

VELVET, a silken textile fabric having a short dense piled surface. In all probability the art of velvet-weaving originated in the Far East; and it is not till about the beginning of the 14th century that we find any mention of the textile. The peculiar properties of velvet, the splendid yet softened depth of dye-colour it exhibited, at once marked it out as a fit material for ecclesiastical vestments, royal and state robes, and sumptuous hangings; and the most magnificent textures of medieval times were Italian velvets. These were in many ways most effectively treated for ornamentation, such as by varying the colour of the pile, by producing pile of different lengths (pile upon pile, or double pile), and by brocading with plain silk, with uncut pile or with a ground of gold tissue, &c. The earliest sources of European artistic velvets were Lucca, Genoa, Florence and Venice, and Genoa continues to send out rich velvet textures. Somewhat later the art was taken up by Flemish weavers, and in the 16th century Bruges attained a reputation for velvets not inferior to that of the great Italian cities.