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In the preparation of an article on the role of the plant flax (*Linum usitatissimum*) in the Roman and Fatimid periods (*JNES* 56 [1997] 201-207) I noticed that the word λίνον in Greek and its congener *linum* in Latin meant "flax" at times but more often meant a wide range of things processed from its inner fiber, such as a linen cloth or garment, yarn, thread, string or cord spun from flax, a fishing or hunting net, a lamp wick, etc.¹ The elastic character of this word can result in missing the precise meaning of a text.² However, the papyri and ostraka have the word λινοκαλάμη which refers specifically to the flax plant. What is remarkable about λινοκαλάμη is that it never made an impression outside of Egypt save in a few passages to be quoted below. Made up of two common words, λίνον and καλάμη ("flax-reed" or "linen-reed"), there is nothing exotic or unusual about its formation to account for the virtual absence of the word in Greek literature.

As for ἄμοργίς, its meaning is not as straight forward as λινοκαλάμη. LSJ defines it as "stalks of mallow (*Malva silvestris*), used like hemp or flax (Perh. from pr.n. ἄμοργός as place of growth."³ G. Richter, influenced by the diaphanous draperies on statues of the Classical period, views it as silk (*AJA* 33 [1929] 27-33). This writer will hold that ἄμοργίς is flax, no different from λινοκαλάμη, and that the fabric and garments made from it (ἄμόργινος, -ον) were of high quality linen. It is interesting to note that neither word surfaces in the Egyptian papyri or ostraka as a plant or a textile. It does however appear, apart from scholia, in Attic inscriptions of the IVth century B.C. and several times in Athenian literature of the V/IV.

A quantitative examination of λινοκαλάμη on the CD ROM discs covering the papyri, ostraka, and inscriptions (PHI Greek Documentary Texts, CD ROM #7 [1996]) and the Thesaurus Linguae Graecae Data Bank Texts (TGL CD ROM #D [1992]) points up the disparity between the documentary and literary material. The data bank for papyri and ostraka provides 77 citations for the word λινοκαλάμη, generally in connection with the leasing of land for the cultivation and sale of flax, the processing it into bundles of fiber or tow, or converting its seed into linseed oil. The documents range in dates from III century B.C. to the VII century A.D. The number of citations is however limited by the fact that, as the editor of P.Oxy. 3254-3262 has observed (p.129), "the most famous flax came from the area of the Delta, in which papyri have rarely survived."

On the other hand, the TLG data bank, which contains some 57,000,000 words in its canon, provides only 9 citations for λινοκαλάμη. The earliest is a biblical citation from the *Septuagint*, *Jos.* 6.2, recounting how the harlot Rahab hid the two Israelite spies on her roof in a pile of flax (ἐν τῇ λινοκαλάμῃ ἐκτοιβαμένη). Rahab's ruse of concealing the two men under stalks of flax is repeated by three Christian theologians, Clement Romanus (*ep. II ad Corinth* 12.3.3), Origen (*Selecta in Jes. Nave* PG 12.820.25) and in Jo. Chrysostom (*In Psalmum* 139 [PG 55, col. 709.64) as an exemplar of a good deeds performed by women. The word also appears in Galen (*Opera* XII.433.5 Kühn) as an ingredient in one of Cleopatra's cosmetic ointments in which dry flax seeds (λινόσπερμα) are burned with flax (λινοκαλάμη) and then mixed with sesame oil.

The four remaining citations, found in the scholia, turn on an explanation of the word ἄμοργίς as flax (λινοκαλάμη), and ἄμόργινον as a fine fabric from which clothing is made. In the scholium to

¹ See Pliny's glowing praise of flax (*n.h.*19.1-27) and the variety of linen products made from its fiber. For the importance of linen in Egypt, see E. Wipszycka, *L'industrie textile dans l'Égypte romaine* (Warsaw 1965), 17-18.

² A simple example from Latin can be taken from the *SHA* (Gallienus 6.9) in which Gallienus, when informed of the revolt in Egypt, is reputed to have exclaimed, *Quid? sine lino Aegyptio esse non possumus!* The editor of *ESAR* II.2 translates this statement as "What! How can we get along without Egyptian flax?" The editor of the Loeb edition, on the other hand, translates *sino lino Aegyptio* "without Egyptian linen." Is Gallienus referring to "flax" or to "linen"?

³ Cf. H. Frisk, *Griech. etym. Wb* (s.v.) and Chantraine, *Dict. étym.*, s.v.

Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* 735 (p. 257 Dübner), the word ἀμοργίς is equated with λινοκαλάμη and with ἄλοπος is taken to mean unscutched flax (with an Aristophanic sexual allusion); p. 258D. ad 737). It (the fabric or the yarn?) is further defined as even thinner than βύσσος and κάρπασος.⁴ In the scholium to Plato's *epistulae* 13.363 (p. 400 Greene) in which expensive Amorgine (Ἀμόργινα) tunics are contrasted with those made of cheaper Sicilian linen, ἀμοργίς is said to be λινοκαλάμη from which Amorgine garments are made and that they resemble those made of βύσσος. The scholium to Aeschines, *In Timarchum* 214a (p. 38 Dilts) cites ἀμόργινα as λινοκαλάμη ἀμόργη, whose essential quality is the fineness of its thread, and that clothing made from it is expensive. Entry 1626, "Ἀμοργίς", in the *Suda* (I, p. 144 Adler) takes its cue from the above scholia.

These four scholia, which equate ἀμοργίς with λινοκαλάμη, lead us to the entry of the latter in LSJ in which λινοκαλάμη is defined as "ἀμοργίς, fine flax." and, collectively, *flax-straw* used as thatch.⁵

Both definitions are misleading. λινοκαλάμη is clearly common flax (*Linum usitatissimum*). The evidence, referred to in LSJ (n. 5) does not support the meaning "fine flax" in *P. Cairo. Zen.* 59470, a letter, concerns three bundles of flax (λινοκαλάμης δέμας γ).⁶ *P. Oxy.* 1.103 deals only with the lease of land to be sown with flax (εἰς σπορὰν λινοκαλάμης). LSJ's citation from Galen also calls for common flax. As for the collective use the word for "flax straw used as thatch," the reading of *Jo.* 6.2, as shown above, is meant to mean "a pile or heap of flax (stalks), probably placed on the roof to dry after retting."

The definition of "fine flax" in LSJ leans too heavily on the scholiasts' treatment of ἀμοργίς as flax from which a fine fabric was made and used for expensive garments. However, the definition of ἀμοργίς given above, is said to be mallow stalks (*Malva silvestris*) and, perhaps, grown on the island of Amorgos. The use of mallow stalks as the source of a textile fiber is highly unlikely. To Theophrastus (*Hist. plant.* 7.7.2), μαλάχη (*Malva silvestris*) is an *uncultivated* herb (italics mine) classified as a edible pot-herb when cooked.⁷

It is possible, or perhaps likely, that the skill in spinning a fine linen thread and weaving a fabric from it originated among the inhabitants of Amorgos, but we have no evidence to support it, neither in the literature nor in the scholia.⁸ What evidence we do have comes exclusively from Athens, although the fame of the island's textile may have become a trade name, "Amorgine", just as the weft-knitted fabric from the Channel island of Jersey became generalized and known as "jersey".⁹ The PHI CD ROM #7 (mentioned above) provides some 34 citations of the word ἀμόργινον which appear in 11 Athenian "treasure" inscriptions, all dated to the 4th century B.C. and connected with votive offerings to the god-

⁴ These two words are at times said to mean linen. On βύσσος and the difficulty of determining its specific character as a linen or cotton or the quality of a fabric, see Wipszyska (above n. 2), 39-42; 108. In late sources, i.e. the scholia, it most likely refers to cotton which had begun to be cultivated on a large scale.

⁵ The supporting evidence for "fine flax" is *P. Cairo Zen.* 59470 (III BC), Cleopatra *ap.* Gal. 12.433, and schol. Aristoph. *Lys.* 737; for "flax straw" *LXX Jo.* 2.6, cf. Eust. *ad D.P.* 525, *P. Oxy.* 103 (IV AD), etc. Du Cange, *Gloss.* col. 815, has under this entry, *Linum tenue Bysso haud dissimile*, Graec. Ἀμοργίς aliis *Culmus Lini exponitur*.

⁶ Nor does any of the other occurrences in the Zenon Archive; see P.W. Pestman, *A Guide to the Zenon Archive* (P.L. Bat. 21) 674. There is, however, a distinction between the fine fibres of the plant (λινοκαλάμη) and the coarse fibres ("tow", *τίπνον*), *P. Cairo Zen.* 59 782b.8f., 76f., 80ff., 90ff., 117ff., 128f., 151f.).

⁷ Identifying ἀμοργίς with mallow is attributed to J. Yates, *Textrinum antiquorum* (London 1843) 310-316. Yates, working through scholia, etymology and analogy to prove his point, still lacks a solid reference to show that mallow was used in the production of a fine textile. There can be no doubt that if *Malva silvestris* could be converted into a textile of high quality found in expensive garments, it would have been noted in antiquity and later, and above all, its use would not have been neglected and become obsolete. See also Richter (*AJA* 33 [1929] 28, nn. 2 and 4).

