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MCAA International Conference *On Colophons* 3–5 December 2009

Conference Report

In most of the world's manuscript cultures, colophons are commonly encountered. Although they are an indispensable aid in the study of manuscripts, as for example as a means of dating or obtaining information about manuscript transmission, to date only a few efforts have been made to examine them on a systematic and comparative basis. To fill this gap, the research group 'Manuscript Cultures in Asia and Africa' convened a conference on colophons at the University of Hamburg, which was held 3–5 December 2010.

Taking into consideration the enormous differences between the various manuscript cultures, the main objective of the conference was not to arrive at a general characterisation, but to present and discuss the individual traditions. A number of guidelines, however, were provided to the participants in advance, as for example, the genesis of the genre, typological and systematic standards, particularities of native terminology, and specifics of usage.

By chance, the first two lectures approached the question of colophons from entirely opposite directions, establishing thereby a perfect framework within which the other presentations could be placed. In his keynote address, Professor Dr Richard Salomon (University of Washington), a specialist on Gandharan scrolls, offered a description of some rare specimens of this early, recently rediscovered Indian manuscript type. Despite the fact that within this corpus, colophons have very rarely been preserved, the three examples he brought forward embodied the three main aspects of this genre: a) the primary function as a means of identification and/or transmission (e.g. recording the name of the scribe or author); b) a discernible tendency towards standardisation (e.g. their size, number of lines, order of categories, etc.); and c) the colophon's role as paratextual means for contextualizing a given manuscript (e.g. providing a donor dedication or recording merit).

In contrast, Dr Lucien Reynhout (Bibliothèque Royale de Belgique, Bruxelles), the renowned author of *Formules latines de colophons*, based his in-depth study on colophons in Medieval Latin manuscript culture on a vast foundation of analysed manuscripts. He has established a detailed typology that covers almost every type of colophon to be found in the Occident. His final differentiation between a 'common cul-

tural ground' and an 'anthropological ground' might serve as promising basis for comparative studies.

The contribution on colophons within the Jewish manuscript tradition, presented by Professor Dr Gianfranco Miletto (Universität Halle), stressed again the close relation between the religious status of manuscripts and the meta-commentary provided by the colophon. The discourse within the colophon of the Jewish manuscript tradition, however, reflects less the socio-religious aims of the scribe or initiator, as for example in comparison to Buddhist examples, than the religious status of the written word.

A preliminary decision was made to group most of the remaining presentations according to regional criteria rather than methodological or phenomenological aspects. This decision proved to work well, as on one hand, genealogical relationships gained clarity, while on the other, vague differences between related cultures came into view more distinctly.

The two presentations dealing with colophons in East Asia both dealt with manuscripts related to the Buddhist tradition and were related to shifts in medium. Mark Schneider, MA (Universität Hamburg) spoke on the topic of late medieval Japanese Buddhist manuscripts, thereby tracing the shift in media from manuscript to woodblock print. Dr Wang Ding (Universität Hamburg), in his introduction to colophons in the Chinese Buddhist tradition, included early colophons and related paratexts on materials other than paper.

Professor Dr Dorji Wangchuk (Universität Hamburg) gave an extensive overview of the colophon tradition in Tibet, including woodblock prints. As distinguishing functions he pointed out the denoting of authorship, meta-strategies to mark intentional changes during the copying process, and specific ways colophons have been used in printed versions. As well, a further characteristic is seen in the various ways paratextual information was handled during the process of adopting Indian texts. Dr Yukiyo Kasai (Berlin-Brandenburgische Akademie der Wissenschaften) presented Buddhist colophons from the Uighur tradition which developed under the influence of the Chinese Buddhist tradition (Dunhuang). Not surprisingly, in this context, the presented material regularly mentions the donor.

The next lecture dealt with the origins of the Buddhist colophon tradition. Professor Dr Oskar von Hinüber (Universität Freiburg) gave an extensive overview of all aspects of colophons as they were used in India, the birthplace of Buddhism. Apparently, emphasis on the donor is strongly connected to the Buddhist tradition and its concept of merit. Professor Dr Volker Grabowsky (Universität Hamburg) discussed colophons in modern Thai Lü manuscripts, dealing with a rather recent revival of a manuscript culture as part of a renewed self-awareness and quest for cultural identity.

With the last three lectures, the conference returned to monotheistic traditions. Dr Rosemarie Quiring-Zoche (Universität Jena) dealt with colophons in Arabic manuscripts. In addition to their close relation to certificates of transmission ('*Hörerzertifikate*'), here the content seems restricted to remarks concerning the production of the text. Another aspect worth mentioning is the strong tendency in Arabic manuscripts to use certain graphic arrangements such as a triangle or trapezium, something also seen in other regions. Professor Dr Nikolay Dobronravin (St. Petersburg State University) continued the theme of manuscripts from the Islamic tradition, discussing transcultural phenomena reaching from Africa to the New World: Arabic and

Ajami colophons in West Africa and in 19th century Brazil. Last but not least, Dr Anaïs Wion (Centre d'études des mondes africains, Paris) looked at colophons in Ethiopian manuscripts, discussing several questions and problems of transmission, especially as part of historiographic texts.

A very lively discussion, stimulated in part by some general remarks by Dr Eva Wilden (Universität Hamburg/EFEO), concluded the conference. To mention just a few of the topics that were discussed: Strong emphasis was placed on the difference between textual and codicological approaches to the phenomenon of colophons. Various misunderstandings could be traced back to inconsistency of terminology in this regard. Close relations to other paratexts were observed in several manuscript cultures, especially with regard to titles. Nevertheless, the predominant position of colophons in most cultures still remains the bottom of the text, insofar as most of information they contain presumes that the text's composition or copying is finished. Another interesting feature was the concept of a 'Buddhist colophon' tradition covering East, South and Central Asia.

The conference proceedings will be published in *Studies in Manuscript Cultures* at de Gruyter.

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