

SPANISH CHINTZES FROM THE ROYAL MANUFACTORY
AT AVILA

By

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THE degree of sophistication to which cotton printing was brought in Spain in the eighteenth century is evidenced by the illustrations that accompany this text. These chintzes were the product of the Royal Manufactory for Printed Cottons which was established in 1787 at Avila, a little town not far from Madrid. The factory owed its existence to two Englishmen, one of whom had owned a cotton factory in France, and both of whom looked to Spain to further their fortunes.¹

Spain at this time offered excellent opportunities to the foreigner who could bring in modern methods, for the country had long been interested in industrial reforms by which it was hoped that Spanish industry might be roused from the lethargy into which it had sunk. Charles II (1661-1700) had first conceived the idea and had imported foreign operators, but it was Philip V (1701-1746) who put the policy into effective operation. Philip was a Bourbon, a grandson of Louis XIV,² and in pursuance of a policy of encouragement from his illustrious relative, he set himself to establish in his new kingdom the industrial improvements that had been of such benefit to his own country. The result of his efforts was the royal cloth factories at Guadlajara, San Fernando, Chinchón, Segovia and Brihuega, the silk factory at Talavera, the glass factory at La Granja and the tapestry factory at Madrid. And later on there was the cotton printing factory at Avila.

Contrary to the hopes of their sponsors, these factories failed to achieve

⁽¹⁾ A more extended account of this factory may be found in an article on signed French and Spanish chintzes by the writer, published in the *Bulletin of the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, September, 1938, p. 206.

⁽²⁾ Philip V, as Duke of Anjou, was the successful claimant to the Spanish throne after the death of Charles II, who left no heirs. His claim, aside from the expressed will of Charles himself, was based on his grandfather's relationship to Philip III and Philip IV of Spain, since Louis XIV was a grandson of one and a son-in-law of the other. The new king took the title of Philip V.

success. They were intended as contributors to the public wealth, but they proved bottomless wells into which public funds were poured with little or no result. The factory at Avila existed for twelve years, from 1787 to 1799, and it ended in a welter of labor troubles much like those of a more enlightened age. Defective machinery, lack of technical knowledge, and a system of bookkeeping that made it impossible to estimate costs were some of the troubles. Alarmed by the reports, a committee arrived from Madrid in 1797, arrested the managers, and substituted a new head who reduced the wages. At this the workers rose in rage, incited street riots, created disturbances in the shops, and as a further outlet for their anger put up posters on the factory walls depicting by sinister drawings the ultimate fate of those responsible for this policy (pl. 1). Succeeding managers were no more successful in solving the problems of the factory, and finally it ceased operations as a royal manufactory and passed into private hands.

Unfortunate as was the history of the Avila venture, there are certain accomplishments that redound to its credit. In its day it employed four hundred people, most of them women and children, who with poverty and unemployment widespread, stood a fair chance of becoming, in the words of the Bishop of Avila, "lost and an offence to God." And also there were the chintzes, and these could only have met with approbation.

By great good chance some of these latter have been preserved, together with the documents relating to the factory. They were found in 1920 among the archives of the city of Simancas³ by officials of The Academy of Historical and Sociological Studies of Valladolid, who were searching at the time for documents relating to the Academy. The file appears to have been preserved complete, covering all the transactions from the first contract with a private individual to the final transference of the royal establishment to another private individual. And among these papers were more than eighty examples of materials turned out by the factory, some plain woven fabrics but others printed cottons.

In 1922 the Academy published an account of the Avila factory in the form of a pamphlet,⁴ but modest as is the format this little book contains three full page illustrations, and in color, of the Avila chintzes which are described as lovely in design and harmonious in color.

⁽³⁾ Simancas is a town lying seven miles southwest of Valladolid where are preserved the archives of Spain, consisting of thirty-three million documents which have been kept since the days of Cardinal Ximenes (1436-1537).

⁽⁴⁾ E. Herrera Oria. *Le real fabrica de tejidos de algodón estempados, de Avila, y la reorganizacion nacional de esta industria en el siglo XVIII* (Valladolid, 1922).

