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EPARCHIKON BIBLION V, 2 IS THALASSAI THE SAME AS BYSSOS?

The *Book of the Prefect* (Τὸ ἐπαρχικὸν βιβλίον) published at the end of the reign of Leo VI (912) is an exceptionally valuable source for the historians of law and all social and economic history researchers. Among its twenty two parts one can find various regulations concerning the functioning of many areas of trade and fields craft and services. Despite the unceasing interest of researchers over the centuries, among the terms used in the source we can now yet find ones whose meaning is still vague and their unequivocal translation and description pose difficulties. Chapters IV–IX of *The Book of the Prefect* discuss the organisation of production and trade of both textiles and clothes. Given the fact that in the area of government's interest has been only the control of those goods that were luxury or have been imported, we can find a particularly rigorous regulations applying to various stages of production and trade of silk manufactures (ch. VII–VIII)¹.

The present text deals with one of these debatable expressions, namely a kind of fabric described as 'θάλασσαι.' This term appears in chapter five, containing guidelines for woolen bands salesmen, and was mentioned among articles of clothing imported from Syria. So far, both editors² and commentators of the document have not been able to satisfactorily answer to the question how this term should be understood. Proposed answers given so far are not profound and therefore were never commonly accepted.

As described in the *Book of the Prefect* certain economical activities of the guilds remain unclear. This remark applies to both – the semantic meaning of the terms used³, and more complex, contextual problems, resulting from

¹ G.B. MANIATIS, *Organization, Market Structure, and Modus Operandi of the Private Silk Industry in the Tenth-Century Byzantium*, DOP 53, 1999, p. 263–332.

² *Das Eparchenbuch Leons der Weisen*, ed. J. Koder, Wien 1991 (= CFHB, 33; cetera: *Das Eparchenbuch*), the Polish translation by Anna Kotłowska with the preface by Kazimierz Ilski (Poznań 2010) has been published recently.

³ E.g. the profession of *bothroi*, has not been thoroughly examined and clarified, see T. Κολιας, Μ. ΧΡΟΝΗ-ΒΑΚΑΛΟΠΟΥΛΟΥ, *Τὸ ἐπάγγελμα καὶ ἡ ονομασία τῶν βόθρων στο Ἐπαρχικὸν βιβλίον τοῦ Λέοντος*

the appearance of previously known terms (predominantly verbs) in an entirely new context⁴.

Within the first category the word *thalassai* can certainly be included; it is used in the second paragraph of the chapter V Περὶ τῶν πρανδιοπρατῶν:

Ἡ εἰσερχομένη πραγματεία τῶν πρανδιοπρατῶν ὀφείλει πᾶσα ἀποτιθεσθαι ἐν ἐνὶ οἴκῳ τῶν μιτάτων, ὥστε πάντας ἐπισυναγομένους ἐπιμερίζεσθαι ταύτην· ὁμοίως καὶ ἡ ἀπὸ Συρίας ἐρχομένη σαρακηνική, εἴτ' ἐσωφόρια εἶεν εἴτε αὐδία καὶ φουφούλια καὶ θάλασσαί. χάμιά τε καὶ ψιλὰ βαγδαδικία μετὰ καὶ τῶν μεστῶν χαμίῶν καὶ βαγδαδικίων.⁵

The newly arrived merchandise belonging to bands, vendors shall be placed entirely in one of the mitatons buildings, so they can be distributed when everyone will gather together, same for the Saracenic merchandises, that have arrived from Syria: whether it would be underwear, cloaks, trousers or thalassai. Also the garments from Baghdad, without lining and long-sleeved along with those with long sleeves, with lining from Baghdad.

Because of the 'marine' origin of the word θάλασσαί the association generated by the Russian editor of the *Book of the Prefect*, Mikhail Sjuzumov⁶ seems natural, though we are of the opinion that this Book's fragment author has not thought of the fabric's color while using it.

Later on numerous authors have made an attempt to ascribe a proper meaning to the term. In a very recent modern Greek edition of the *Book of the Prefect* Taxiarchis Koliás and Maria Chronē tried to explain its meaning (modern Greek: θάλασσες) by referring to common associations with the sea. Although the editors do not quote Sjuzumov, they certainly share his view. On the one hand they refer to the lightness of the cloth, its 'waving;' on the other hand to the color of water, without, however, specifying it⁷.

