TEXTILES

The role played by textiles in interior decoration in France in the eighteenth century was a capital one. During the reign of Louis XIV, the efforts of his minister Colbert had ensured that French tapestry, the worthy descendant of the great northern tradition of tapestry weaving, became the finest in Europe. Similarly, the French silk industry, born to imitate products from Italy and further afield, assumed a leading role in Europe. Just as it had done with other products of French industry, the civilized world supplied itself with French textiles, which were exported as far afield as China and Peru.

THE SAVONNERIE

Workshops producing carpets velouté façon de Turquie (like velvet, with a thick knotted pile) were established at the Louvre in the early seventeenth century as part of Henri IV’s initiative to revive industry and the arts after the Wars of Religion. By 1671, these had moved to a disused soap works (hence the name Savonnerie) at Chaillot on the western outskirts of Paris. From 1714, there was a single workshop, managed by an entrepreneur (contractor).

The early production of these workshops consisted of carpets for floors and tables, with flowers on a dark background, but, by the time of the summit of Louis XIV’s reign in the 1680s, they were already being woven to designs provided by the great team which, under Charles Le Brun, created a unified style in art as a means of glorifying the King.

From then on, designs were supplied almost exclusively by artists working for the Crown, and fulfilled a double function, playing a part in the general decorative scheme of a project, and, more importantly (once a design had been approved and was found to be successful), being woven again and again, even if fashion had changed, until the cartoon became so worn that it was no longer usable.

Carpets formed the principal production of the Savonnerie, but other types of objects were woven there as well, such as panels for folding screens and firescreens, covers for chairs and benches, pictures copying oil paintings, including portraits, and portières (door curtains). The Savonnerie made more of these in the first half of the eighteenth century than during the neoclassical period, when woven silks, the principal competition for Savonnerie in these fields, became even more popular.

Fortune did not always favour the Savonnerie. The Duc d’Antin reported to Louis XIV in 1708 that it was on the point of collapse (“cette belle Manufacture est sur le point de sa chute”), and that he intended to reverse this situation. In the event, the Louis XV period marked a high point. The King, in the company of Marigny and Gabriel, was generally personally involved in the choice of designs, and annotated alternatives bear the royal “bon” in his own hand, in addition to the phrase “bon à choisir”, the formula signifying that a design was worthy of being submitted to him. The lack of interest shown by Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette in the Savonnerie may have contributed to the fact that in carpet design the Louis XV period was more successful than that which followed.

Most of the Savonnerie’s production was intended for the King. Carpets and other pieces went to the Garde-Meuble where they were kept until they were needed, either for a room in one of the palaces or to be given to foreign dignitaries. Savonnerie carpets featured among thesplendid presents given by Louis XV to the Ottoman Sultan in 1742, not only did he want to show the Sultan that his country could manage without Turkish carpets, he also wanted to impress him with the quality and richness of French carpets, woven on this occasion with borders of gold thread. The gesture was somewhat ironic since Turkish carpets (like English ones) were the subject of almost prohibitive customs duties upon entry into France, and were therefore uncommon.
Savonnerie paravent (screen) of the first half of the eighteenth century, one of a pair. At 2.73 m, these represent the tallest of the screens woven by the Savonnerie, and were probably intended for a salon or large antichambre in one of the royal palaces. The cartoons for this screen were provided in 1714 by François Desportes for the birds, and by Jean-Baptiste Blain de Fontenay for the surrounds.

Painted design, circa 1720, by François Desportes, for the leaf of a Savonnerie screen.
Other clientele could aspire to owning such prestigious works of art, but it has been estimated that not more than fifty carpets were woven as private commissions by the Savonnerie during the eighteenth century. Marigny, as Directeur des Bâtiments, was naturally well placed to own some, and a design survives for a carpet he commissioned in 1769 in imitation of tiger skin. Among complete outsiders was William Beckford, who arrived from England in 1792, at a moment when the Savonnerie was delighted to find someone who took an interest in their expensive product. Two small carpets, intended for his father’s Adam house, Fonthill Splendens, were woven to designs executed especially for Beckford, and in keeping with the Adam interiors.