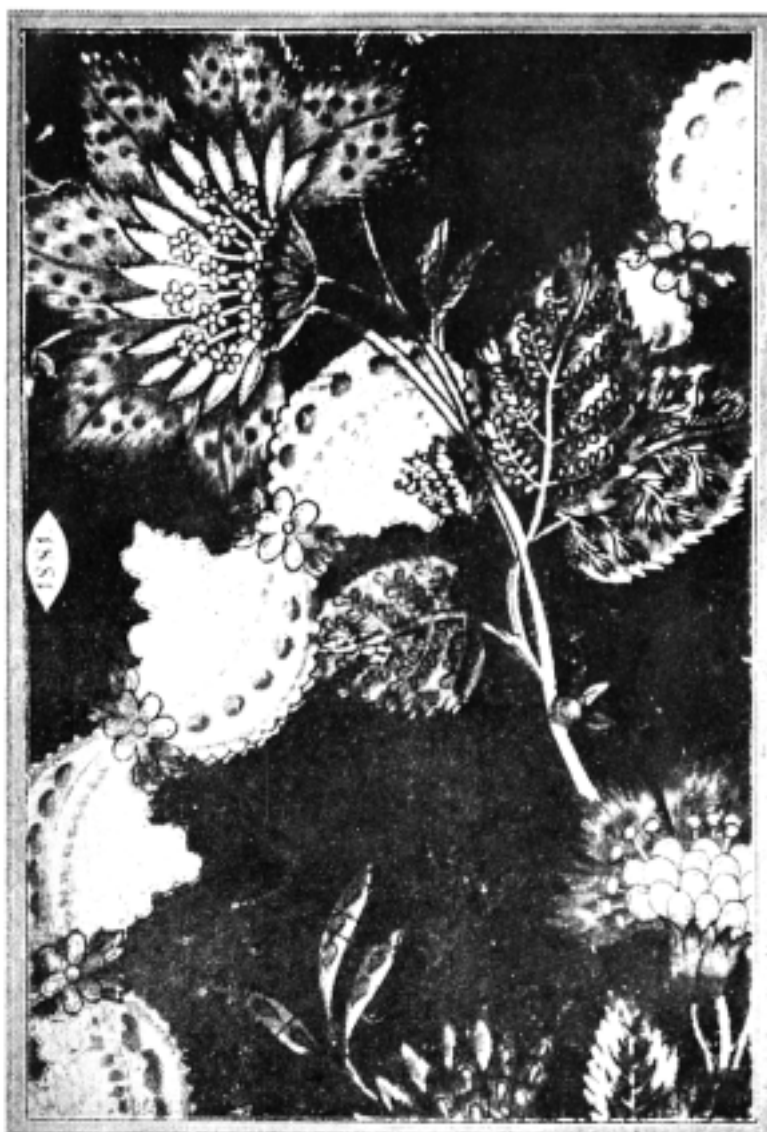


PLATE 2
POLYCHROME FLORAL PATTERN ON DARK GROUND.

*Muestras de tejidos estampados, de la Rl. Fábrica de Avila,
conservadas en el Archivo de Simancas.*



*Tricomia impresa en los Tall-
eres litográficos de la Casa
Social Católica, de Valladolid*

PLATE 3
FLORAL PATTERN WITH SWAG ON YELLOW GROUND.

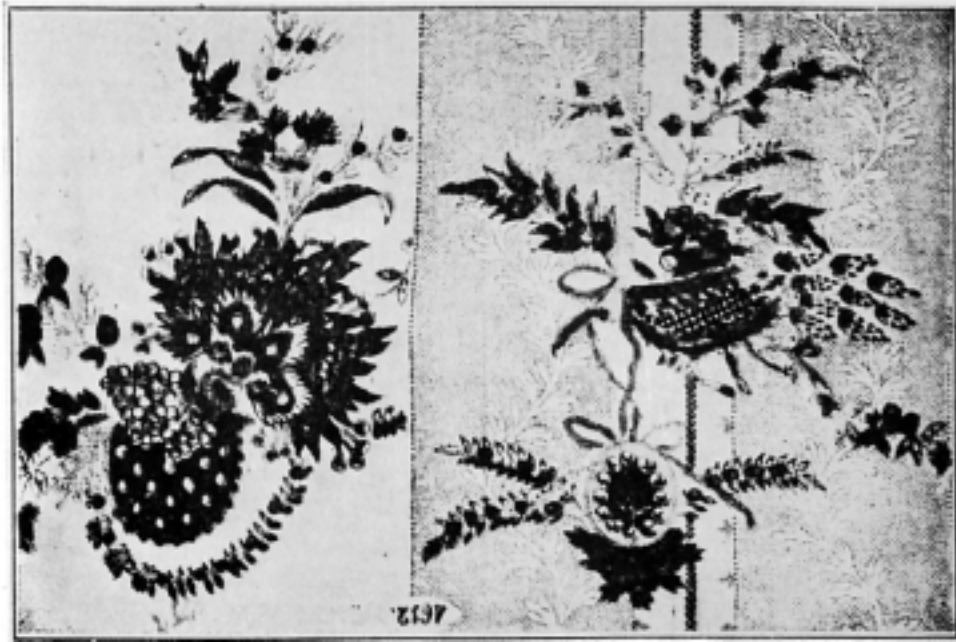


PLATE 4
FLORAL SPRAYS AND FLOWERING BASKETS AGAINST A PATTERN OF STRIPES.

And lovely indeed these pieces are, as well may be seen. Huge flowers in blue and red against a dark ground bend gracefully across a Louis XV band stippled in red on white (pl. 2). Or they cross the surface diagonally against a pale yellow ground (pl. 3). A variation is a deep red flower topped by lilac-colored sprays, with a bulbous ornament in black, all against a delicate stripe. They take also the form of flowering baskets against a stripe alternating with undulating vines in red and white (pl. 4).

The parentage of all these designs is unmistakably French, for French influence was strong in Spain in the eighteenth century, but to the original design has been added the Spanish interpretation which contributes a boldness of design and a scale of color that make for an extremely decorative effect.