

# Colophon

From the Greek 'summit, finishing touch'.

The term colophon refers to notes or short texts added to a [codex](#) or book that supply information about the production and/or the use of the volume. Such information may include the name of the [scribe\(s\)](#) or printer(s), the place and date of production as well as the title of the work(s) in the book, the person who commissioned the work, the person who bought or sold the book, directions or curses (*anathemata*) and personal comments related to the book by the scribe, printer and later users. The term scribal colophon can be used to specify information provided by the person(s) responsible for copying the book. The more encompassing term, colophon, may also include notes inscribed by contemporary or later users of the book. Colophons, especially those in printed books, may be emblematic or pictorial.

For [stemmatology](#), colophons, which are often essential sources of historical and geographical information, can consequently aid in determining relationships within a [stemma](#) codicum or another representation of genealogical relationships between witnesses.

In extraordinary cases, the information provided in colophons can help establish direct relationships between manuscripts. For example, in a ninth-century copy of Hilary of Poitiers' *De Trinitate* (Paris, BnF, Lat. 12132) the names of two scribes found in short notices indicating the beginnings and ends of their stints allows us to place the manuscript in Rheims. Additional historical information, a [material accident](#) and correspondences in layout have allowed scholars to identify the exemplar of the manuscript (Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, Lat. 2630) and so a direct relationship (for further details, see Vezin 1979 and Parkes 2008, 63 and 88-89).

For traditions within Western Europe, the largest collection of colophons is found in the catalogue assembled by the Bénédictines of Bouveret (1965-82), which lists colophons alphabetically by name (usually of the scribe of the book – even if the scribe did not write the colophon itself – or the scribe of the colophon). For entries without personal names, colophons are listed by location (*lieux*) or alphabetically following the text (*anonymes*). Heavily reliant on information provided in manuscript catalogues published at the time, this invaluable work is not exhaustive. Specific examinations of individual colophons and broader studies of manuscript collections and their colophons (see for example Condello and de Gregorio 1995) continue to augment and refine knowledge of textual traditions.

## References

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