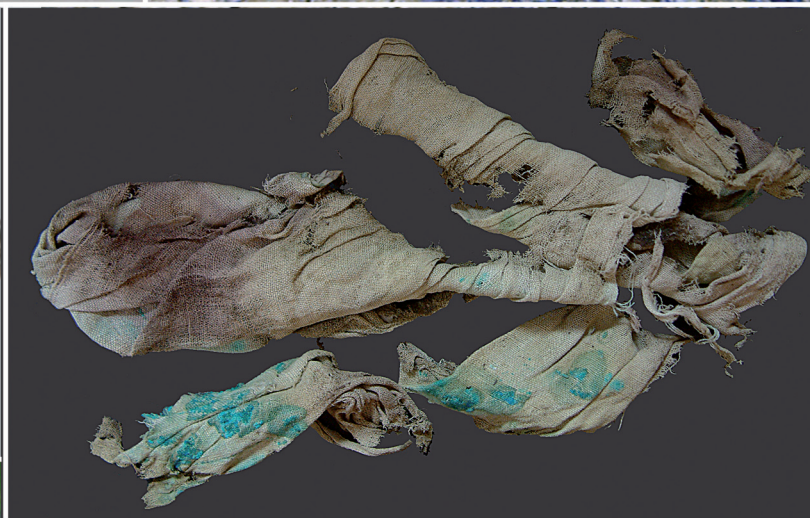
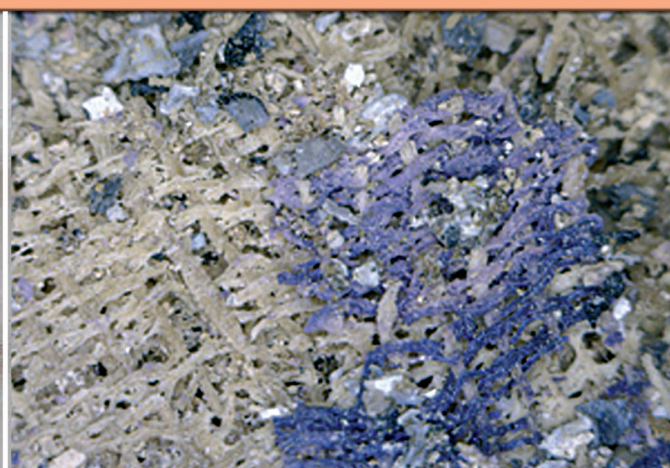




# PRODUCTION AND TRADE OF TEXTILES AND DYES IN THE ROMAN EMPIRE AND NEIGHBOURING REGIONS

*Carmen Alfaro, Michael Tellenbach y Jónatan Ortiz*





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*Textiles and Dyes in Antiquity*

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Roman Empire and Neighbouring Regions*

*Producción y comercio de textiles y tintes  
en el Imperio Romano y regiones cercanas*

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## ABREVIATURAS

ABSAA	<i>Annual of the British School of Archaeology at Athens</i>
AE	<i>Annales de l'Est</i>
AEA	<i>Archivo Español de Arqueología</i>
AG	<i>Applied Geochemistry</i>
AGA	Archivo General de la Administración de Alcalá de Henares
AH	<i>Acta Horticulturae</i>
AHB	<i>Annals of Human Biology</i>
AJA	<i>American Journal of Archaeology</i>
AJPh	<i>The American Journal of Philology</i>
AMS	<i>Asia Minor Studien</i>
AnMurcia	<i>Anales de Prehistoria y Arqueología</i>
Ann.	<i>Annales</i>
Ann. Génét. Sél. Anim.	<i>Annales de génétique et de sélection animale</i>
ANRW	<i>Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt</i>
ArchCl	<i>Archeologia Classica</i>
Arctica	<i>Arctica: Studia Ethnographica Upsaliensia</i>
ATN	<i>Archaeological Textiles Newsletter</i>
BA	<i>Biblical Archaeologist</i>
BCH	<i>Bulletin de Correspondance Héléniqne</i>
BICS	<i>Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies</i>
BRSAT	<i>Bulletí de la Reial Societat Arqueològica Tarraconense</i>
BSAC	<i>Bulletin de la Société d'archéologie copte</i>
BSAP	<i>Bulletin de la Société d'Anthropologie de Paris</i>
BSAL	<i>Bolletí de la Societat Arqueològica Lul-liana: Revista d'estudis històrics</i>
CCJB	Collection du Centre Jean Bérard. Nápoles
CAH	<i>The Cambridge Ancient History</i>
CAM	<i>Cuadernos de arqueología mediterránea</i>
CChO	<i>Collectanea Christiana Orientalia</i>
CIL	<i>Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum</i>
CL	<i>I Cancer Letters</i>
CQ	<i>The Classical Quarterly</i>
CRFSN	<i>Critical Reviews in Food Science and Nutrition</i>
CRIPeL	<i>Cahiers de recherches de l'Institut de papyrologie et égyptologie de Lille</i>
CTcF	<i>Conservación de tejidos procedentes de contextos funerarios. Jornadas internacionales sobre conservación de tejidos procedentes de contextos funerarios, Madrid 10-12 Febrero 2010, Madrid, 2011</i>
DHA	<i>Dyes in History and Archaeology</i>
EB	<i>Economic Botany</i>
EC	<i>Études Crétoises</i>
EMC/CW	<i>Echos du Monde Classique/ Classical Views</i>
ETF (arqueol)	<i>Espacio, Tiempo y Forma, Serie I, Prehistoria y Arqueología</i>
FGrHist	F. JACOBY (ed.), <i>Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker</i> , Berlin, 1923-1968.
FPSB	<i>Functional Plant Science and Biotechnology</i>



