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Ovid *Met.* 6.9: Idmon's Dye

By Howard Jacobson, Urbana

Ovid begins his narrative of the tale of Arachne with some information about her family background. *Inter alia* we are told that her father, Idmon of Colophon, would dye wool with the purple dye of the murex (*Phocaico bibulas tingebat murice lanas*: 6.9). Commentators note the occasional piece of evidence for the use of dying in Lydia (e.g. Pliny *NH* 7.196), though nothing explicitly referring to Colophon (or Phocaea, for that matter). So I note here an interesting text that explicitly associates Colophon with purple dye.

In a fragment of the sixth century elegiac poet Xenophanes of Colophon, he reports (presumably based on autopsy) that in Colophon 1000 men would meet in assembly dressed in all-purple garb¹. Scholars debate whether the clothing reflected merely the wealth of the 1000 or was a sign of their authority. Be this as it may, the text makes it clear that there was an ample market for the product of a purple-dyer in Colophon².

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1 Xenoph. *Fg.* 3 Diels-Kranz (Athen. 15.526a–b).

2 The story of the purple-garbed men of Colophon was known in Rome in the first century. See Cic. *Rep.* 6.2.