The Duvivier family, entrepreneurs at the Savonnerie from 1743 to 1826, took an active part in every aspect of the production, including translating sketches into detailed cartoons. Pierre-Josse Perrot was the artist responsible for many of the finest cartoons of the Louis XV period; his panels framed by scrolls with flowers and leaves are among the happiest inventions of the eighteenth century. Soufflot, the architect who had accompanied Marigny to Italy in 1749, became inspecteur at the Savonnerie in 1755; it was, however, a little-known artist called Michel-Bruno Bellengé who was to interpret neoclassicism for the Savonnerie in a set of fluent cartoons making use not of architectural detail but of arabesques incorporating elegant vases and garlands of flowers.

Savonnerie carpet, woven in the Duvivier workshop, from a cartoon by P. J. Perrot. Similar carpets were woven for Fontainebleau and Choisy between 1744 and 1756.
Woven Tapestry

The great tapestries of the seventeenth century were slightly out of place in the new interiors of the eighteenth, but they nevertheless continued to be hung in rooms for which solemnity was the prime requirement; for example at Versailles, where seventeenth-century and even Renaissance tapestries decorated the Grands Appartements until the end of the ancien régime.

Tapestry increasingly tried to imitate paintings in order to fit in with modern decoration, to the extent that dyes were multiplied to provide an increased number of colours and shades within colours, and the borders of tapestries were woven to resemble giltwood picture frames. Indeed some tapestries were woven without borders: “Borders can be applied to these tapestries, but they can also be framed in giltwood, if you prefer not to have tapestry borders,” wrote Cozette, one of the Gobelins entrepreneur, to Claude Bonnet in 1754.

Many of the finest painters provided cartoons for tapestry weaving, but two names are of paramount importance, to the Gobelins and to Beauvais as well as indirectly to Aubusson: Jean-Baptiste Oudry and François Boucher.

The Gobelins

Louis XIV’s furniture and tapestry workshops, lodged in a building formerly occupied by the Gobelins family (hence the name) had closed in 1694 for economic reasons, but reopened in 1699. It had the status of Manufacture Royale, and much of its production was intended for the King, either for decorating one of the royal palaces, or as presents. The workshops within the Gobelins had some degree of independence, and others could approach one of the entrepreneur for private commissions.

Cartoons were ordered from leading painters. These consisted of a number of paintings, from which tentures (sets of hangings) were woven, some of these comprise a large number of tapestries. The cartoons were kept, to be used repeatedly for a period of many years. The designs for the borders of the tapestries, usually in the style of giltwood picture frames, were periodically updated, so that an early tenture of a subject may have a different border to a late one.

During the reign of Louis XIV, ponderous subjects such as the King’s victories were chosen for tapestries, but the eighteenth century saw a greater variety, in a more charming and exotic vein, as the art of tapestry became increasingly associated with interior decoration rather than forming part of the architecture. L’Ambassade Turque of 1731, after cartoons by Charles Parrocel, represented an attempt to retain the grand manner, but with the elegance of the new age; in the event, it was discontinued, and in 1735 Oudry was asked for cartoons for a new and

"Le Triomphe de Vénus", Gobelins tapestry from a cartoon by Noel Coypel. Inspired by a sixteenth-century original, it was woven in the bataille workshops of Jans the Younger, and was part of a set begun in 1705 and completed in 1713. In 1717 the tenture was housed in the French embassy in Sweden, and from 1748-91 in the French embassy in Rome.
different *tentre*, the *Chasses du Roi*. In the same year he was appointed Inspecteur sur les Ouvrages at the Gobelins. The *Chasses du Roi* was one of the Gobelins' great successes; *L'ambassade Turque* had been an unruly jumble of figures on horseback, but here the occasional figure, dressed in the blue of the royal hunting uniform, is glimpsed against the beautiful royal forests, a background reminiscent of the lush foliage of traditional *verdure*. The cartoons' enduring popularity is proved by the fact that Louis XVI had them copied on porcelain by Sèvres in 1782 for his dining room at Versailles.

