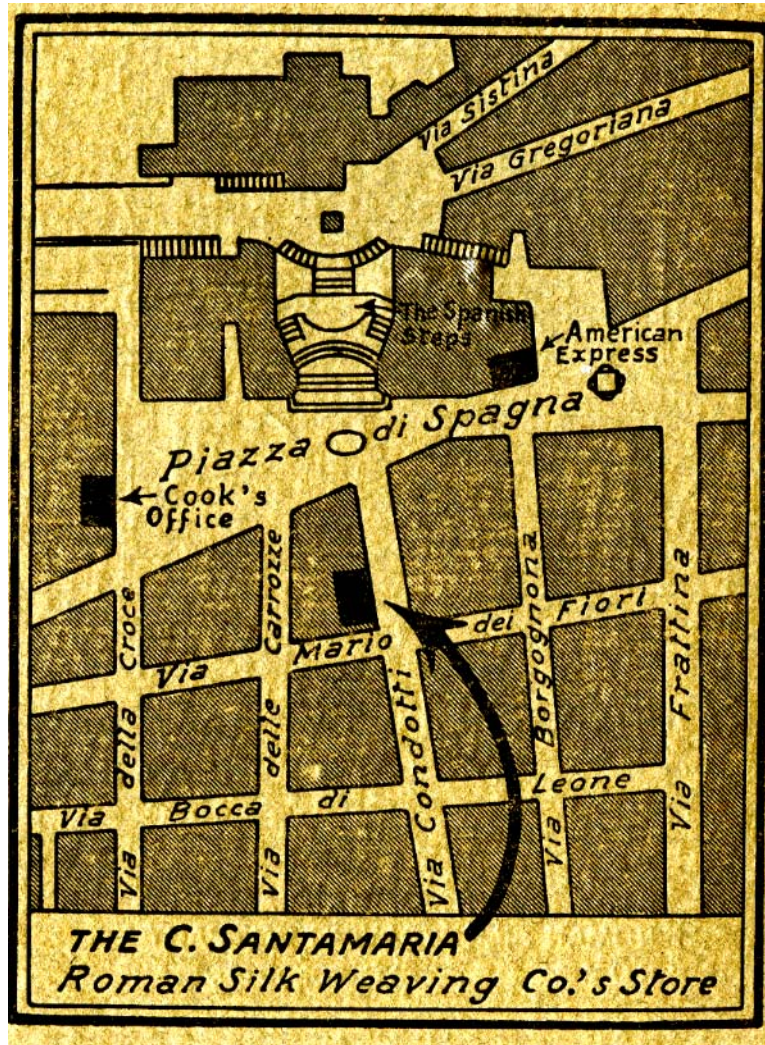


**ROMAN SILK
ACROSS THE AGES**

Edited by THE C. SANTAMARIA
ROMAN SILK WEAVING COMPANY
ROME VIA CONDOTTI, 82-83



**ROMAN SILK
ACROSS THE AGES**
A HISTORY OF ROMAN SILK
WEAVING

Edited by THE C. SANTAMARIA
ROMAN SILK WEAVING COMPANY
ROME VIA CONDOTTI, 82-83

THE C. SANTAMARIA
ROMAN SILK WEAVING C.
ROME, VIA CONDOTTI, 82-83
:: :: NEAR THE PIAZZA DI SPAGNA :: ::

The LEADING STORE IN ROME
for ROMAN SCARFS, SHAWLS,
SASHES, BLANKETS and all' OTHER
:: ROMAN SILK SPECIALITIES ::

ROMAN, VENITIAN and SPANISH
EMBROIDERED SHAWLS

THE PROCESS OF ROMAN SILK WEAVING
:: :: CAN BE SEEN ON THE PREMISES :: ::
ROME - 82-83, VIA CONDOTTI, 82-83 - ROME

Silk in Ancient Greece and Rome.

It is uncertain whether, previous to the end of the Republican era, the ancient Romans had become acquainted with silk or had ever attempted to weave spun silk into textile fabrics. The Greeks, on the contrary, had long before the Romans, used silk for personal adornment and, according to Herodotus, silk garments were known and worn in Greece even previous to the Persian Wars (333 B. C.).