It appears highly probable that the *Book of Prefect* talks about textile from byssos – the so-called sea silk (also: marine wool or marine silk). Both expressions can be found in the literature concerning the subject in interesting texts by Daniel McKinley, Berthold Laufer or Felicitas Maeder, which present the problem from the exceptionally noteworthy perspective of material culture⁸. Recently another

Στ' του Σοφοῦ, EEBΣ 52, 2006, p. 379–390; J. KODER, "Wer ndern eine Grube gräbt..." *Die Bezeichnung βόθρος in „Eparchikon biblion"*, [in:] *Fest und Alltag in Byzanz*, hrsg. G. PRINZING, D. SIMON, München 1990, p. 71–76.

⁴ E.g. what is the actual meaning of a prohibited process of producing 'rough coins' (X, 4: τραχύνων)? See Koder: (...) *die gesammelten (Kupfer-) Münzen aufzurauhen* (?).

⁵ *Das Eparchenbuch*, p. 94 [English translation by the authors of this article].

⁶ М.Я. Сюзюмов, *Византинская книга Эпарха*, Москва 1962, p. 159.

⁷ Τ. Κολιάς, Μ. ΧΡΟΝΗ, *Τὸ ἐπαρχικὸν βιβλίον Λέοντος τοῦ Σοφοῦ*, Αθήνα 2011, p. 111.

⁸ B. LAUFER, *The Story of the Pinna and the Syrian Lamb*, JAF 28(108), 1915, p. 103–128; D. McKinley, *Pinna and Her Silken Beard: a Foray into Historical Misappropriations*, ATe 29, 1998, p. 9–223; the numerous papers written recently by Felicitas MAEDER are mainly prepared in the frame of Projekt Muschelseide on Naturhistorisches Museum Basel (e.g. F. MAEDER, M. HALBEISEN, *Muschelseide: auf der Suche nach einem vergessenen Material*, WK 1, 2001, p. 33–41; F. MAEDER, *Sea-silk in Aquincum: First Pro-*

interesting opinion was expressed by Philip Ditchfield⁹, who in his study on material culture indicates production centers, distribution areas and numerous applications of byssos (*le byssus*) in the Mediterranean world of Late Antiquity and later in the Middle Ages. Unfortunately, in contrary to the assumption made in present article, he has not associated byssos with *θάλασσα*.

Constantine VII Porphyrogenetus, mentions *θάλασσα*¹⁰ among others in *De cerimoniis aulae byzantinae*, in the chapter devoted to ‘sewn robes’ which should be found in the emperor’s vestiarian. The Latin translation used by the editor is not of much help here (direct Latinism only: ‘thalassae’). However, one can conclude from the perspective of the analysis presented below that it is the same kind of luxurious fabrics, or robes made of them, which had been mentioned in Emperor Leo’s edict, and the fibres to manufacture them (the so-called sea silk) which were extracted from the mollusc called *pinna*.

Sea silk had already appeared in another legal source – in the *Edict on Maximum Prices* announced in 301 by Diocletian and his three co-rulers. Three chapters of the tariff, which is considered to be a real mine of information about everyday life of the empire’s inhabitants, mention the word ‘marine’ in relation to the fabric both in original Latin¹¹ and in Greek in which the copy of the edict was made¹². In the chapter XIX of the tariff entitled Περὶ ἐσθήτος (‘On clothes’)¹³ one can find position 14 [*dalmatic*] *omafortium marinum subsericum ut s(upra)* (‘semi-silk marine dalmaticomafortium’; δελμ[ατικομαφέρτιον] *θάλασσιον συνψε[ι]ρικον ευ[–]*), which maximum price was 48 000 *denarii*. Position 1a. in chapter XXI, 1 Περὶ λαναρίων¹⁴ (*De lanariis*, ‘About workers in a wool spinning mill’), regulates the maximum rate for 1 libra of goods on the level of 40 *denarii* for a spinner working with wool from *Mutina* or marine wool