⁸ The poor soil of Amorgos may have produced thin stalks of flax that yielded fine linen yarn from its fiber. Columella (r.r. 2.10.17) reports that poor soil sown very thickly with flax produces slender stalks. On the infertility of the island, see Richter (above, n. 7) 29.

⁹ Cf. the scholium to *Lys.* 150 in Dübner (p. 250) in which certain dresses (Θηραῖα) that elsewhere occur in treasury inscriptions (IG II² 2.1415.25; 1421.126; see LSJ *Suppl.* s.v.), are said to have been created on the island of Thera. It is on analogy with Thera that the scholiast posits that Amorgine developed in Amorgos.

dess Artemis Brauronia.¹⁰ The TLG CD ROM #D disc records, scholiasts and lexicographers aside, ten citations for ἀμοργίς/ἀμόργινον. Six appear in writers of the 4th century BC (thrice in Aristophanes and once in Aeschines, Antiphanes, and Plato). From the 5th century BC one may add Eupolis (1) and from the following century Kratinos.¹¹ (103 Kassel-Austin IV.172). By the II/III centuries AD, Amorgine is taken to mean a luxurious fabric made into expensive clothing or covering.¹²

That Athenian women were skilled at weaving Amorgine fabric is made very clear in Aeschines' *In Timarchum* 214 in which one of Timarchus' slaves was "a woman, skilled in producing Amorgine, who took the sheer fabric to the market (γυναίκα ἀμόργινον ἐπιταμένην ἐργάζεσθαι καὶ ἔργα λεπτὰ εἰς τὴν ἀγορὰν ἐκφέρουσαν). Aristophanes (*Lys* 738 and 735) also points out that Athenian women worked the flax plant, which is cited as ἀμοργίς. His allusion to scutching (i.e. the process of scaling or removing the exterior covering of the plant for the inner cellulose fiber which was turned into linen yarn) is one commonly employed in processing flax.

To sum up, λινοκαλάμη and ἀμοργίς clearly refer to the flax plant. What is noteworthy, in view of its widespread cultivation in antiquity, is the restricted use of these two words outside of Egypt and Athens. The appearance of λινοκαλάμη in the Egyptian commercial documents is understandable; the ambiguity of λίνον was avoided and correspondents knew exactly what the point of reference was, especially in a business transaction. λινοκαλάμη is a very serviceable word, as "flax" is in English, but why it did not gain currency beyond Egypt is open to speculation.

ἀμοργίς has its own peculiarity. As stated above, it seems to have been localized in Attica as kind of trade name for a flax that was woven into a fine linen fabric (ἀμόργινος, -ον) used in women's clothing. Aristophanes in *Lys.* 150-1 makes it clear that Amorgine chitons are "fine" in the sense that they are sheer, captivating and seductive. By extension, garments made of finely woven fabrics are expensive, "fit for a goddess". That the technique for weaving ἀμόργινος developed on the island of Amorgos is possible but it should be noted that most grammarians, lexicographers, and scholiasts, do not cite the island as the source for its development, more often connecting ἀμοργίς with ἀμόργη, the lees and dregs from oil and wine presses. Finally, that the appearance of these words in such popular Attic writers as Aristophanes, Aeschines and Plato, should have virtually fallen out of use, is, perhaps, the most peculiar thing of all.

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¹⁰ *IG* II².2, 1514.2, 10, 22, 51, 61, 63, 64, 65; 1515.14; 1516.28, 37, 39, 40; 1517.172; 1518.70, 81, 82, 83; 1522.15; 1523.20, 21; 1524.135, 194, 195, 211, 214, 216, 217, 235; 1525.7, 9; 1528.12; 1529. 18; *Hesp.* 16 (1927) 263.13. To these we may add *IG* II².2, 754.10, 22. See T. Linders, *Studies in the Treasure Records of Artemis Brauronia Found in Athens* (Stockholm 1972), especially 11-13 on garments given as votive offerings. Although the word ἀμόργινον appears often in inscriptions (8 times in 1514), there is no discussion of its meaning.

¹¹ Eupolis, *Poleis*, fr. 256 Kassel-Austin (V.441); Kratinos, *Malthakoi* fr. 103 Kassel-Austin (IV.172f.), has ἀμοργιν (so Meineke: ἀμοργόν cod.); for a discussion of the text and its intentional ambiguity see Kassel-Austin's commentary.

¹² Athenaeus, *Deipn.* 6.17. The Loeb edition (III.255, p.151), apparently influenced by LSJ's definition, translates ἀμοργίνω καλύμματι as "a covering made out of mallow fibres." See also Cass. Dio 281.16; Clem. Alex., *Paed.* 115.5