GAMF	<i>Gaceta Agrícola del Ministerio de Fomento</i>
GCA	<i>Geochimica Et Cosmochimica Acta</i>
G&R	<i>Greece &amp; Rome</i>
Herc. Oet.	<i>Hercules Oetaeus</i>
HHS	<i>Hou-Han-Shu</i>
HKDKK	<i>Hyogo Kyoiku Daigaku Kenkyu Kiyo</i>
ICAZ	International Council of Archaeozoology. Durham
IEJ	<i>Israel Exploration Journal</i>
IFAO	Institut Français d'Archaeologie Orientale
IJC	<i>Israel Journal of Chemistry</i>
INSAP	Institut National des Sciences de l'Archéologie et du Patrimoine
IPCE	Instituto del Patrimonio Cultural de España
JAA	<i>Journal of Anthropological Archaeology</i>
JAMT	<i>Journal of Archaeological Method and Theory</i>
JAS	<i>Journal of Archaeological Science</i>
IJBMS	<i>Iranian Journal of Basic Medical Sciences</i>
IWA	<i>Images of Women in Antiquity</i>
JGS	<i>Journal of the Geological Society</i>
JEE	<i>Journal of Ethnobiology and Ethnomedicine</i>
JESHO	<i>Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient.</i>
JHS	<i>Journal of Hellenic Studies</i>
JNES	<i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i>
JRAS	<i>Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society</i>
JSDC	<i>Journal of the Society of Dyers and Colourists</i>
JSARF	<i>Journal of Swedish Antiquarian Research, Fornvännen</i>
JSDC	<i>Journal of the Society of Dyers and Colourists</i>
JSR	<i>Journal of Shellfish Research</i>
JTATM	<i>Journal of Textile and Apparel Technology and Management</i>
LSJ	H. G. LIDDELL, R. SCOTT Y H. S. JONES (eds.), <i>Greek-English Lexicon</i> , Oxford, 2006.
MAN	Museo Arqueológico Nacional, Madrid.
MDE	A. DE MOOR y C. FLÜCK (eds.), <i>Methods of dating ancient textiles of the 1st millennium AD from Egypt and neighbouring countries</i> . Proceedings of the 4th meeting of the study group 'Textiles of the Nile Valley', Antwerp, 16-17 April 2005, Tiel 2007.
MEB	<i>Microscopio electrónico de barrido</i>
MECD	Ministerio de Educación, Ciencia y Desarrollo
MH	<i>Museum Helveticum</i>
MM	<i>Madrider Mitteilungen</i>
Mozia	<i>Mozia. Itinerari IV</i> . Roma 1989
NAH	<i>Noticario Arqueológico Hispánico</i>
NiKG	<i>Nippon Kasei Gakkaishi</i>
OJA	<i>Oxford Journal of Archaeology</i>
PA	<i>Preistoria Alpina</i>
PBM	<i>Perspectives in Biology and Medicine</i>
PhTAPhA	<i>Phoenissiae, Transactions of the American Philological Association</i>
PME	<i>Periplus maris Erythraei</i>
PSE	<i>Plant Systematics and Evolution.</i>
PVI	C. ALFARO, J. P. WILD AND B. COSTA (eds.), <i>Purpureae Vestes, Actas del I Symposium Internacional sobre Textiles y Tintes del Mediterráneo en época romana (Ibiza, 8 al 10 de noviembre, 2002)</i> , <i>Purpureae Vestes I</i> , Valencia, 2004.
PV II	C. ALFARO y L. KARALI (eds.), <i>Vestidos, textiles y tintes. Estudios sobre la producción de bienes de consumo en la Antigüedad, Purpureae Vestes II</i> , Valencia, 2008
PV III	C. ALFARO, J. P. BRUN, PH. BORGARD y R. PIEROBON BENOIT (eds.), <i>Textiles y tintes en la ciudad antigua (Nápoles, 13 al 15 de noviembre, 2008)</i> , <i>Purpureae Vestes III</i> , Valencia-Nápoles 2011
QAE	<i>Quaderns d'Arqueologia Ebusitana</i>
QdAV	<i>Quaderni di Archeologia del Veneto</i>
RA	<i>Révue Archéologique</i>
RAE	<i>Révue Archéologique de l'Est</i>
RCMS	<i>Rapid Communications Mass Spectrometry</i>
RE	G. WISSOWA, W. KROLL y K. MITTELHAUS (eds.), <i>Paulys Realenzyklopädie der klassischen Altertumswissenschaft</i> , Stuttgart, 1958-1978

<i>REL</i>	<i>Révue des Études Latines</i>
<i>RivStAnt</i>	<i>Rivista di Storia Antica</i>
<i>RIDA</i>	<i>Revue Internationale des Droits de l'Antiquité</i>
<i>RPCE</i>	<i>Revista Patrimonio Cultural de España</i>
<i>RhM</i>	<i>Rheinisches Museum für Philologie. Cologne</i>
<i>RSF</i>	<i>Rivista di Studi Fenici</i>
<i>RSL</i>	<i>Rivista di Studi Liguri</i>
<i>SEIE</i>	<i>Solvent Extraction and Ion Exchange</i>
<i>SHA</i>	<i>Scriptores Historiae Augustae</i>
<i>SNR</i>	<i>Schweizerische Numismatische Rundschau</i>
<i>TAW</i>	<i>Thera and the Aegean World</i>
<i>TH</i>	<i>Textile History</i>
<i>Traditio</i>	<i>Traditio: Studies in Ancient and Medieval History, Thought and Religion</i>
<i>TrAPA</i>	<i>Transactions of the American Philological Association</i>
<i>TRSE</i>	<i>Transactions of the Royal Society of Edinburgh</i>
<i>UAM</i>	<i>Universidad Autónoma de Madrid</i>
<i>WASJ</i>	<i>World Applied Sciences Journal</i>
<i>ZPE</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik</i>



# LUXURIA ET MOLLITIA: ROME'S TEXTILE RAW MATERIAL TRADE WITH THE EAST

*Manuel Albaladejo Vivero<sup>1</sup> and Manel García Sánchez<sup>2</sup>*

**Abstract:** From the Principate of Augustus onward, the Roman Empire began to import large quantities of textile raw materials as well as luxury dyes (*luxuria*) from India and China. This trade caused a moralistic reaction by several writers, who saw in the arrival of these goods a factor of effeminacy in their society (*mollitia*).

**Keywords:** Exotic products, ancient textiles, silk, dyes, India, China.

**Resumen:** A partir del Principado de Augusto, el Imperio romano comenzó a importar grandes cantidades de materias primas textiles y de tintes de lujo (*luxuria*) procedente de la India y de China. Este comercio provocó una reacción moralizante por parte de varios escritores, que vieron en la llegada de dichos productos un factor de afeminación de su sociedad (*mollitia*).