The introduction of silk into Rome dates probably from the last years of the Republic, and silk garments were considered, at that time, to be among the most costly and luxurious commodities which only people of immense wealth could afford to wear. One of the most bitter accusations which were directed against Julius Caesar by his dissatisfied soldiery was precisely that of his excessive prodigality for having imported, from Asia a certain quantity of silk stuffs for the decoration of a theatre. The desire to possess and to wear silk materials became so prevalent in Rome and was the cause of such lavish expenditure among the wealthy classes, during the early part of the Imperial epoch, that Tiberius, in his sumptuary laws

emanated a decree prohibiting Roman citizens of both sexes to wear silk garments.

All through the Empire, silk was an article of luxury and its price was, accordingly, very high; so much so that, according to Herodianus, a silken tunic belonging to Antoninus Pius was purchased at a price which would have been sufficient to supply the pay for a whole army. Although there seems to be a certain exaggeration in the above statement, it is nevertheless a fact that during the whole period of the Roman Empire, silken goods were quoted at very high figures in the Imperial markets.

The process of silk production in its raw form was most probably unknown to the Romans up to the reign of Justinian the Great. Pliny the Naturalist, the foremost scientist of antiquity, calls silk « the wool of forests », and Virgil was no better informed. Three centuries later, Amianus Marcellinus, who wrote on the subject, was equally ignorant.

Silk in its raw form and woven in fabrics, was imported from Persia and from India, but principally from China. It was also brought to Rome in spools which were spun, wound and woven with infinite labour by the Roman women.

The elegant Roman matrons vied with one another to possess the luxurious fabrics and paid fabulous prices for them, especially after the Emperor Elioga-



The C. Santamaria Roman Silk Weaving Company's Store
Rome, Via Condotti 82-83

talus had adopted the fashion of wearing an *olose-ricus*, or garment made entirely of silk; a degree of luxury which, owing to the enormous cost of silk materials, no one had ever attempted to reach.

During the period of the Lower Empire, and especially at the time of Aurelian, a pound of silk cost no less than 12 ounces of pure gold, that is to say, that silk and pure gold were of equal value. In the reigns of Constant and Julian the Apostate, the silken materials intended to be worn by the patricians of Rome were manufactured at Constantinople.

Introduction of Silk into Italy.

The process of silk production was imported into Europe towards the year 532 A. D., when, during the reign of Justinian the Great, two Persian monks, who had resided in China for many years - probably in the royal city of Nankin - brought to Constantinople some silkworms which they had hidden in the hollow of a reed. It is well known that the Chinese were, at that time, extremely jealous of the secret they possessed of producing silk from the silkworm. The Emperor Justinian, influenced, it is believed, by his spouse, the Empress Theodora, did his utmost to encourage the new industry and emanated an edict for the planting of mulberry trees throughout the

Empire, the leaf of the mulberry tree being the ordinary diet of the silkworm.

Many centuries passed, however, ere the secret of silk production was revealed in Italy. This happened during the 12th century, when Roger I., the Norman ruler of Sicily, having fitted out various fleets manned principally by pirate crews, devastated the coasts of the near East. In the course of these incursions, his pirates captured and led into captivity a number of Greeks who were masters of the art of silk production and weaving. These artisans were landed at Palermo and set to work at their trade and it was from there that the cultivation of mulberry trees and the breeding of the silkworm spread all over Italy, the mild climate of the Peninsula being specially adapted for the development of the silk industry.

During the Middle Ages

The industry of silk production grew rapidly throughout Italy during the Middle Ages. The first centres of production were Rome, Florence and Lucca followed, later on, by Milan and Venice. Toward the middle of the 15th century, Louis XI. of France (1423-1483), struck by the excellence and the beauty of the Italian silk textile fabrics, induced a number of Italian artisans to emigrate into France, and esta

blished at Tours the manufactories which soon became famous, especially for the production of the renowned *gros de Tours*. At a later period, the silk industry developed at Lyons where it flourished and became justly celebrated. The pre-eminence in the industry, however, remained and still remains with Italy; this country being the leading producer of silk in Europe.

Origin of Roman Silk.

