

**MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS.
CATALOGUE OF AN EXHIBITION
OF TAPESTRIES, JANUARY
26 TO FEBRUARY 28, 1893**

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by Various

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VARIOUS

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The Museum

TAPESTRY.

“Tapestry is a kind of work in which colored threads are intertwined on lines stretched vertically or horizontally so as to become one substance, thus forming a web and producing combinations of lines and tints analogous to those obtained by the painter with his brush, by the enameller with his metallic cells and liquid enamels, or by the mosaic worker with his cubes of marble.

“Tapestry differs from embroidery in this that in it the pictures produced are an integral part of the texture, while in the latter they are simply superimposed on a tissue already existing. It also differs from woven brocaded fabrics by being always the work of the hand, and not an unlimited mechanical repetition of the same design; so that each piece produced is distinctly original.” M. Müntz. — *La Tapisserie*.

“Among the monuments that the past has bequeathed to us there are none which offer so much material for the archæologist as ancient tapestries.

“The vicissitudes of this industry are closely connected with the history of the countries in which it is practised. Not only does the greater part of these productions bear the imprint of the epoch in which they were produced, but we find in them the reflection of the beliefs and of the great events of their time, with all the details of its architecture and its costumes. They give us, in fact, a picture of the intimate life of each century.” M. Castel. — *Les Tapisseries*.

The history of tapestry from the Middle Ages onward is that of painting. At that epoch the style is that of the illuminators and the painters of glass.

In the fifteenth century the influence of the early Flemish painters, the Van Eycks, Van de Weyden, Bouts, Memling and Matsys, makes itself felt.

In the sixteenth, the Italian school predominates, — Mantegna, Raphael, Romano, Veronese, Dosso, Bachiacca, Bronzino, Salviati, and the followers of the Italians, Van Orley and Coxie.

In the seventeenth it is the Flemish school again, that of Rubens, Van Dyke, Jordaens, Teniers, and the French school of Caron, Lerambert, Vouet, Lesueur, Coypel, Mignard, Le-Brun.

In the eighteenth the influences of the French school are paramount, — Desportes, Audran, Bérain, DeTroy, Oudry, Watteau, Boucher.

In the early part of the nineteenth the French school still leads, — Regnault, David Legros, Vernet, Gérard, and in our own day Diéterle, Mazerolle, Galland, Ehrmann and Merson.

The earliest tapestry of the Middle Ages still in existence is that in the church of Saint Géréon at Cologne. It was probably woven in the twelfth century, and its style is Byzantine. Fragments of it may be seen at the Germanic Museum in Nuremberg, the South Kensington Museum in London, and at the Industrial Museum in Lyons.

The next earliest are the German tapestries in the churches of Halberstadt and Quedlinburg. Kugler attributes the former to the end of the twelfth century. The latter was worked by Agnes, Abbess of Quedlinburg, and her nuns, for the decoration of the choir of the church of that town, about 1200.

German tapestries or fragments of such, ascribed to the fourteenth century, are to be seen at the South Kensington Museum in London, the National Museum in Munich, and the Germanic Museum in Nuremberg.

In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries Arras was the city from whence came the most important tapestries. Hence arose the terms, Arras hanging, Arras work, Arras cloth, Arazzi, all of which designate tapestries made at Arras

or after the style of those produced at that city. They stood for all that was richest in color, choicest in material, and the finest production of the tapestry weaver. Froissart states that in the fourteenth century their reputation had penetrated even to the Orient.

Neither the Arras tapestries, nor those produced elsewhere prior to the sixteenth century, bear marks indicating the place of production or name of maker. It is difficult, therefore, to assign the tapestries of the early period to any particular place of origin or atelier. At the cathedral of Tournai, however, may be seen an Arras tapestry which was finished in 1402 at the atelier of Pierre Féré, and is described at length in "*Tapisseries du XV. siècle conservées à la Cathédrale de Tournai.*" Tournai, Vasseur — Delmé, 1883.