**Palabras clave:** Productos exóticos, textiles antiguos, seda, tintes, India, China.

## Production centres and trade routes

PERSIA and India were among the countries whose exotic products satisfied the ever more sophisticated demands of the upper layers of Roman society, especially from the start of the *pax romana* period during the Principate of Augustus. As might be expected, at certain times there was a real craze for some of these goods, such as perfumes, precious stones, pearls, fine woods, spices (particularly pepper), products extracted from plants and animals, and, what concerns us most here, dyes and textiles.<sup>3</sup> However, the Romans of the Augustus period were not the first ones to discover and use such goods in the West. Some centuries before that there had been Greeks who had had occasion to travel to Persia and India or,

at any event, to be in contact with these two geographical areas, and who had discovered the characteristics of various dyes and textile raw materials. There was a physician of Greek origin, by the name of Ctesias of Cnidus, who worked in the Achaemenid court in the late 5<sup>th</sup> century BC, who wrote about the dyes that could be found in India, although he did so rather cryptically.<sup>4</sup> The historians who accompanied Alexander also included in their descriptions of India references to that country's colouring agents and the use made of them for personal embellishment and adornment.<sup>5</sup> In the imperial Roman period, Pliny the Elder notably wrote on the subject, especially about cinnabar<sup>6</sup> and indigo, the Indian dye par excellence, which is obtained from *Indigofera tinctoria*, a leguminous plant. It is the oldest dyestuff employed in the

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<sup>3</sup> These goods were mentioned several times in the *Periplus maris Erythraei*, as well as in some later works, such as Chinese and Arabic accounts, and even in the Genizah documents from the Middle Ages. Ray 2003, 216.

<sup>4</sup> *FGrHist* 688 F 45 (38-39).

<sup>5</sup> Albaladejo and García 2010, 141-146.

<sup>6</sup> It was also called «dragon's blood». In origin, cinnabar is a deep red colour dye of mineral origin, but in Antiquity the same name was given to a plant dye imported from India, called *calamus draco*. Its origin was explained from a legendary fight launched by dragons –i.e. giant snakes– and elephants. After that, their blood was mixed and collected by Indians and Ethiopians to sell it as 'dragon's blood'. Plin. *HN* XXIX, 26; XXXV, 30.

Indian Ocean region<sup>7</sup> and had already been previously mentioned by Vitruvius<sup>8</sup> and Dioscorides.<sup>9</sup> The fact is that Pliny was aware that indigo was a substance that had only recently come onto the Roman market –painters used it for its bright colour, although its exact composition was unknown and remained so in the West until the time of Marco Polo–.<sup>10</sup>

The Indian cotton from which numerous textiles imported by Rome were made was referred to by some Greek authors in their works as ‘tree wool’, alluding to its supposed exotic origin.<sup>11</sup> It is known that in the earliest Indus cultures –Mohenjo Daro and Harappa–, cotton was already spun and woven, and even exported to Mesopotamia.<sup>12</sup> Various objects made of cotton are mentioned in the works of several of Alexander’s historians and Pliny appears to have based himself on Theophrastus’s work in describing this material.<sup>13</sup>

Nevertheless, the ancient work in which the cotton trade is mentioned with good knowledge of the facts is the *Periplus maris Erythraei*, which was probably written in the middle of the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD as a practical aid for use by sailors and traders.<sup>14</sup> It is no coincidence that this work was written at a time when monsoon navigation –which consisted in ships setting out from Egyptian ports on the Red Sea and, once they reached the open sea in the Indian Ocean, availing themselves of the strong south-westerly monsoon winds to reach the Indian coast in forty days’ sailing– was well known and used. Cotton is mentioned in the *Periplus* as an object that was exported from ports such as Barbarikôn<sup>15</sup> in north-east India and Barygaza<sup>16</sup> –now Broach–, south-east of Barbarikôn, together with cloths of the same raw ma-

terial made in the hinterland of Barygaza, and Tagara,<sup>17</sup> further to the south. Another material mentioned in the list of textiles exported from these places is *molochinon*, possibly a cotton cloth of especially high quality.<sup>18</sup>

Flax was another of the textile raw materials linked to India. According to various authors of the high imperial period who used the works by Alexander’s historians, flax was planted during the rainy season,<sup>19</sup> was very much used by the country’s inhabitants<sup>20</sup> and its colour was brighter than any other.<sup>21</sup> In particular, the *Periplus* refers to the linen cloths manufactured in the cities of Ozene and Tagara, from where they were taken to Barygaza for export.<sup>22</sup> Similarly, fine linen cloths called *argaritides*<sup>23</sup> were exported from Aigialos and Argaru in southern India. The same thing happened on the island of Taprobanê, in present-day Sri Lanka, which, in addition to linen cloths, exported pearls, gems and tortoiseshell.<sup>24</sup>

According to what is said in the text, the Massalia<sup>25</sup> region on the Coromandel coast in south-east India specialised in the production of linen cloths.<sup>26</sup> Much further to the north, in an area almost unknown even to the sailors and traders from the eastern Mediterranean, were the markets of the Ganges delta near today’s city of Dakka, possibly in Tamralipti<sup>27</sup> –now Tamluk, in the Indian Union– where linen cloths of the best quality, known precisely as *Gangetic* cloths, were sold.<sup>28</sup>

Without doubt the costliest textile product and the one most highly appreciated of all those exported from the East to Rome during the High Empire was silk. Prior to the opening of trade with India, in the Greco-Roman world a type of silk from the island of

<sup>7</sup> Ray 2003, 219. Plin., *NH* XXIX, 26; XXXIII, 116; XXXV, 30, 50.

<sup>8</sup> VII, 9, 6; VII, 14, 2.

<sup>9</sup> V, 92.

<sup>10</sup> Plin., *NH* XXXIII, 163; XXXV, 43, 46. Karttunen 1997, 164-165.

<sup>11</sup> Hdt. III, 47; III, 106; VII, 65. Ctesias, *FGrHist* 688 F 45, (41).

<sup>12</sup> Schlingloff 1974, 81-90; Barber 1991, 32-33; Karttunen 1997, 133; Ray 2003, 217.

<sup>13</sup> Plin., *NH* XII, 17, 25, 39; XIII, 90; XIX, 15. Thphr., *HP* IV, 4, 8.

<sup>14</sup> Casson 1989; Belfiore 2004.

<sup>15</sup> *PME* 39. Not only were Indian cotton and cotton cloths exported to Rome; in *PME* 6 and 14 there are references to exportations of the same material with destination to Opone, a place located in Eastern Africa. In Egypt, the *P. Iand.* VII, 142, II, 8, dated in 164-165 AD, shows the existence of cotton plantations which were kept in later centuries. Wild *et al.* 2008, 143-147.

<sup>16</sup> *PME* 41, 48, 49.

<sup>17</sup> *PME* 51.

<sup>18</sup> *PME* 48, 51. Casson 1989, 249, interpreted *molochinon* as that cloth.

<sup>19</sup> Str. XV, 1, 13.

<sup>20</sup> Str. XV, 1, 58; XV, 1, 59; XV, 1, 71. Curt. VIII, 9, 14; IX, 7, 12; IX, 8, 1. Mela III, 63.