duction Proof in Antiquity, [in:] *Vestidos, Textiles y Tintes. Estudios sobre la producción de bienes de consumo en la Antigüedad. Actas del II Symposium Internacional sobre Textiles y Tintes del Mediterráneo en el mundo antiguo (Athenas, 24 al 26 de noviembre 2005)*, ed. C. ALFARO, L. KARALI, València 2008, p. 109–118 [*Purpureae Vestes: II Symposium Internacional*]; EADEM, *Die Edle Steckmuschel und ihr Faserbart: Eine kleine Kulturgeschichte der Muschelseide*, MNGB 11, 2009, p. 15–26; the complete list is to be found on the e-site of the project: <http://www.muschelseide.ch/en/bibliographie/Projektpublikationen.html>; also in collaboration with other authors: *Muschelseide – Goldene Fäden vom Meeresgrund / Bisso marino – Fili d’oro dal fondo del mare (Ausstellungskatalog)*, ed. F. MAEDER, A. HÄNGGI, D. WUNDERLIN, Milano 2004, with the texts by Daniela Lunghi, Felicitas Maeder, Tihana Šiletić, Gerolama Carta Mantiglia, Sergio Flore, Lucia D’Ippolito, Dominik Wunderlin).

⁹ P. DITCHFIELD, *La culture matérielle médiévale: L’Italie méridionale byzantine et normande*, Rome 2007, p. 425–427 [=Collection de l’École française de Rome, 373]; a noteworthy bibliography on the subject.

¹⁰ *Constantini Porphyrogeniti imperatoris De cerimoniis aulae Byzantinae*, rec. I.I. REISKE, vol. I, Bonnae 1829, p. 470, 6–7 = 471, 5.

¹¹ For the official language of the tariff see the commentary of J. PROSTKO-PROSTYŃSKI, [rec.:] *A. and P. Barańscy, P. Janiszewski, Edictum Diocletiani de pretiis rerum venalium. Poznań 2007 – SŽ 47*, 2010, p. 289.

¹² For the remarks related to the edict, the edition by Marta Giacchero was used: *Edictum Diocletiani et Collegarum de Pretiis Rerum Venalium*, ed. M. GIACCHERO, Genoa 1974 (cetera: *Edictum Diocletiani*).

¹³ The title of this chapter is known only in the Greek version, *Edictum Diocletiani*, p. 174–175.

¹⁴ *Edictum Diocletiani*, p. 180–181.

(...). In the Latin version of the tariff the entry is as follows: *lanario in lana Mutinensi vel marina pasto in po(ndo) unum*; in the Greek version it is *λαναριῶ ἔργαζομένῳ Μουτουνήσια ἢ θάλασσια τρεφομένῳ*. Chapter XXV, 1 Περὶ ἐραιας (*De lanis*, 'About kinds of wool')¹⁵ in point 3 determines the price of 400 *denarii* for one *libra* of *marine wool* (Lat. *lanae marinae*, Gr. ἐραιας θαλασσίας). This price shall be considered as of very high level, especially given the prices of other kinds of wool, as e.g. one *libra* of common, not 'brand' wool, has a stable price of 25 *denarii*. These kinds of wool which origin determines their price are valued more highly, but not as much as marine wool which is the topic of the present article. For instance, the wool from Asturias cannot be sold at a price higher than 100 *denarii*, the wool from Tarent – 175 *denarii*, and the wool from Altinum – 200 *denarii*. Of the group of 'brand' kinds of wool it was the 'washed' wool from Mutina that maintained the highest value – its maximum price for one *libra* was 300 *denarii*. We do not possess, however, any information concerning the price occurring in the same chapter in point 10. The Latin version contains *lana marina*, again – unfortunately the remaining part of this entry has not been yet rediscovered. In the Greek copy one can read about an unknown price for ἐρέας θαλασσίας νωτιαίας. The attribute 'dorsal' seems rather doubtful, and it is vague.

The common meaning of this adjective, which can be found in Greek lexicography, does not appear adequate in this situation¹⁶. While preparing the present text we did not manage to find a convincing explanation of this word. It is significant, however, that the material described in Diocletian's edict as 'marine wool' can be definitely considered a kind of fabric made from fibres produced by *pinna nobilis*, mollusc allowing it to attach to rocks. Such hypothesis expressed by Hugo Blümner in 1893¹⁷ was confirmed by Joyce Reynolds who participated in the excavations in Aphrodisias in Caria (which resulted in the discovery of substantial fragments of the tariff)¹⁸. John Haldon has captured very similar associations between *θάλασσαι* and *byssos*: (...) *the term [θάλασσαι – A.J./A.K.] may refer to garments*

¹⁵ *Edictum Diocletiani*, p. 184–185.