Charles-Antoine Coypel provided the Gobelins from 1714 onwards with a set of twenty-eight paintings for the *Histoire de Don Quichote* which continued to be woven until the revolution. A set of these could comprise several large *pièces*, as well as other smaller ones and overdors. This *tentre* signalled a new departure: the picture in the centre has become smaller, and is almost a mere pretext for a breathtaking *alentour* (border) incorporating a background of one-colour damask (red or yellow), brilliantly patterned, upon which elaborate gilt frames, trophies and garlands of flowers, peacocks with tails outspread, cornucopias and coats of arms completely overshadow

*Louis XVI armchair,* probably by Jean-Baptiste-Claude Sené, covered in Gobelins tapestry. The seat cover is identical to those on chairs that match the first *Tenture de Boucher*, woven in 1764 for Lord Coventry (now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York).
"Les Noces d'Angélique", Gobelins tapestry of a scene from the opera *Roland et Armide*, from the *Texture de l'Opéra*, finished in 1749. The cartoon was painted by Charles Coypel, who exhibited it at the Salon in 1737, and the tapestry was woven by Monnerqué. The borders, simulating a giltwood picture frame, were designed by P. J. Perrot. Presented by Louis XV in 1765 to Paul-Jérôme, Duc de Grimaldi, the Spanish ambassador to Paris.
the central shaped panel, which is nevertheless highly exotic, with figures in Spanish costumes indulging in scenes of total buffoonery taken from the great novel by Cervantes. The designs for the borders varied, and several artists were involved in each, including Michel Audran and Alexis Peyrotte.

Upon Oudry's death in 1755, Boucher, who had already painted two of his greatest pictures, Le Lever du Soleil and Le Coucher du Soleil, (now in the Wallace Collection), as cartoons for tapestries to be woven by the Gobelins for Madame de Pompadour in 1752, was named Surinspecteur there by Marigny, and ceased working for the Beauvais factory. His major work for the Gobelins consisted of a set simply known as the Tenture de Boucher for which he provided paintings of Olympian gods, often as pairs of lovers. These were designed along the same principles as the Histoire de Don Quichotte for the picture is confined to a central oval again surrounded by a frame imitating giltwood (as does the outer border). The whole seems to hang from the ceiling on brightly coloured ribbons tied in a knot at the top of the tapestry, on a damask background with garlands of flowers. Maurice Jacques was responsible for the designs of these borders, with the assistance of Louis Tessier for the flowers.

Designed to form the complete decoration of rooms, these tentures comprised tapestries for each wall panel, even the small ones at the side of the chimney and overdoors. They also included complete sets of seat and screen covers, some of which have oval scenes within them while others are merely decorated with garlands of flowers. The first set was woven from 1764, and was bought by an Englishman, Lord Coventry. There is nothing surprising in this, since the end of the Seven Years War had drawn the English to Paris in large numbers, but it does seem strange that every single version of this particular set went abroad, some being sold and others given, such as the set given by Louis XVI to the Comte du Nord. Madame de Genlis was to complain that it had become the fashion to relegate Gobelins tapestries to storage and replace them with English blue paper, and perhaps the Gobelins' production was more at home in foreign palaces than in Paris houses and apartments.

As well as weaving pictorial tapestries, the Gobelins was responsible for portières (door curtains). These were often armorial, with elaborate borders, but one of the Gobelins' first and most successful patterns was the Portières des Dieux followed in 1727 by the Portières aux Armes de France for which the cartoons had been provided by Perrot, in a style similar to the work he was executing for the Savonnerie at the same time.

**BEAUVAIS**

The Beauvais factory benefited from the same status of Manufacture Royale as the Gobelins, but with greater independence, since most of its production was for public sale. In the early eighteenth century, Beauvais underwent financial problems, but nevertheless managed to produce splendid sets such as L'île de Cythère ou le Temple de Vénus, a tenture of six pièces, from cartoons by Jacques Duplessis in 1724. Brightly coloured exotic coastal landscapes with classical buildings contain figures in Eastern costumes, putti and classical gods. Elaborate trophies
of love abound in the borders, incorporating quivers, lyres, putti and swans.