<sup>21</sup> Arr., *Ind.* XVI, 1-2. Cf. Str. XV, 1, 54.

<sup>22</sup> *PME* 48, 51. Σινδον is the term used by the author of the *Periplus* to refer to the linen-made clothes.

<sup>23</sup> *PME* 59.

<sup>24</sup> *PME* 61.

<sup>25</sup> It was also mentioned by Ptol., *Geog.* VII, 1, 15, with the name of Μασωλία and it corresponds to the present-day city of Machilipatnam.

<sup>26</sup> *PME* 62.

<sup>27</sup> Rawlinson 1971, 123.

<sup>28</sup> *PME* 63.



Kos was used,<sup>29</sup> although it may not have been the silk of animal origin we know today.<sup>30</sup> Together with the famous overland Silk Road, definitively opened during the late Hellenistic period,<sup>31</sup> India played a major role as a half-way station for the trade in spun and manufactured silk between China and the Roman Empire.<sup>32</sup> This was mainly due to two factors: first, the knowledge of monsoon navigation which has already been mentioned and, second, the strategic position of the Parthian Empire, Rome's great enemy, situated between the Roman Empire's eastern provinces and China's cultural and commercial area of influence. The Parthian rulers were always ready to take advantage of the establishment of the Silk Road<sup>33</sup> to levy high taxes on the goods travelling through their territory,<sup>34</sup> thereby pushing up the final price of the merchandise.<sup>35</sup> In the face of such adversity, direct contact between the Roman Empire and India through the Red Sea ports of Egypt made it possible for Chinese silk to reach the Roman markets relatively quickly and safely, and at a lower overall cost than the silk reaching Syria via the overland route, as we shall see later on.<sup>36</sup>

Once again we have to turn to the information in the *Periplus* to appreciate the type of objects taken on board at the Indian ports. It is mentioned there that silk was exported in the form of both yarn and cloth.<sup>37</sup> In the former case, the merchants put in on ships at the port of Barbarikôn and Barygaza, which

it reached via the overland route through Bactria.<sup>38</sup> According to the anonymous author of the *Periplus*, the silk yarn came from a large, far-off city called Zina<sup>39</sup> –Θίνα–, a Hellenised toponym derived from Ch'in, the name of the dynasty that unified China in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC.

Silk cloth was obtained from both Barygaza and ports in south-west India such as Muziris<sup>40</sup> and Nelkinda,<sup>41</sup> where it arrived after a long journey through, among other places, the Ganges delta.

The best documented archaeological remains of textiles from India are those found on the Egyptian site of Berenike. It is thought that around 50% of the fabrics dated to the 4<sup>th</sup> century discovered in this Red Sea port were made of cotton. About half were of Nubian origin, while the other half were Z-spun, a peculiarity, coupled with the fact that blue dyes have survived on some fabrics, which has made it possible to determine with relative certainty that they came from India.<sup>42</sup> Roman Syria, and its connection with the *orbis romanus*, was also important in that its merchants, together with those of the caravan cities, played a decisive part in the commerce of silk from the country of the Seres and cashmere from Afghanistan.<sup>43</sup> The cities on the coast worked with products from the East, adding to their value with purple dye and by weaving the silk.<sup>44</sup> Purple production at Tyre and Sidon, but also in many other cities such as Gerasa and Philadelphia, boosted a textile industry for which the dyeing

<sup>29</sup> Mentioned by Arist., *HA* 555a 10 ff. Keith 2008, 194-195.

<sup>30</sup> Karttunen 1997, 218.

<sup>31</sup> During the period in which Rome mastered the Eastern Mediterranean, the Syrian city of Palmyra became the terminal point of the 'Silk Road'. The traded goods were sent from Palmyra to the harbours of Antioch and Tyre. The work of Isidorus Characenus titled *Mansiones Parthicae* (beginning of 1<sup>st</sup> century AD), describes its route from Zeugma, at the river Euphrates, to Alexandria in Arachosia –present-day Kandahar, in Afghanistan–. Millar 1998, 119-137; Belfiore 2004, 245-266. On this topic we shall see later on.

<sup>32</sup> Barber, 1991, 30-32. On the other hand, Gopal (1961, 42-64) defended the idea that India had in Antiquity its own silk industry. That is not incompatible with the role played by some harbours of the Indian subcontinent as intermediaries in the silk trade between China and Rome. About these connections, *vid.* Ferguson 1978, 581-603.

<sup>33</sup> Raschke 1978, 606-622.

<sup>34</sup> It must not be forgotten that the 'Persian Gulf and Euphrates Road' converged in Palmyra with the overland road, and it was used, at least, from the 4<sup>th</sup> millennium BC onwards. Its main center was the island Bahrein –known as Dilmun in the Sumerian texts–. Parker 2002, 70-71.

<sup>35</sup> The work known as *Hou-Han-Shu* (the annals of the last Han dynasty, 5<sup>th</sup> century AD) collected some news from the years 25-220 AD. In chapter 88, 20, it is written that Parthians were reluctant to let a direct contact between the Chinese and Roman Empires. In 97 AD, China sent an embassy to Ta-Chin (the Roman province of Syria); when the ambassadors arrived to the Persian Gulf area and tried to continue sailing to the West, some Parthian sailors persuaded them to give up after telling them the huge risks the ambassadors could face in their journey. A similar sense emerges from the information contained in chapter 88, 32 of *Hou-Han-Shu*, as well as in chapters 30, 24 and 30, 45 of *San-Kuo-Chih*, another work of V<sup>th</sup> century AD which collected information referred to the years 220-264 AD. Hirth 1885, 39, 42, 70, 72.

<sup>36</sup> Raschke 1978, 641-642, was reluctant to admit the existence of some kind of Parthian monopoly on the silk trade due to the political and military weakness of that empire. We think that the former conclusion does not exclude the possibility of a financial benefit in the form of high taxes on transactions and traffic both on silk and on other luxury goods, even despite the doubts of Raschke.

<sup>37</sup> Sidebotham 1986, 39; Karttunen 1997, 218-219.

<sup>38</sup> *PME* 39, 49, 64.

<sup>39</sup> According to Ptol., *Geog.* VII, 3, 6, it was called Sinai –Σίναϊ–, while Cosmas Indicopleustes, an Alexandrian naval officer of 6<sup>th</sup> century AD, in his *Topographia christiana* II, 45-46; XI, 15-16, referred again to the region where the silk came as Τζίνατζα.

<sup>40</sup> Shajan and Selvakumar 2006, 15-20.