¹⁶ Δ. ΔΗΜΗΤΡΑΚΟΣ (*Μέγα Λεξικόν Ὁλης τῆς Ἑλληνικῆς Γλώσσης*, vol. VII, Ἀθήναι 1953, p. 3293 and vol. X, p. 4954); Ε. ΚΡΙΑΡΑΣ, *Λεξικό τῆς μεσαιωνικῆς ἑλληνικῆς δημόδου γραμματείας 1100–1669*, vol. VI, Θεσσαλονίκη 1980, p. 72 sq and vol. XI, Θεσσαλονίκη 1990, p. 318–319 (*Που ἀνήκει ἢ ἀναφέρεται στα νώτια ἐκφρ. τα νώτια μέρη = τα οπίσθια*).

¹⁷ *Der Maximaltarif des Diocletian*, ed. T. MOMMSEN, H. Blümner, Berlin 1893 (repr. 1958), p. 159: *Und da darf man denn daran erinnern, dass in jener Zeit (und noch bis in die Neuzeit hinein) die Faserbüschel der im mittelländischen Meere heimischen Steckmuschel (pinna nobilis, auch bei den Alten pinna genant) zu Geweben verarbeitet...*

¹⁸ J. REYNOLDS, *Diocletian's Edict on Maximum Prices. The Chapter on Wool*, ZPE 42, 1981, p. 283: *marine wool is convincingly identified with the fibres by which the mollusc pinna nobilis attaches itself to rocks (...)*. B. Laufer (*op. cit.*, esp. p. 107 and 117) supposes that the beginnings of the production of marine wool from fibres produced by molluscs should be traced back to the Hellenic world, probably to pearl-divers and tradesmen. It is worth mentioning that the authors of works on the history of textiles mention *byssos* as the Golden Fleece for which Jason and his Argonauts set out on their quest. We do not aim at any detailed discussion of these views; our point is to indicate the presence of this fabric in many ancient sources.

of “sea-wool” (...) manufactured from the byssal threads produced by the marine mollusc *pinna nobilis*, the fan-mussel, which had a particularly lustrous appearance¹⁹. Unfortunately however, this brief indication has never been supported by reliable sources.

The identification: *sea silk-byssos-pinna* leads us to the assumption that the noun found in the *Book of the Prefect* is a term to describe an article which was made of the abovementioned wool.

Let us examine the sources of greatest relevance to the subject. It appears that in the common understanding of the ancient, the molluscs were characterized by specific behaviours. Aristophanes in *The Wasps*²⁰:

ὁ πινοτήρης οὐτός ἐστι τοῦ γένους,
ὁ μικρότατος, δὲ τὴν τραγωδίαν ποιεῖ.
It's a crab [i.e. Pinoteres], —a hermit-crab,
the smallest of its kind; it writes tragedies.²¹

Pinoteres is our small crab living next to *pinna*, as Cicero will write below. The comical effect is twofold: a) the head of the talented family is Karkinos (the authentic name) which means Crab; b) Pinoteres behaves like an animal whose name he bears, i.e. he preys on others. The following conclusion can be made: if Aristophanes used this wordplay in a comedy on stage, our molluscs must have been commonly known, otherwise the joke would not have been understood.

Marcus Tullius Cicero, in his two moral treatises, wonders, among other things, on the essence of altruism, making an attempt to find it also in the world of animals. He gives the example of collaboration between *pinna* and small crabs (or small crayfish). In *De finibus bonorum et malorum*:

Thus certain big animals are born for each other, as the one in a broad shell which is called *pina* and the one that goes out of the shell to protect it and is called *pinoteres*; when it comes back to it, the shell closes as if it has been warned by it...²²

In *De natura deorum* Cicero says:

Pina (as it is called in Greek), consisting of two big shells along with a small crayfish, constitutes a kind of collaboration in gaining food. When small fish get into an open shell, *pina*, alarmed by the pinch of a small crayfish, closes the shell: that is how different animals gain food.²³

¹⁹ J. HALDON, *Constantine Porphyrogenitus. Three treatises on imperial military expeditions*, Wien 1990 [= CFHB, 28], p. 222–223.