Jean-Baptiste Oudry's involvement with tapestry weaving began in 1726 when he began to supply cartoons to the Beauvais factory; in 1734 he became the factory's director, in partnership with one of the great silversmiths of the first half of the eighteenth century, Nicolas Besnier. His cartoons mainly showed nature in various forms, but he could venture into new ground, providing, for instance, a set after Molière, and one of Mélanthroposes. Upon his appointment as Surinspecteur at the Gobelins he ceased to paint cartoons for Beauvais himself, but successfully found other painters to do so instead. Felicitously, his choice fell upon the young Boucher, whose first tenture, the Fêtes

"Le jardin chinois", one of the five pièces of a Beauvais Tenture Chinoise of 1750-54, from cartoons by Boucher. There is little that is Chinese about this lady at her toilette, except perhaps her hairstyle and the blue-and-white vases, but the luxuriant vegetation, the parasol and the colourful costumes all convey an exotic and Utopian feeling. The original oil sketch for the design, now in the Musée des Beaux Arts, Besançon, is larger and incorporates further Chinese figures and a Chinese pavilion.

LEFT

Early eighteenth-century panels of Beauvais tapestry with decorative and allegorical motifs.
Beauvais carpet of arabesque style and in tapestry weave, late 1780s. De Menou, the director of the Beauvais factory, also produced such carpets in Savonnerie weave.

Mid-eighnteenth-century Aubusson tapestry.
Italiennes (four pièces) of 1734-5, showing groups of figures in landscapes (some of which were used by Vincennes for biscuit groups), was followed by L'Histoire de Psyché in 1736, and a Tenture Chinoise in 1741 (see page 207). After Boucher joined the Gobelins his cartoons, as well as Oudry's, continued to be employed at Beauvais, on account of their popularity, and because Beauvais found it difficult to obtain cartoons by competent artists. When Jean-Baptiste Le Prince exhibited at the Salon in 1767 a set of cartoons for Beauvais for a tenture to be called Les Jeux Russiens (as usual there was little that was Russian about it) Diderot complained of the poor composition and of a "dirty colour".

While still producing wall tapestries such as Huet's Pastoralas à draperies bleues et arabesques during the reign of Louis XVI, Beauvais turned to the manufacture of two other specialities of note; seat covers and carpets. Large suites of Louis XVI seat furniture, normally by the menuisier Henri Jacob, have survived with Beauvais tapestry covers of garlands of flowers and ribbons, but other subjects were also attempted, notably a set comprising wall tapestries as well as seat covers. These were woven in the late 1780s to the designs of Jean-Jacques-François Le Barbier with scenes symbolizing the role played by France in the War of American Independence. It was ordered by Louis XVI to give to George Washington, but sadly seems not to have reached him.

In 1789 the new director at Beauvais, de Menou, who had come from the Aubusson factory, started production of carpets in the style of the Savonnerie; Aubusson had been engaged in this activity since the mid-eighteenth century, and he realised that Beauvais too could imitate the Savonnerie cheaply. Carpets of tapestry weave as well as façon de Perse (woven with a pile) enjoyed considerable success in the years preceding the revolution.

**AUUBUSON**

To revive the independent tapestry workshops at Aubusson in central France, which had been seriously depleted by the mass exodus consequent upon the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685, a painter; Jean-Jacques du Mon, and a technical adviser from the Gobelins were both sent there in the 1750s, and until the end of the eighteenth century Aubusson was to produce charming tapestries of pastoral scenes, some woven from discarded cartoons of the Gobelins and Beauvais, and some with subjects drawn from the engravings of Boucher and others. Verdures remained popular, and Aubusson competed with Flanders in this field. As well as tapestries, Aubusson began to weave cheaper versions of Savonnerie carpets in the mid-eighteenth century, sometimes to designs pilfered from the Savonnerie itself.

**UPHOLSTERY: SILK AND OTHER TEXTILES**

Jean-François Bimont, a maître-tapisseur, published in 1770 an updated version of an upholsterer's manual he had written some years previously. In this work, the Principes de l'art du Tapissier, he seeks to instruct his colleagues about current practice in upholstery, both on the nature and use of materials, and in the technical aspects of the craft. He insists on the importance of knowing how to use the patterns woven or printed on a material: "the principal flowers should be placed centrally on walls, and at eye level", "the principal flower panel must without fail be placed on the back of chairs." If the pattern is too big to fit entirely on the back of a chair, the lower part of the bouquet should be placed on the seat. When using striped materials, care should be taken to ensure that "two stripes of the same colour should not be sewn together", and lengths of it should be used sideways to form borders at top and bottom. The gilt nails used to fix materials to chairs should have a small space between them, and should not be placed too close to the edge of the frame in order not to damage it when they are hammered on. Another useful tip given by Bimont concerns curtains; to avoid getting them dirty they should always be fitted with pulls. Realistically, he concludes his advice with the comment that the work can only be as good as the budget is large.