<sup>41</sup> *PME* 54, 55, 56, 64.

<sup>42</sup> Wild and Wild 2005, 11-16; Wild *et al.* 2008, 145-146 (despite the questions raised by the authors).

<sup>43</sup> Rostovtzeff 1932; Sartre 2001, 796, 837; Sartre 2002, 70; Young 2001, 171-180.

<sup>44</sup> Sartre 2001, 825.

of products provided additional prestige and quality.<sup>45</sup> Nevertheless, a large proportion of these fabrics –made of silk, (locally produced) wool, animal hides, cotton and flax–, were manufactured in Palmyra, mingling Palmyran decorative motifs with Chinese ones, such as ideographic signs from Xinjiang.<sup>46</sup>

The textile industry also had a major presence in Roman Palestine. This centred particularly on flax, a raw material mentioned in the Talmudic literature together with purple,<sup>47</sup> and also in the classical literature as an export product, as can be deduced from a passage by Clement of Alexandria criticising the women of Egypt for their extravagance and for wearing linen adornments from the country of the Hebrews.<sup>48</sup>

Pausanias adds that the linen from Palestine was of high quality<sup>49</sup> and in Diocletian's *Edictum de Pretiis Maximis*<sup>50</sup> we read that the linen of Scythopolis was the dearest in the world.<sup>51</sup> However, this did not stop flax being imported into Roman Palestine from Pelusium and India.<sup>52</sup> Gregory of Tours tells us that cotton was exported from Jericho.<sup>53</sup> Nor did Palestine remain off the international trade routes for silk, although it was more an area of passage than of production.<sup>54</sup> This market of sumptuous products also included the aromas and spices of the *Arabia Felix* of the Nabataeans,<sup>55</sup> leading players, along with Egypt, on the Red Sea route and in the trade in fabrics from India.<sup>56</sup> According to the *Hou-Han-Shu*<sup>57</sup> there did not exist a monopoly or co-operation with the Parthians in regard to the silk trade, nor did this lead to continuous fruitless attempts by the Romans to subjugate the Parthian enemy.<sup>58</sup>

Egypt's tradition of textile production began in the time of the Pharaohs, but in the Roman period it

followed hard on the path marked out by the economy of the Ptolemys. This involved the output of fabrics in Alexandria<sup>59</sup> and the famous coloured cloths, or πολύμιτα, the high quality linen and cotton cloths, perhaps with the exception of mediocre wool –as Egypt imported wool from Greece, Arabia and Nubia– and silk from the Far East, possibly rewoven in Egypt with some of the ornamental motifs based on Syrian and Persian designs.<sup>60</sup> Of course, the Roman administration did not grant tax exemptions to the professions concerned with weaving, and the papyruses inform us that taxes were set for weavers, dyers, fullers, tailors, cobblers and alum-sellers.<sup>61</sup>

The Sassanids' possible monopoly and control of the Silk Road and the Romans' need to find alternative routes by setting up bases on the Red Sea through control of the Caucasian area of Iberia –established as a Roman protectorate– or Armenia, always a hotspot in Roman-Parthian relations, have already been mentioned. Evidence for the existence of this monopoly is usually based on the *Hou-Han-Shu*<sup>62</sup> and Diocletian's<sup>63</sup> attempt to break this monopoly.<sup>64</sup> The issue is controversial and the debate as to whether there existed a Parthian monopoly has not been resolved one way or the other. Whereas a few scholars have played down, minimised or simply denied the Arsacids' or the Sassanids' monopoly,<sup>65</sup> most have argued that the Persians played an indisputably key part as intermediaries between India and China and the Roman Empire through the route that reached the Mediterranean coast from China, Central Asia, Horosan, North Persia, Mesopotamia, from Seleucia to Ctesiphon via the Euphrates and as far as Zeugma.<sup>66</sup> This was a route that exacted a price in the form

<sup>45</sup> Sartre 2001, 792.

<sup>46</sup> Stauffer 1995, 57-71; Schmidt-Colinet *et al.* 2000, 60, 145, 146; Sartre 2001, 796; Sartre-Fauriat and Sartre 2008, 88; Young 2001, 128, 151.

<sup>47</sup> Safrai 1994, 192, 421.

<sup>48</sup> Clem. Al., *Paed.* 2, 20.

<sup>49</sup> Paus. V, 5, 2.

<sup>50</sup> *Edictum de Pretiis Maximis* XXVI.

<sup>51</sup> Safrai 1994, 155-156.

<sup>52</sup> Safrai 1994, 389.

<sup>53</sup> Greg. Tur., *Liber de Gloria Martyrum*, PL 71: 721; Safrai 1994, 395.

<sup>54</sup> Safrai 1994, 161.

<sup>55</sup> Bowersock 1983; Young 2001, 81 ff.

<sup>56</sup> *PME* 6-8, 24, 28, 39, 49, 56.

<sup>57</sup> *HHS* 88, 32. Hirth 1885, 13.

<sup>58</sup> Young 2001, 25-26, 176, 177, 179.

<sup>59</sup> Plin., *NH* VIII, 74.

<sup>60</sup> Préaux 1939, 93 ff.; Wipszycka 1965, 27, 37, 39.

<sup>61</sup> Wallace 1938, 193-211.

<sup>62</sup> *HHS* 88, 32.

<sup>63</sup> *SHA, Divus Aurelianus*, 29.

<sup>64</sup> Herrmann 1966, 18-19, 26-27; Thorley 1969, 209-223 (215); Wisseman 1984, 166-173; Wisseman 1982; Sonnabend 1986; Landskron 2005.

<sup>65</sup> Young 2001, 25, 26, 176, 177, 179.

<sup>66</sup> Isidorus Characenus, *Mansiones Parthicae* I.

of customs tariffs (it has been surmised that the rate charged was 25% rather than the usual 12.5%)<sup>67</sup> and a trade that did not decline after the fall of Hatra or Palmyra<sup>68</sup> and in which the Roman colony of Nisibis played a prominent role.<sup>69</sup> What is in no doubt is that relations between Romans and Parthians increased the trade in luxury goods from the Far East,<sup>70</sup> especially silk.<sup>71</sup> These commercial relations began during the Principate, intensified in late Antiquity and were probably present in all the peace treaties and all the wars, but were never, even in the most critical moments of Roman-Parthian relations, threatened or subject to restrictions.<sup>72</sup> Even in the time of Theodosius I, as can be seen from the *Justinian Code*, it was established that the *comes mercatorum* was the only person authorised to buy and sell the barbarians' silk.<sup>73</sup> Finally, in the time of Justinian attempts were made to establish diplomatic relations with the Turks to open up an alternative route and, thanks to a passage by Procopius, we know that in 552 the Byzantine emperor had silkworms brought from far-off Serinda to be acclimatised to the Byzantine Empire<sup>74</sup> so as to put an end to the dependence on the Parthian Empire and trade with the Far East.<sup>75</sup> Although this did not produce any immediate results, the passage is certainly revealing and clearly shows that the wars between Romans and Persians were closely linked to the silk trade.