²⁰ ARISTOPHANES, *Wasps*, v. 1510–1511, ed. et trans. D.M. MACDOWELL, Oxford 1971.

²¹ *The Complete Greek Drama*, trans. E. O'NEILL, vol. II, New York 1938, p. 660.

²² MARCUS TULLIUS CICERO, *De finibus*, III, 63, 7–11: *...sic inmanes quaedam bestiae sibi solum natae sunt, at illa, quae in concha patula pina dicitur, isque, qui enat e concha, qui, quod eam custodit, pinoteres vocatur in eandemque cum se recepit includitur, ut videatur monuisse ut caveret...*

²³ MARCUS TULLIUS CICERO, *De natura deorum*, II, 123, 10 – 124, 1: *pina vero [sic enim Graece dicitur] duabus grandibus patula conchis cum parva squilla quasi societatem coit comparandi cibi; itaque cum pisciculi parvi in concham hiantem innataverunt, tum admonita <a> squilla pina morsu comprimit conchas: sic dissimillimis bestiis communiter cibus quaeritur.*

The luxurious character of marine wool confirmed in Diocletian's edict had been afterwards noticed for instance by Pliny who in *Historia Naturalis* writes about the inhabitants of Achaëa making the fabric called *byssinus*: *the most similar to byssinus, is appreciated mostly by women and it is made near Elis in Achaëa; I know that 1 gram [1/24 ounce] of it is sold for four times more denarii than [implicitly 1 gram] of gold*²⁴. Also Herodotus describing the most costly process of mummification notices that the Egyptians *conceal the body for seventy days, embalmed in saltpeter (...)* and when the seventy days have passed, they wash the body²⁵ and wrap the body in bandages made of byssos²⁶. Editors of *Le dictionnaire des antiquités grecques et romaines*, published in the 1887, but to some extent still relevant, emphasized the use of byssos in the Egyptian mummification process²⁷; however, differently than above, they wrongly identified byssos with linen²⁸. Regarding the sources mentioned above we cannot share this opinion. There is a clear evidence of byssos being treated separately by the Egyptians. Moreover, the manufacturing process of these fabrics was also diversified by-law. A papyrus of Tebtunis records a decree of Ptolemy VIII, Cleopatra II and Cleopatra III of 118 B.C. with cloth-weavers (τοῖς λινύφοις), byssos-makers (βυσσοουργοῖς) and robe-weavers (πλεπούφοις) as separate professions²⁹. The fact that this fabric maintained its value in ritual practices is acknowledged by Plutarch:

Then the priests perform other sad ceremonies and having covered a gold-plated cow with a mourning³⁰ robe made of byssos, they exhibit it as the suffering of the goddess (since they consider the cow as the image of Isis and Earth)...³¹

²⁴ *Plinii naturalis historiae libri XXXVII, XIX, 20, 6–7*, ed. H. RACKHAM, W.H.S. JONES, D.E. EICHHOLZ, London 1940: *proximus byssino, mulierum maxime deliciis circa Elim in Achaia genito; quaternis denariis scripula eius permutata quondam ut auri reperio.*

²⁵ HERODOTUS, *Histories*, II, 86, 20–23, trans. A.D. GODLEY, London 1920 (cetera: HERODOTUS): Ταῦτα δὲ ποιήσαντες ταριχεύουσι λίτρῳ κρύψαντες ἡμέρας ἑβδομήκοντα. πλεόνας δὲ τούτων οὐκ ἔξεστι ταριχεύειν. Ἐπεὶ δὲ παρέλθωσι αἱ ἑβδομήκοντα, λούσαντες τὸν νεκρὸν...

²⁶ HERODOTUS, II, 86, 23–24: ...κατελίθουσι πᾶν αὐτοῦ τὸ σῶμα σινδόνης βυσσίνης τελαμῶσι κατατετημένοισι... A.D. Godley uses the term *fine linen cloth* instead of *byssos* or *byssinus*.

