaining its original binding and decorated leather cover, the codex was used by salt refiners to manage feudal obligations. In this context, wax tablets functioned as practical working tools, allowing obligations, deliveries, and calculations to be recorded, updated, and erased as needed within the cyclical rhythms of salt production and distribution. The durability of the binding and the care invested in the leather cover further highlight that this was a long-term administrative instrument, designed to accompany daily practice over many years. Its excellent state of preservation offers a rare glimpse into the material culture of salt administration, where erasable writing played a central role in mediating between economic activity, legal frameworks, and routine record-keeping. Its wax surfaces preserve abundant traces of erasure by rubbing, and appears to preserve also traces of oil-based polishing, which resonates with an earlier recipe, also from German context” (Daniele Ferraiuolo i <https://tabularasa.hypotheses.org/3552>; lesedato 16.02.26).

“The practical character of the wax tablet and the organic materials of which it was made mean that very few examples from the past still exist today.” (Sophia N. S. Huei m.fl. i <https://blogs.ntu.edu.sg/history-of-the-book/2021/03/06/wax-tablet/>; lesedato 11.11.25)

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