There are many passages describing for us the fine dresses of the Arsacids and the Sassanids,<sup>76</sup> and exchanges of presents of purple garments were frequent. For example, the *Oracula Sibyllina*<sup>77</sup> refers to

Philip the Arab as a *purple-loving warrior*, and the *Historia Augusta* mentions the liking Odenatus and Zenobia of Palmyra had for sumptuous Persian fabrics,<sup>78</sup> and a present given to Aurelius by the king of the Persians consisting in a purple cloak from India.<sup>79</sup> Nevertheless, most of the classical sources saw in the Parthians' clothes a sign of effeminacy, of *luxuria* and *mollitia*,<sup>80</sup> such as the τρυφή of the Median dress of Surena<sup>81</sup> or the one mentioned by Pompeius Trogus.<sup>82</sup> In the process of constructing the image of Parthian otherness, dress played a leading part in representing barbarism, the Eastern enemy,<sup>83</sup> with their *laxas vestes* and *fluxa velamenta*,<sup>84</sup> with their barbarian trousers or tights, whether ostentatiously decorated or not (ἀναξυρίδες; Ancient Persian \*šara-vāra-; Greek σαράβαρα; Latin *sarabara*),<sup>85</sup> their short crossed tunics (*tunica manicata et succincta*; χιτῶν; Ancient Persian \*sarapiš and Greek σάραπις or κάπυρις)<sup>86</sup> with a V-neck or a crew neck, their caftan (κάνδυσ), femininely knotted belts (*muliebriter*) in the Persian style<sup>87</sup> and feet shod with leather boots (*zancae*).<sup>88</sup> Occasionally also, to justify a geographic determinism which was reflected in the way they dressed with leather tunics resembling the leather jackets of the Scyths,<sup>89</sup> with trousers, sometimes loose and baggy, sometimes tight-fitting on the legs, with riding chaps and high boots (*zancae*) or leather riding shoes,<sup>90</sup> with caps (πίλος/*pileus*) also of leather or felt with earflaps,<sup>91</sup> typical in the representation of Easterners in the Roman imagination, and knotted diadems fastened at the back with a bow.

<sup>67</sup> *Der Neue Pauly*, s.v. Zoll, 830; Dignas and Winter 2008, 201.

<sup>68</sup> Dignas and Winter 2008, 195-209; *vid.* Raschke 1978, 604-1378; Loewe 1971, 166-179; *vid.* for the sources Dodgeon and Lieu 1991.

<sup>69</sup> *Expositio totius mundi et gentium* 22 (p. 156 ed. Rougé).

<sup>70</sup> *Digesta* XXXIX.4.16 (7), enumerates 54 types of products taxed upon arrival in Alexandria. Parker, 2002, 41-42.

<sup>71</sup> As emphasized by the anonymous author of a work of IV AD titled *Expositio totius mundi et gentium* 19 (pp. 153-154 ed. Rougé).

<sup>72</sup> Ziegler 1964, 87-88; Dignas and Winter 2008, 203.

<sup>73</sup> *Iust.*, *Codex* IV.40.2.

<sup>74</sup> Procop., *Goth.* IV, 17, 1-8.

<sup>75</sup> Dignas and Winter 2008, 208; López 1945, 1-42.

<sup>76</sup> *Hdn.* VI, 4, 4-6; Zonar. XII, 15.

<sup>77</sup> XIII, 21.

<sup>78</sup> *SHA, Triginta Tyranni* 16, 27, 30.

<sup>79</sup> *SHA, Divus Aurelianus* 29.

<sup>80</sup> Widengren 1956; Curtis 1998, 61-73.

<sup>81</sup> *Plu.*, *Crass.* 24, 2.

<sup>82</sup> *Pomp. Trog.* XLI, 2, 4.

<sup>83</sup> Matheson 1978, 106; Schneider 1986, 29-96; Schneider 1998, 113-116; Lerouge 2007; Schneider 2007, 51; García and Albaladejo 2010, 133-140.

<sup>84</sup> *Luc.* VIII, 362-387; *Pomp. Trog.* XLI, 2, 4; *Tac.*, *Ger.* 17, 1.

<sup>85</sup> *Hdn.* IV, 11, 3; IV, 11, 6.

<sup>86</sup> *Pollux* VII, 58; VII, 61.

<sup>87</sup> *Curt.* III, 3, 17-19.

<sup>88</sup> *SHA, Divus Claudius* 17, 6.

<sup>89</sup> *Pomp. Trog.* XLI, 2, 4.

<sup>90</sup> *SHA, Divus Claudius* 17, 6.

<sup>91</sup> *Str.* XV, 3, 19; *Mart.* X, 72.



### Daily life, mentality, and *mos maiorum*

Although the use of oriental fabrics was a common custom among the upper strata of the population, the morality of the *mos maiorum* was severely critical of such refined tastes, typical of the vice of *luxuria*, seeing in them the danger or origin of the decadence of the good, austere virtues and customs of the ancestors who had led Rome to create an empire. Abuse of such commodities opened up the way also to *mollitia*, the effeminacy of customs, another evil that was lethal to the good health and greatness of Rome.