²⁷ *Dictionnaire des Antiquités grecques et romaines*, ed. CH. DAREMBERG, E. SAGLIO, Paris 1887, p. 756: *Le passage le plus remarquable est celui où Hérodote dit qu'on enveloppait les momies dans des bandages de byssus.*

²⁸ *L. cit.:* *on a cru longtemps que la matière de ces bandages était du coton, mais les dernières recherches et les études microscopiques tendent à prouver que c'est du lin.*

²⁹ P.Tebt. 1, 5, l. 248–251, <http://papyri.info/ddbdp/p.tebt;1;5> [28 VII 2013].

³⁰ Literally 'black', but we have decided the metaphorical meaning will be more appropriate here. Otherwise one should assume that byssos was dyed black, which is not confirmed by any available sources. Such hypothesis would also contradict the cited Byzantine sources full of admiration for the natural colour of byssos.

³¹ *Plutarch's „De Iside et Osiride”*, 39 (= 366 E), ed. et trans. J.G. GRIFFITHS, Cardiff 1970: οἱ <τότε δ'> ἱερεῖς ἄλλα τε δρῶσι σκυθρωπά καὶ βοῦν διάχρυσον ἱματίῳ μέλανι βυσσίνῳ περιβάλλοντες ἐπὶ πένθει τῆς θεοῦ δεκνύουσι (βοῦν γάρ Ἰσίδος εἰκόνα καὶ γῆς νομίζουσιν).

Byssos³² is also mentioned on one of the most widely known artifacts, the famous Rosetta Stone. It is the decree from 196 B.C. containing information about the benefits conferred on priests by Ptolemy V. In its Greek version one can read that the pharaoh lowered the tax in cloth made of byssos by two parts: *βυσσίνων ὀθονίων ἀπέλυσεν τὰ δύο μέρη*³³. The next fragment coming from the same source contains the information that the ruler *returned the temples the debts which went to the royal treasury up to the eighth year [of the rule], in big amounts of corn and silver; similarly byssos cloth was not sent to the royal treasury*³⁴.

In *De aedificiis* Procopius wrote: *chlamis is made of wool, but not the one that comes from sheeps, it is the wool gathered from the sea. The animals from which this wool is born are customarily called pinnoi*.³⁵ Tertullian confirms the marine origin of the wool: *It is not enough to sew and sow for a tunic if one does not gain the garment by diving. Since this wool [comes from] the sea*³⁶, *being surrounded by slimy shells, flatter than others because of their wooliness*.³⁷

Basil of Caesarea admires sea silk ('marine wool') in one of his homilies, apparently lending credence to our definition: *What is the way in which pinnai give*

³² The essential information and sources are found in RE, vol. III.1, Stutgardiae 1897, col. 1108–1114. The article and the following updates do not associate, however, byssos with the sea-wool. Consecutive shorter versions of RE do not bring any new thoughts in this matter. *Der Kleine Pauly. Lexikon der Antike*, ed. K. ZIEGLER, W. SONTHEIMER, München 1979, p. 978–979 (H. GAMS):

Byssos (βύσσος) bezeichnet verschiedene pflanzliche und tierische Fasern, βύσσινος, βύσσινον πέπλωμα usw. Aus solchen gefertigte Gewebe und Kleidungsstücke, in erster Linie wohl aus den Stängelfasern von Linnen (λίνον, Lein, Flachs), später (anscheinend schon bei Hdt) auch aus den Samenhaaren der Baumwolle (s.d.) nach Heldreich vielleicht auch denen der aus Africa eingebürgerten Aslepiadacee Gomphocarpus Fructicosus; ferner auch strangförmige Pilze und Fleischen. Kaum junger als die Bezeichnung für Leinfasern dürfte die für die bis nennte Byssos genannten Haftfasern festsitzender Meermuscheln, besonders der im Mittelmeer verbreiteten Pinna nobilis sein, aus dere 3–8 cm langen Fasern seit dem Altertum Stricke, Strümpfe, Handschuhe u.a. hergestellt werden. Byssolith is das fasrige Gestein Asbest;

Der Neue Pauly, vol. II, p. 866 (C. HÜNENÖRDER) underlines its Durchsichtigkeit: *Byssos (βύσσος). Pflanzliche und tierische Fasern, die in weitgehend durchsichtigen bewändern (βύσσινος, βύσσινον πέπλωμα) verarbeitet wurden.*

³³ *Orientis Graeci inscriptiones selectae*, ed. W. DITTENBERGER, Lipsiae 1903 [repr. Hildesheim 1986; cetera: *Orientis Graeci inscriptiones*], 90 A, p. 153.