It is highly interesting to note how Roman silk, in its world-renowned production of scarves, shawls, sashes and other forms of female adornment, came into existence. The peculiarity of Roman silk consists of a cunningly arranged system of stripes of various bright colouring; and it is not too much to say that it is distinctively Oriental in its combinations of striving. It must be remembered that silk fabrics were originally imported from the East, principally from Syria and Persia, and that the numerous Greek, Albanian and Saracenic colonies disseminated in Central and Southern Italy may have greatly helped to keep alive the traditional style and patterns of dress materials of their countries of origin. It is no subject of wonder, therefore, if, in the traditional costumes of the inhabitants of the towns and villages

of the Roman Campagna, of the Abruzzi and of the Campanian districts, certain portions of female attire still retain a decided resemblance to Oriental patterns, when we consider that Greek and Albanian colonies still flourish in Southern Italy, retaining their original language and customs and, to quote only one instance, at a few miles from Rome there is a village called Saracinesco, which in the Middle Ages was founded by the Saracens, and whose inhabitants retain even at the present day, after many centuries, a decided Oriental character both in physical aspect, in manners and costume. In the mountain districts of the Abruzzi and in the Southern portions of Latium, the peasantry still weave in wool and cotton certain materials that are decidedly Oriental in character and pattern. Little wonder, therefore, that the Roman silk weavers of the Middle Ages and of the Renaissance should have maintained many of the patterns and designs that originally came from Eastern sources, inasmuch as they, with their instinctive good taste and their natural artistic geniality, found an unlimited field for the multiplication of stripes and colours.

In Papal Rome.

Certain it is that the trade or, more correctly, the art of silk weaving in Rome flourished sturdily



Some of the hand looms at work Weaving Roman Silk

during the late Middle Ages and the Renaissance period, and that the production was considerable. Apart from the silk fabrics that are known as especially Roman, that is to say articles of attire or adornment woven in striped patterns or designs, it must be remembered that the presence in Rome of the Papal Court, with its host of Cardinals and prelates; the necessity to adorn the hundreds of churches; the demand for tapestries for the princely houses of which the Eternal City abounded, and the materials required for the gorgeous pageants of those times could not fail to promote and to firmly establish an industry which soon became famous throughout Europe. And thus it was that, besides the weaving of silk materials for which a University or Corporation of artisans had been founded from time immemorial, there also sprang in Rome a School of embroidery which, too, was celebrated for the minuteness of workmanship, the beauty of design and the delicacy of execution of the works that its members produced. This School has continued uninterruptedly its old traditional efficiency, and at the present day the embroidered shawls of Rome rival and even surpass in beauty, brilliancy and design those embroidered in Spain and the East.

Papal Support.

The impulse given to the silk trade in Rome was greatly due to the encouragement which the various Popes granted to the noble industry. There are historical evidences that a University or Corporation of Silk Weavers flourished in Rome for many centuries, the Statutes of which were revised by Pope Sixtus V., with the Papal Bull « *Cum sicut* » dated May 28, 1586: « *Institutio artis conficiendi sericum in Urbe et toto Statu Ecclesiastico, etc.* ». It may be stated that Sixtus V., who clearly saw the importance and the advantages connected with a great industry which contributed in no small share to the well-being and prosperity of a considerable portion of the working classes of Rome, gave ample support during his reign to the silk trade. His example was followed by several other Pontiffs, and notably by Clement XI., who, in the year 1719, amongst other measures, published an Edict prohibiting the importation into the Papal States of foreign manufactured silk materials, in order to protect the local industry.

Later on, Benedict XIV., with his Pontifical Message or *Motu-Proprio* of June 20th. 1754, approved the revision of the Statutes of the Corporation of the Silk Weavers of Rome, and created a Consulate

or Directorate for the administration of that institution. He had already supported the silk trade by suppressing, in 1741, the heavy customs duties on raw silk. Pope Clement XIV, on July 23rd. 1771, issued a Decree regulating the manufacture of silk materials and imposing certain rules for the purpose of obtaining an improvement of the quality of the silk production.

The manufacture of Roman silk, however, reached its full efficiency during the 19th. century, and all the Pontiffs who ruled over the Papal States during that period, from Pius VII. to Pius IX., whose temporal reign ended in 1870 with the unification of Italy, gave the greatest encouragement to the silk trade.

How Roman Silk is Woven.