Many of the prestige goods from the East consisted in articles to do with textile production and the adornment of the body, such as silk and decorated cotton, fans made of peacock tail feathers, which, together with precious stones, aromatic plants, incense and dyes –such as purple–, ivory, coral, spices, and exotic animals –such as ostriches, tigers and the pet parrot of Ovid’s beloved Corinna,<sup>92</sup> which came from India–, were presumably consumed only by the wealthiest members of Roman society. In the sources, mentions of some of these prestige goods to do with dress abound. The *Edictum de Pretiis Maximis* provides various details about the prices and taxation of wild and reprocessed silk,<sup>93</sup> of purple for dyeing<sup>94</sup> and many other products from the East –fragrances from Arabia, fabrics from Alexandria,<sup>95</sup> materials from India, silk from China (in the graves of Palmyra), animal hides from the markets of Palmyra and Persia–, products bought as raw materials or already manufactured. Nevertheless, in order to compare the actual situation with people’s mentality, it is extremely useful to examine the contrast between the information that tells us that these items were in normal use as status symbols and acquired by consumers in luxury shops in the *Via Sacra*, near the *Forum*,<sup>96</sup> in the *vicus Tuscus*,<sup>97</sup> or in other markets,<sup>98</sup> on the one hand, and the harsh value judgements concerning these items found in the elegiac poets and the stoic philosophers, on the other. The fact is that the elegiac poets’ choice of words is highly ambiguous and they did not use to

employ specific terms in describing dress (*uestes*) or indicating where it came from. Corinna appears before Ovid with her tunic wrapped loose –*tunica velata recincta*–,<sup>99</sup> although mention of the garment’s lightness may refer to a sumptuous fabric,<sup>100</sup> like the comparison of hair unspoiled by curling or dyeing with the cloths of the *Seres*.<sup>101</sup> Similarly, in mentioning the shops on the *Via Sacra*, Ovid and Propertius opt for generic terms such as *munera*, *dona* or even, ironically, *uilia dona* (trifles), this last expression probably more to do with the poets’ intention of highlighting the insubstantial and superfluous nature of such goods for women rather than their cheap price.

It is perhaps in Pliny that the criticism of luxury, of *luxuria*, appears most profusely. It is found in a passage of the *Natural History* in which he talks about wool, for example Asian wool from Laodicea in Caria, Erythraean red wool from the Troy area or the excellent quality of the extremely strong wool from Egypt.<sup>102</sup> After making an exhaustive comparison between the old praiseworthy ways of dressing of the elders, from the virtuous Tanaquil with her spinning wheel and spindle, he goes on to describe the reprehensible new ways of dressing that have come in from the East, from Asia: Phrygian garments embroidered with gold, interweavings in different colours from Babylonia, *polymitia* or damask cloths woven with many threads from Alexandria and, displaying the use of hyperbole to denounce luxury, live animal skins dyed purple, scarlet or violet.<sup>103</sup> Reference to the fabrics of Babylon goes back a long way. So, for example, it is found in Plautus<sup>104</sup> and the passage by Petronius in which he denounces how *insatiable luxury crumbles the walls of war*, associated, of course, with Babylonian tapestry (*palato Babylonico*), pearls and corals from India that were the undoing of Roman matrons or of the married woman wearing *garments of woven wind* and exhibiting herself *naked ... in gossamer tissue*.<sup>105</sup> But it is Martial’s epigrams that reveal most clearly the tone of moral censure, often as an acute display of satirical creativity concerning dress and the new times dominated by luxury from the looms of the

<sup>92</sup> Ov., *Am.* II, 6, 1.

<sup>93</sup> *Edictum de Pretiis Maximis* XXIII. 1-2.

<sup>94</sup> *Edictum de Pretiis Maximis* XXIV. 1-1a.

<sup>95</sup> Plin., *NH* VIII, 74; *PME* 6-8, 24, 28, 39, 49, 56.

<sup>96</sup> Ov., *Am.* I, 8, 100: *munera*; *AA* II, 265-6: *dona*; Prop. II, 24a, 13-14: *uilia dona*.

<sup>97</sup> Mart. XI, 27, 11: *de Tusco Serica uico*; *CIL* VI, 9976, 33923, *uestiarius*; *CIL* XIV, 2433, *purpurarius*.

<sup>98</sup> Young 2001, 21-22.

<sup>99</sup> Ov., *Am.* I, 5, 9.

<sup>100</sup> Ov., *Am.* I, 5, 13.

<sup>101</sup> Ov., *Am.* I, 14, 6: *uela colorati qualia Seres habent*.

<sup>102</sup> Plin., *NH* VIII, 73.

<sup>103</sup> Plin., *NH* VIII, 74.

<sup>104</sup> Plaut., *St.* 378; *Ps.* 147-148.

<sup>105</sup> Petron., *Sat.* 55, 6: *uentum textilem, palam prostare nudam in nebula linea*.

Nile and the needle of Semiramis of Babylonia,<sup>106</sup> the Babylonian queen being a prime symbol of eastern fondness for the luxury of coloured coverlets<sup>107</sup> and amethyst-coloured wool drunk with the blood of Sidonian shellfish denuded of *sobrietas*.<sup>108</sup>

Purple is also associated by Pliny with *luxuria* and *mollitia* in describing how much material for luxury there is in the sea in the form of the molluscs, including the murex –moral corruption and luxury spring from no other source in greater abundance than from the genus shell-fish–,<sup>109</sup> especially the costly *purpura dibapha*, the twice-dyed purple of Tyre<sup>110</sup> –reason sprang up next, and a defect was turned into a success by marvellous inventions, and a double path pointed out for luxury–<sup>111</sup> excused only by the fact that purple forms part of the *trabea* or embroidered ceremonial robe of the kings, of the Salian priests and the augurs, of the magistrates' *toga praetexta*, of the clothes worn by children until they are sixteen or by the sacred symbolism in the case of the *pontifex maximus* and the *rex sacrorum*.<sup>112</sup> To purple might be added the pearls from Orient, signs of decadent extravagance.<sup>113</sup>

The moral judgements passed on silk were hardly less harsh, such as the silkworm (*bombyx*) of Kos, which was used to make luxurious transparent dresses for women or *coa vestis*,<sup>114</sup> a luxury garment also dyed purple<sup>115</sup> and with gold embroidery<sup>116</sup> that was morally associated with women of ill repute, as it consisted in nothing other than *a plan to reduce women's clothing to nakedness*.<sup>117</sup> This was also a very fashionable vice among Roman men who preferred to use and abuse the Assyrian *bombyx* to wearing armour,<sup>118</sup> a metaphor that once again connotes

the softening of the *éthos*, of the character, of the *mos*. Cleopatra, of course, a symbol of Oriental *luxuria*, wore transparent and diaphanous gowns made of Chinese silk –dyed with Sidon purple and sewn with the needles of the Nile–,<sup>119</sup> such as the *laxas vestes* and the *fluxa velamenta* of the Parthian enemy.<sup>120</sup> Plutarch also criticised as unbecoming of the perfect wife the use of silk or purple-dyed garments,<sup>121</sup> although it may not have been unusual for silk ribbons to be worn as an adornment for the hair.<sup>122</sup>

The use of silk, however, was linked especially to the East and the territory of the Seres, or China, and Florus even writes that the standards of the Parthians at the battle of Carrhae, adorned with silk and gold, fascinated Crassus's soldiers.<sup>123</sup> Nevertheless, what was most common in the Augustan period was the association of silk with China and its use was so habitual among men that, according to Tacitus, at the time of the emperor Tiberius, during a heated debate in the Senate in 16 AD, there was a lengthy discussion on luxury in the Urbs and it was decreed that *men not dishonour themselves by wearing silk clothing*.<sup>124</sup> Caligula was one of the maximum exponents of such dishonour, as, on occasion, he liked to wear long feminine silk clothes, yet another example of effeminacy, or *mollitia*, and an attire unfitting of his country and unworthy of a citizen.<sup>125</sup> This same criticism of the use of silk would continue among Christian authors, such as Tertulian in *De Pallio*<sup>126</sup> and Clement of Alexandria in *Paedagogus*.<sup>127</sup>

Silk clothes were plentiful in the wardrobes of the imperial family and, to give just one example, in 176 Marcus Aurelius, finding the public treasury empty following the campaign against the Marcomans, Sar-

<sup>106</sup> Mart. VIII, 28, 17; XIV, 150.