³⁴ *Orientis Graeci inscriptiones*, 90, p. 158: ἀφῆκεν δὲ καὶ τὰ ἐ[ν] τοῖς ἱεροῖς ὀφειλόμενα εἰς τὸ βασιλικὸν ἕως τοῦ ὀγδοῦ ἔτους, ὄντα εἰς σίτου καὶ ἀργυρίου πλήθος οὐκ εἰς τὸ βασιλικὸν βυσσίνων ὀθ[ονί]ων.

³⁵ PROCOPIUS, *De aedificiis*, III, 1, 19–20, [in:] *Procopii Caesariensis opera omnia*, rec. G. WIRTH (post J. HAURY), vol. IV, Leipzig 1964: *χλαμὺς ἢ ἐξ ἐρίων πεποιημένη, οὐχ οἶα τῶν προβατίων ἐκπέφυκεν, ἀλλ' ἐκ θαλάσσης συνειλεγμένων. πίννουσ τὰ ζῶα καλεῖν νενομίκασιν, ἐν οἷς ἢ τῶν ἐρίων ἐκφυσις γίνεται* (if not stated otherwise, all the translations are by the authors of the present paper).

³⁶ 'The wool from the sea' also appears in Alciphron's letters – *Alciphronis Rhetoris Epistularum libri IV*, I, 2, 3, ed. M.A. SCHEPERS, Groningae 1901: τὰ ἐκ τῆς θαλάσσης ἔρια.

³⁷ TERTULLIANUS, *De pallio*, 3, [in:] IDEM, *Opera*, vol. II, *Opera montanistica*, ed. A. GERLO, E. EVANS, A. HARNACK, Turnhout 1954 [= CCSL, 2]: *Nec fuit satis tunicam pangere et serere, ni etiam piscari vestitum contigisset: nam et de mari vellera, quo mucosae lanusitatis plautiores conchae comant.*

*birth to golden wool, which no dyer has been able to imitate up to this day?*³⁸ This fact also astonished later Byzantine erudites, since John of Damascus, for instance, quotes the above fragment in his collection of noteworthy information in the 8th cent.³⁹

In order to summarize, having regarded and equally respected all the opinions presented above, in our view it is fair to conclude that both terms apply to almost the same fabric. We therefore believe that *θάλασσα* is a manufacture fabricated from byssos ('sea silk', 'marine wool') and imported from Syria as luxurious commodity. However, at the turn of centuries they were occasionally used in different contexts, which may and probably was the reason for misunderstandings and confusions. First of them was used extremely rarely, while the others were of great popularity, both in Greek and Latin sources.

Abstract. The article examines a kind of fabric described as '*θάλασσα*' in *The Book of the Prefect* (*Τὸ ἐπαρχικὸν βιβλίον*). The meaning of this term by both editors and commentators of the document has not been satisfactorily explained so far. It appears highly probable, however, that '*θάλασσα*', because of the 'marine' origin of the word, can be associated with a textile from byssos – the so-called sea silk, made from fibres produced by a mollusc *pinna nobilis*. The presence of this fabric in numerous ancient sources is indicated, incl. works of Aristophanes, Cicero, Herodotus and Plutarch. *Diocletian's Edict on Maximum Prices*, where the price of 'marine wool' is at the very high level is also investigated.

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³⁸ BASILIUS MAGNUS, *Homilia VII in Haexaemeron*, 6, [in:] PG, vol. XXIX, col. 161A: Πόθεν τὸ χρυσοῦν ἔριον αἱ πίνναι τρέφουσιν, ὅπερ οὐδεὶς τῶν ἀνθοβαφῶν μέχρι νῦν ἐμμήσατο.

³⁹ IOANNES DAMASCENUS, *Sacra Parallela*, [in:] PG, vol. XCVI, col. 205B.