Damask, Bimont tells us, is the material most frequently employed in upholstery. It may be plain coloured, or have a background of one colour and one or more colours in the pattern. This is appropriate to cover a meuble d'hiver (winter set), as is tapestry, while for a meuble d'été (summer set) a taffetas à fleurs ou chine is preferable.

Curtain, wall and furniture upholstery could be changed with the seasons. This extravagant practice took place at Versailles twice a year, the autumn change happening during the Royal household's yearly stay at Fontainebleau. Lesser households often included a servant called a valet de chambre tapissier whose job it was to carry out this change, but

**Red, green and cream silk damask, mid-eighteenth century. An example of one of the most widely used upholstery materials.**

Marie Antoinette's salon des jeux at the Château de Compiègne, 1786.
Pelmet from a bed or window, wool embroidery on linen, about 1720-30.

Bimont is happy to advise those on a budget to fit loose covers of, say, white silk with flowers, for the summer. Some of the finest seat furniture of the Louis XV and Louis XVI periods is built so that the upholstery can be removed; the back, seat and armrests are upholstered on to frames which unclip and can be replaced by others covered in a different material. This type of chair is known as à châssis. While it may have been usual to have a meuble d’hiver and a meuble d’été, occasionally more are found. Bonnet wrote to Dutillet in Parma in 1749 to tell him that he had ordered designs for “three different [sets]… for winter, spring and summer”.

Lyon weavers produced the finest silks of the eighteenth century (many of them for the Garde-Meuble), but with interruptions which periodically brought the industry to its knees. In 1730, the first major royal orders since the reign of Louis XIV revived the Grande Fabrique, as the weavers working for the Crown were known.

The earliest sets of silk hangings woven in the 1750s for the Garde-Meuble were executed in a traditional style, with patterns reminiscent of those of the Louis XIV period. On backgrounds of crimson or blue were symmetrical arrangements of leaves, scrolls, flower garlands and strapwork in gold and silver thread. Since these were to be used for covering surfaces of varying sizes and shapes, the patterns were woven accordingly, with different repeats for chair seats and backs, and separate vertical and horizontal borders for the wall hangings. This practice was to remain current throughout the century for luxury materials, and during the Louis XVI period, when seat upholstery became more angular, thin strips of matching border were woven for the edges of seats and backs.

On 28 September 1754 the tapissier (upholsterer) Le Queustre delivered a set of bedroom furniture for the Chambre du Roi at Fontainebleau. This very large and elaborate ameublement (suite) is a perfect if exaggerated example of usual practice in the eighteenth century. It comprised a bed, two armchairs, two carreaux (thickly stuffed cushions), twelve pliants (X-frame stools) one firescreen, one folding screen, wall hangings (including an overdoor panel) and curtains, all in Lyon silk with gold flowers on a blue ground, edged with gold braid, apart from one curtain which for some reason was of white damask. The silk had been woven in Lyon in 1738 to designs by Lallié, and the Duc de Luynes approvingly noted that “the more one contemplates this room, the more splendid it seems.”

The bed, described as a lit à l’Impériale et à la Duchesse (not only was the canopy domed but it was of square outline) was extravagantly upholstered: valences with added gold embroidery and elaborate fringes were surmounted by four gilt helmets each bearing thirty loose white feathers and an aigrette (plume). The curtains, lined with plain blue satin, were garnished with paillettes (sequins) and other ornaments, and the shaped backboard was enriched with leaves and ornaments of raised gold embroidery. The King slept on no less than four mattresses, and was kept warm by a white satin quilt. The matching furniture, as well as its upholstery of the same silk, bore loose covers of another heavy blue silk, and the firescreen was fitted with a cord of blue and gold with a lead-filled pear-shaped tassel.