The process of Roman silk weaving by hand looms has undergone little or no change since the early days of its invention. Everyone is familiar with the old-style loom in its primitive form with its hand pushed shuttles and its antiquated shaky pedals. The hand loom used to this day for silk weaving is precisely the same as that used five centuries ago. In Roman silk, however, there are two principal systems of weaving: the herring-bone and the corded

weaves. In the herring-bone weave the woof is interlaced with the warp, whilst in the corded weave the warp is entirely covered by the woof, and consequently, the colours of the texture are brought out in their original brightness.

The introduction, during the 19th century, of looms moved by machinery, with flying shuttles and, in fact, with all the peculiarities of the Jacquart loom, could not fail to strike a fell blow to the industry of hand-made fabrics. It is generally acknowledged that what has been gained in speed of production and in minor weight of silk, and consequently in cheapness, has been lost in no small measure in strength and durability of texture; hence the undeniable superiority of the hand-made article, notwithstanding its higher cost. In Roman silk, as in other forms of weaving, the hand-loom is gradually disappearing, and few, very few hand looms are still extant in Rome.

Where It Was Woven.

It may be interesting to the student of the topography of Modern Rome to learn that, whilst a number of silk artisans hand, since time immemorial established their workshops in the oldest quarters of the City, the Trastevere and Borgo districts, the most important factories were situated in the centre of the



The C. Santamaria Roman Silk Weaving Company's Embroidery Department

City and not far from the Piazza di Spagna. Up to 1870, one of the leading factories of Roman silk was located in the Via Fontanella di Borghese, in close proximity to the historical Borghese Palace, and occupied, besides, various premises in the adjacent streets. At that time, that is during the early part of the 19th century, looms worked by machinery had not yet been adopted, and the manufacture was executed entirely by means of hand-looms. The factory in question was the property of the Stefoni family, an old family of silk weavers, who had carried on the business from father to son ever since the beginning of the 18th century. They owned over 100 looms which daily turned out a very considerable quantity of scarves, shawls, sashes and other articles which found a ready sale in all seasons, and especially in their retail stores in the Via Condotti. The prosperity of the concern was undeniably due to the conscientious execution of the fabrics, the excellence of the materials and the beauty of the production.

Present Day Roman Silk.

In course of time, and in consequence of the inevitable laws of human events, the Stefoni family declined in number of components and in activity, so that at the close of last century, the once famous

factory was considerably reduced in number of looms and artisans employed. The surviving members of the Stefoni family retired from business in 1893, and the factory was purchased by another old Roman family; and thus it was that THE C. SANTAMARIA ROMAN SILK WEAVING COMPANY was established. and after removing the factory to more convenient premises, the new Firm reorganised the manufactories and also took over the retail business of the Stefoni family in the Via Condotti.

Over and above the more modern processes of Roman silk weaving which were immediately applied on a large scale by the new Firm, the hand looms of the old concern were put into action once more, worked by the same well-trained and efficient artisans, with the result that at the present day, after thirty-five years of uninterrupted success, THE C. SANTAMARIA ROMAN SILK WEAVING COMPANY can be considered as one of the leading manufacturers of the traditional Roman silk. The establishment was furthermore enriched by an embroidery department in which the famous Roman embroidered shawls are produced and have become celebrated for the variety and beauty of design and minuteness of workmanship.

In conclusion, it may be added that THE C. SANTAMARIA ROMAN SILK WEAVING COMPANY is now almost the only concern in Rome where the weaving of

Roman scarves is executed chiefly by means of hand looms, and consequently it is one of the very few establishments in Rome where the traditional Roman silk is woven with the process of bygone times, and which produces the genuine legendary fabrics that have been for many centuries the pride of industrial Rome and a household word throughout the world.



THE TRADITIONAL PROCESS OF ROMAN SILK
WEAVING IS ON VIEW AT
THE C. SANTAMARIA ROMAN
SILK WEAVING COMPANY'S STORE
82-83, VIA CONDOTTI, ROME.

THE FINEST * THE BEST * THE MOST ARTISTIC
EMBROIDERED SHAWLS

ROMAN, VENITIAN AND SPANISH
ARE TO BE FOUND AT

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COMPANY'S STORES
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PLAIN SHAWLS OS ALL KINDS AND PRICES

VEILS FOR PAPAL AUDIENCES
ROMAN PEASANTS' COSTUMES
DOLLS, etc.