At the Cathedral of San Maurice at Angers is preserved a set of tapestries called the "Apocalypse," worked by Nicolas Bataille, a fabricator of Paris, about 1376. "Scarcely can one cite another still existing piece of the fourteenth century. The enumeration of the numerous tapestries of Paris and Arras, made during a quarter of a century, gives us an idea of the prodigious rapidity of execution of our ancient artisans. How is it that there remain to us to-day so few of those sumptuous decorations which were so numerous at the end of the fourteenth century? The frequent change in the place of residence of the royal court, and of the seigneurs, and the habit of carrying all their household furniture on their journeys, together with the carelessness of the officers charged with their keeping, resulted in their rapid destruction." M. Guiffrey. — *La Tapissérie*. Yet we find the Duke of Burgundy taking great precaution to insure the conservation of his treasures, he not only appointed a number of officers with the title, Guards of the Tapestries, with valets to assist them in their work, but in 1440 he constructed a stone warehouse with vaulted roof especially for their reception.

The fifteenth century is spoken of as the golden age of tapestry, and examples of this period, though not numerous, may be seen in the museums and cathedrals of Europe.

Says Charles M. Blanc in his study upon decorative art: "Our ancestors of the Middle Ages lived in a more poetic and attractive age than ours. They were poets in their architecture, full of religious and chivalric sentiment. They were poets in their glass paintings which, intercepting the light, shone resplendent with a paradise of color. They were poets in their tapestries with which they covered their walls and which they used as enclosures when they divided their halls or chambers into small alcoves. These tapestries enveloped them in mystery. *Intrigues d'amour*, state secrets, conspiracies, surprises, hidden passages, — all these in a time of chivalry, of war, of stratagem, were in turn concealed and disclosed by these heavy tentures which covered the walls, and the fringes of which trained upon the floor."

In 1477 Louis XI. conquered Arras and obliged all the tapestry weavers to quit their homes. This date marks the fall of the industry in that city and the end of the moyen age period. Tournai, Brussels, Audenarde, Lille, Bruges, and Valenciennes were also centres of tapestry weaving in the fifteenth century.

In the sixteenth century the leading city of this industry was Brussels. "No time and no country presented anything comparable with the prosperity of the Brussels tapestry weavers during this period. Henceforth tapestry is everywhere appreciated, everywhere in demand, and we find that those nations which march at the head of progress spare neither time nor expense to free themselves from the tribute paid to the northern provinces." M. Guiffrey.— *La Tapisserie.*

It was to Brussels that Pope Leo X., in 1515, sent the famous cartoons of Raphael, the "Acts of the Apostles," to be woven into tapestries at the atelier of Pierre d'Enghien, called Van Aelst, a fabricator well qualified to interpret these grand designs, which he finished in 1519, and which were received in Rome with universal admiration. These tapestries may be seen at Rome to-day. A suite from the same cartoons by the Mortlake factory and one by the Gobelin factory are in the Garde Meuble, Paris.

“ From this moment the ateliers of Brussels were proclaimed the first in Christendom, and all the princes in Europe hastened to demand replicas of this famous tenture. During many years the cartoons of Raphael were copied and re-copied by the most skilful Brussels masters. From them come these numerous “ Acts of the Apostles ” to be seen in all the museums of Europe, — at Berlin, at Madrid, at Dresden, at Vienna and at the Cathedral of Loretto.” M. Guiffrey. — *La Tapisserie*.

The productions of this period by the Flemish masters may be best studied at Madrid. The Musée des Gobelins possesses some fine examples, and one should not pass through the Louvre without examining one of its *chefs d'œuvre*, “ La Vierge Glorieuse,” a small religious tapestry executed in the latter part of the fifteenth or early part of the sixteenth century. It recalls the school of Memling. In the Spitzer collection, Rue Ville Juste, Paris, may be seen some beautiful examples of this period, as well as in the South Kensington Museum at London, and in many of the museums and cathedrals of Europe.

The other principal cities of this century in which this art flourished were Tournai, Lille, Valenciennes, Gand, Enghien, Paris, Fontainebleau, Ferrara and Florence.

In the earlier part of the seventeenth century, Brussels still holds its lead inspired by the genius of Rubens; but in the latter part we see the rise of the Gobelin manufactory, the supremacy of which rests undisputed to this day.

“ Towards the middle of the fifteenth century Jehan Gobel, from Reims, founded upon the borders of the Bièvres a dyehouse which became celebrated and brought to its proprietors a great fortune, due to the quality of the products which emanated from its vats, — a quality due to the skill of its dyers and not to the waters of the Bièvres, which never had any particular dyeing qualities. The Gobelin family carried on this industry even as late as about 1655; and by a singular favor of destiny by the simple fact of the installation of skilful tapestry weavers in this ancient property, they acquired immortality without ever having woven a