<sup>107</sup> Mart. XIV, 136.

<sup>108</sup> Mart. XIV, 154.

<sup>109</sup> Plin., *NH IX*, 104: *cum populatio morum atque luxuria*.

<sup>110</sup> Plin., *NH IX*, 105, 127, 136, 137, 139; Hor., *Epod.* 12, 21; Cic., *Att.* 2, 9, 2; Ov., *AA III*, 171; Sen., *Herc. Oet.* 663.

<sup>111</sup> Plin., *NH IX*, 140: *portentosis ingeniis*.

<sup>112</sup> Plin., *NH IX*, 127.

<sup>113</sup> Plin., *NH IX*, 56, 114: *exquisita perditu nepotatu*.

<sup>114</sup> Arist., *NH 555a* 10 ff.; Plin., *HN XI*, 26, 76; Tib. II, 4, II, 6; Prop. I, 2, II, 1, IV, 2, IV, 5; Hor., *Carm.* IV, 13, 13; *Satur.* I, 2, 101; Ov., *AA II*, 298; Mart. VIII, 33, 16. Parker, 2002, 48, 60, 61.

<sup>115</sup> Hor., *Carm.* IV, 13, 13; *Satur.* I, 2, 101.

<sup>116</sup> Tib. II, 6.

<sup>117</sup> Plin., *NH XI*, 26, 76: *ut denudet feminas vestis*; Petron., *Sat.* 55, 15.

<sup>118</sup> Plin., *NH XI*, 27, 78.

<sup>119</sup> Luc. X, 141.

<sup>120</sup> Luc. VIII, 362-387; Pomp. Trog. 41, 2, 4; Tac., *Ger.* 17, 1.

<sup>121</sup> Plu., *Moralia II*, 12, 144E, 145E.

<sup>122</sup> Mart. XIV, 24.

<sup>123</sup> Flor. III, 11.

<sup>124</sup> Tac., *Ann.* II, 33: *ne vestis Serica viros foedaret*; Dio Cassius LVII, 15; Suda, s.v. *Τιβέριος*.

<sup>125</sup> Suet., *Cal.* 52: *vestitu calciatuque et cetero habitu neque patrio neque civili, ac ne virili quidem ac denique humano semper usus est*; Dio Cassius LIX, 12; I., *BI VII*, 5, 4. Parker 2002, 61.

<sup>126</sup> Tert., *De Pallio* 4.

<sup>127</sup> Clem. Al., *Paed.* 2, 10.

matians, Vandals and Quads, yet wishing to celebrate a victory in Rome without squeezing the provinces any more with taxes, held a public auction in Trajan's Forum in which he also sold off his wife's silk and gold dresses.<sup>128</sup> Pertinax too held an auction with the clothes of Commodus, silk garments embroidered with gold yarn and Dalmatian sleeved tunics, typical of Celtic and Asian peoples and a symbol of effeminacy.<sup>129</sup> Aurelianus also rid his wardrobe of gold-embroidered and purple-dyed silk clothes (*pallio batteo serico*)<sup>130</sup> and forbade his wife to wear them. He also had the intention of requiring his nobles to hand over their tunics because of the huge amount of gold embroidered on them that could be melted down.

In the Lower Empire the use of silk became a symbol of power, a status symbol of the imperial family and the court. This went so far under the last emperors as their having sumptuous linen tunics made with gold and silk borders (*limbus*) in the imperial gynaeceum known as *paragaudae*.<sup>131</sup> Undoubtedly neither all the previous legal provisions nor the moral warnings by various Roman authors were able to put an end to the fondness for luxury of the higher echelons of Roman society expressed in their passion for the exotic cloths and dyes that came from very far-off lands.

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<sup>128</sup> *SHA*, Marcus Aurelius 17.

<sup>129</sup> *SHA*, Helvius Pertinax 8, 2.

<sup>130</sup> *SHA*, Divus Aurelianus 45-46.

<sup>131</sup> *SHA*, Divus Aurelianus 15; Iust., *Codex XI*, tit. 9 s1, 2 Krueger; Lyd., *Mag.* i.17, ii.4, 13.

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Este libro recoge los trabajos presentados en el IV Symposium Internacional sobre Textiles y Tintes del Mediterráneo celebrado en Valencia (noviembre de 2010), en el espléndido marco del Museo Nacional de Cerámica González Martí de Valencia. Como en los anteriores ejemplares de esta misma serie, los trabajos desarrollados en él se caracterizan por su interdisciplinariedad y por el deseo de mostrar las muchas facetas que el estudio de los textiles y los tintes antiguos (o de cualquier otra época) permiten. No en vano la mayoría de sus autores formaron parte, en su día, del Proyecto DressID (Clothing and Identities: new perspectives on textiles in the Roman Empire, 2007-2012) y ésta era una de las máximas metodológicas que les guiaba. En todos ellos pueden encontrarse elementos que permiten mejorar nuestra visión sobre la Producción y el Comercio de materiales que se utilizaron para cubrir las muchas necesidades de la vida cotidiana a la vez que constituyeron la base del desarrollo económico de áreas y culturas diferentes aunque más o menos emparentadas. El territorio del Imperio Romano y aquellos colindantes (o mucho más lejanos, como en el caso del Oriente asiático) permitieron el intercambio de ideas, formas de hacer y desarrollo de la moda. Solamente el tiempo (que enriquecerá el acervo común con continuas aportaciones), los nuevos hallazgos de textiles *in situ*, así como el trabajo basado en la realidad social, laboral, religiosa, legal o identitaria del pasado, permitirá un mejor conocimiento de este campo de investigación.



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