In the first half of the eighteenth century, silk designers native to Lyon provided most of the models for the weavers. An exception was the design for the pilaster-shaped vertical borders of a tenture made by Barnier between 1730 and 1733. These were the work of the

Silk woven with a pattern of coral and flowering branches designed by Philippe de Lasalle, 1765-70.
RIGHT

Lyon silk *lampas* with silver thread, circa 1735. A characteristic example of the work of Jean Revel, with exotic motifs symbolizing Love, making this a suitable fabric for the upholstery of a bedroom in a *petite maison*.

Chiné velvet by Camille Pernon, 1788. Ordered from Pernon for the Court of Spain, some of this material is still in place in the Casita del Príncipe in the Prado.
celebrated silversmith Thomas Germain. In 1725, the Lyon silk weavers petitioned the King to obtain protection from plagiarism of their designs. They stated that they spent considerable sums on training their designers, and that every year they sent them to Paris to observe the latest fashions, but that many of them tried to sell their designs to more than one weaver at the same time, or, worse, to foreigners.

From the mid-eighteenth century, many of the designs for Lyon silk were provided by the Garde-Meuble's own designers, such as Peyrotte and Gondoin, and later Dugouyc. Multicoloured garlands of ribbon-tied flowers on light and bright backgrounds gradually adopted a more symmetrical appearance with the advent of neoclassicism, becoming enclosed in frail arabesques. A new style emerged for the 1780s, exemplified by the salon des jeux of Louis XVI at Fontainebleau in 1786. This was upholstered with panels of shiny blue silk with pale arabesques incorporating cyclops, winged seahorses, river gods and spaniels. At three aunes (3.57 m), the repeat (rapport) followed the general rule, which was to be as long as possible, testifying to the virtuosity of the weaver as well as affording a more varied appearance. The hazy and elegant appearance of chiné silks and silk velvets, with warp dyed before the weaving, ensured their continued popularity. At the end of the eighteenth century, Dugouyc's designs, in a striking Etruscan style, proved to be a new departure.

Philippe de Lasalle (1723-1804), undoubtedly the most famous of the Lyon silk weavers of the eighteenth century, rarely worked for the Garde-Meuble. In addition to silk designing and weaving, he became a silk merchant in Paris and Lyon, and the technical improvements he introduced to weaving brought him much praise, although they also earned him the opprobrium of his colleagues. His varied clientele included the ex-king of Poland, Stanislas Leszinski, for whom he supplied a tenture in traditional style in the early 1760s, with flower garlands and ribbons, but he is perhaps best known through his work for Catherine the Great, that voracious consumer of the products of French genius. Indeed it was through the most brilliant personification of such genius that Catherine first heard about Lasalle in 1771. Voltaire owned a silk portrait of the Empress by Lasalle, an embroidered monochrome profile surrounded by woven garlands of flowers, and he wrote about it to her in glowing terms: "it is a masterpiece of the arts practised in the city of Lyon." She was to employ Lasalle to weave some fabulous silks, including a tenture to commemorate the battle of Chesmé, the first Russian victory in a sea-battle for nine hundred years. Lasalle rose to the challenge with a design incorporating a ship on a stormy sea, enclosed within trelliswork of flowers and ribbons in his favourite style.

In eighteenth-century descriptions and inventories, painted silks abound but, perhaps hardly surprisingly, very few seem to have survived to this day. The name Pekin peint was normally employed to describe painted silk, which suggests that it was Chinese, but in fact it was often made in France, although Chinese examples are known, including panels in the Victoria and Albert Museum of flowers painted on blue silk, but with European borders of white silk painted with a

Detail of a painted silk panel by Cardin, for Louis XVI's Cabinet du Conseil at Compiègne. One of a series with military scenes, the borders show how close the neoclassical style could be to Louis XIV baroque.
continuous frieze of scrolls and flower trails. White and yellow silk was woven in Lyon and painted there, to be sold in Paris. At first, designs imitated Chinese originals, with flowering trees or Oriental figures, but gradually a French style predominated, and a series of panels of painted silk of the 1780s in the J. Paul Getty Museum are in a wholly French arabesque style. Many competent artists, including those working for the Garde-Meuble, painted silk upholstery for walls and chairs, often possibly in situ, and the bronzier Quentin-Claude Pitoin advertised himself as a “painter on textiles in the Indian style”.

