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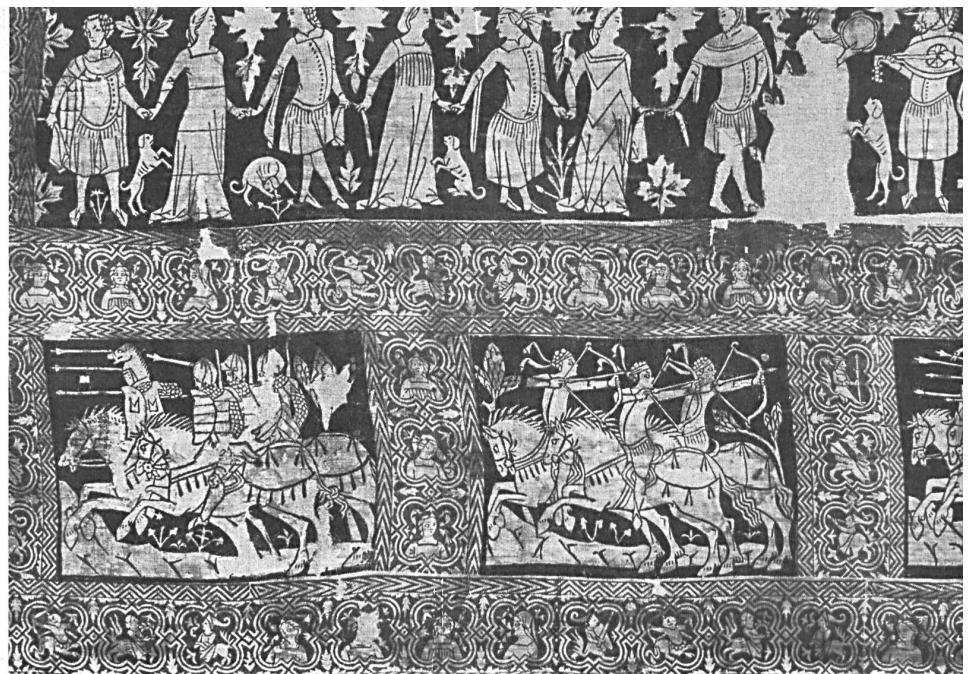
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The "Sion Tapestry"

(By courtesy of the Applied Art Museum, Basle.)



Textile Printing

The Museum of Applied Art in Zurich, which has been responsible for the organisation of so many exhibitions of the greatest interest, was the scene, from December 9th, 1950 to the end of January 1951, of a remarkable exhibition devoted to textile printing. Although this event is already a thing of the past, we would like to give it here the mention it deserves, while at the same time regretting not to be able to devote more space to it. Let us mention that only once before, in 1919, has a complete and systematic collection of printing fabrics been shown to the Swiss public. It was therefore only natural for it to be repeated, and it is to the Museum of Applied Art in Basle that all the credit is due for having taken the lead by organising the exhibition. It was then transferred to the Museum of Applied Art in Zurich, which enlarged it still further and gave it a more unified structure by installing it in the very large exhibition halls it possesses. Thus it was that we were able to admire an extremely rich and complete collection of printed fabrics, an enthralling panorama giving a survey of the way in which over a period of fifteen centuries and in every part of the world man has put his inventive spirit and his artistic sense at the service of industry, to enrich and beautify his existence. This spectacle gives us a higher idea of the intellectual achievements of man than accounts of certain atomic and sporting exploits. The exhibition in Zurich showed products ranging from the first attempts at printing on fabrics by the primitive peoples of Africa and the South Sea Islands, prints of the pre-Columbian era from Peru and Coptic prints from the 4th and 5th centuries of our era, to the most recent creations of modern industry. The illustrated and very well presented catalogue contained some interesting and well documented articles from which we have taken the following information.

The colouring of fabrics must be considered as the first form of printing, although it is in fact very different from it owing to the absence of any technical means of repetition. It is nevertheless the first attempt to apply colour on to a fabric and has been continued right up to the present day in the decorative arts, without however ever acquiring any industrial importance. Colouring is also still found in combination with printing proper in the Middle Ages in the form of the "illuminating" of designs, only the contours of which were printed. The same process is found again in certain primitive civilisations and continued right up to the 17th and 18th centuries in the production of the printed calicoes of

India and Persia which, imported en masse from Europe, gave birth to the printed cotton industries. Before the appearance of wooden blocks employed in hand-block printing, use was made in the early days in Europe as in the East, of stamps or seals, making it possible to print separate coloured motifs on fabrics. These seals, which may have been used first of all for tattooing, were made of wood, terra cotta, the rind of the cucurbitaceae (gourds), etc. As opposed to this technique, block printing (see *Textiles Suisses*, No. 3/1951, page 48) which is still in use to-day, makes it possible to apply to fabrics motifs joining at the edges, that is to say to repeat the same pattern ("repeat") over the whole surface. This technique has been used not only in Europe but also in the Middle East.

The technique of engraving on copper gave the idea for a new process, that of printing on a flat-bed press, using engraved plates. It was the first case of a machine being used in this field of textiles. So-called "mechanical flat-bed printing" was introduced into the famous factory at Jouy in 1781 and was also used in Alsace and Switzerland. The idea of printing fabrics with engraved rollers is very old and machines employing this method were already in use at the end of the 17th century. The first rotary printing machine was invented in 1785 and the principle has remained the same up till the present time. The first machines, worked by hand, allowed the use of only one colour (only one engraved roller) while more recent machines allow the successive application to the fabric of as many as 16 different colours in a single passage through the machine.

The most recent printing process is screen printing which has already been described in these pages (see *Textiles Suisses*, No. 4/1951, page 57). The screen is a modern form of the stencil, which had already been used for printing by primitive peoples. The screen printing process, formerly carried out exclusively by hand, is gradually being done more and more by machine and already there exist entirely automatic machines to do the work. Space does not permit us to go into the question here of colours or of the different processes involved in printing: direct application of the colour, use of resists preventing certain parts of the fabric from absorbing a colour, the discharge process in which a colour previously applied to a fabric is subsequently removed or destroyed in selected areas, etc.

The exhibition included a very interesting technical documentation on all the subjects just touched on here.

(Continuation on opposite page, above.)