Velvet, both plain and cut, including velours d’Utrecht, which was made in Northern France, was normally only used for chairs and door-hangings, according to Bimont, who tells us that this is the same sort of material as is used for women’s dresses and men’s jackets, and that it is suitable for bergères, fauteuils à la Reine, cabriolets, or chaise-longues but not normally for meubles à demeure (fixed seat furniture) such as sofas and ottomans.

Moquette, a type of solid velvet with a strong pile, is only good, in Bimont’s eyes, for chairs in antichambres, or for placing on the floor. This is the ancestor of fitted carpet, and began to be used as such in the eighteenth century. The floor of Marie Antoinette’s box at the Théâtre Français, decorated when the theatre was new between 1780 and 1782, was of moquette, with a crimson, green and white mosaic pattern.

Painted or printed cottons from the East, principally from India, had become so popular in Louis XIV’s reign that it was judged necessary in 1686 to ban their import, on the grounds that they deprived the nascent French printed-cotton industry of a living. The French industry itself was banned in turn, at a time when the economic hardships of the end of the seventeenth century prompted Louis XIV to issue a variety of sumptuary laws, but both French-made products and imported cottons continued to be widely, though illegally, employed (see page 18), until various challenges brought the ban to an end in stages during the 1750s, and a number of workshops throughout France began to produce printed cottons, for example at Nantes or Bourges. Naturally, the enclosures privilégiés had acted as refuges for cotton printers during the ban, and Bimont records the existence of one at the Temple in Paris. That the ban was unevenly enforced is evident from the fact that even royal palaces contained printed cottons; the 1752 inventory of the Château de Choisy mentions “a canopy bed, upholstered in calico, of sandy-coloured ground with bunches of flowers in red”. The curtains and valances were edged with silk ribbon.

“Stamoises”, “Indiennes”, and “Musulipatam” were all exotic names given to various types of Eastern printed or painted cottons, but the names continued to be employed for the imitations made in France. They were decorated with luxuriant flowering foliage in red, brown and blue, with matching borders. These cottons could be produced much more cheaply than silks, and their highly colourful and exotic nature made them extremely popular. Bimont considered them suitable for beds, walls and curtains, but not for chairs, except as cushions.

In 1760, Christophe-Philippe Oberkampf started a factory producing printed toiles at Jouy-en-Josas near Versailles, the enormous success of which has led to the generic name “toiles de Jouy” being applied to all French printed toiles of the late eighteenth century. Oberkampf, a typical example of an entrepreneur of the early industrial era, printed toiles in the traditional calico “Indienne” style and in loose imitation of Lyon woven silks. He also developed a distinctive style of his own, the monochrome printing of pastoral and allegorical scenes taken from the engravings of Huet and others, in blue, red or purple. In 1783 Oberkampf was granted a Privilege, which allowed him to call his factory a Manufacture Royale, as was Réveillon, the printed-paper manufacturer with whom Oberkampf may have collaborated.

“Painted toiles can be used for fine upholstery, especially in the country.” This comment by Bimont is intended to emphasize the rustic aspect of toile, but Marie Antoinette employed it for rooms in her private apartments at Versailles, such as the cabinet de verserai, which in 1784 contained a bergère, a lit à la Turque and door and window curtains upholstered in “toile de Jouy” with applied borders, and lined in white taffeta.

Instead of woven tapestry chair covers, tapisiers could supply the equipment for ladies to execute their own petit-point or embroidery panels. Tessin sent some to his wife in Sweden in 1741 “six armchairs of tapestry to be filled in, with the necessary wool, in a pattern imitating one colour damask”. Mesdames Adélaïde and Victoire were ardent embroiderers, ordering silks from Mademoiselle Dubuisqoy in the Rue Saint-Honoré, which they applied in various patterns including arabesques and a “design of drapery and cartouches”. Being well-organized princesses, they ordered the chairs before starting work. These were delivered, with white upholstery, carefully scrutinized in situ, and then stored away until the work was done.

Louis XVI, restaurateur de la Liberté. Toile de Jouy designed by Huet in 1789. Toiles printed with monochrome patterns such as this were the mainstay of Oberkampf’s production.

FOLLOWING SPREAD

Wall panelling in the salon of the Hôtel de Villette, Paris.