

Zeitschrift: Swiss textiles [English edition]
Herausgeber: Swiss office for the development of trade
Band: - (1955)
Heft: 2

Artikel: Saint-Gall
Autor: R.C.
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-798473>

Nutzungsbedingungen

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. [Siehe Rechtliche Hinweise.](#)

Conditions d'utilisation

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. [Voir Informations légales.](#)

Terms of use

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. [See Legal notice.](#)

Download PDF: 18.05.2025

ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>

In a few words :

SAINT-GALL

A town of burghers and merchants,
centre of the embroidery
and fine cottons industries



The St. Gall Minster, at present the cathedral of the diocese.

Photo Siegfried Luaterwasser

Origin and development

About A. D. 613, a monk named Gallus came over from Ireland to preach the Gospel and settled in an as yet uncivilized part of Helvetia lying between a lake and mountains, far from the main travellers' routes. A number of monks settled round his hermit's cell. About a century later, the small community, which lived according to the rule of Saint Colomban, was transformed into a Benedictine Abbey, which was for many centuries the centre of the religious and intellectual life of the district, with a fame that extended all over Europe. Around the monastery, a town sprang up. Hemmed in on all sides by the territories of the Prince Abbot, the city of St. Gall could not expand and therefore abandoned any idea of playing a political or military role like other Swiss towns.

From the 12th century onwards, as the influence of the monastery declined, so the importance of the town increased; as a result of continual quarrels with the Prince Abbot, the burghers of the town—who had banded together in corporations about the middle of the 14th century—obtained their independence, after having joined the Swiss Confederation in 1454. With the Reformation, the separation became complete, the town, following the example of its burgomaster, the humanist *Vadianus* (Joachim von Watt), having gone over to the new faith. The French Revolution marked the end of the Benedictine Abbey. Apart from the memory of its greatness, all that remains today are the buildings, part of which house the cantonal administrative offices while the rest is the diocesan centre, an admirable cathedral in the baroque style, built in the middle of the 18th century, with one of the finest naves in Switzerland, and decorated with a wealth



St. Gall in the 19th century, from a contemporary engraving.

of elegant detail (wrought-iron railings, carved stalls, frescos, stucco, etc.), and the conventual library of the same style which contains numerous treasures, among them a great number of manuscripts and incunabula, a collection of coins, etc.

The St. Gall textile industry

As early as the 13th century, linen was spun and woven at St. Gall, not only for domestic needs but also for purposes of trade. This industry developed and outlasted that of Constance, from which it had sprung and which disappeared in the 15th century. At this time, St. Gall was the principal market for linens, and in the neighbourhood of the town, along the waterways, there already existed bleaching establishments which subsequently developed into the fabric finishing industries that have become so important today. The inhabitants of St. Gall, who had just enough meadows around their town to spread their linen out to bleach, had extended their commercial relations all over Europe, from Spain to Poland, from Latvia to Venice. In 1691, more than 30,000 lengths of linen were bleached at St. Gall, which however were not woven in the town. In fact, St. Gall was exclusively a trading city and the merchants had their fabrics woven for them by weavers in the neighbouring countryside. More or less the same system has lasted up till the present day. The good name of the products of St. Gall was based on quality, and to maintain this, the authorities had very early on decreed certain regulations providing for the inspection and compulsory marking of the lengths of linen according to their quality.

In the 18th century, first of all the spinning and then the weaving of cotton were introduced into eastern Switzerland where they developed very rapidly, supplanting the weaving of linen, which was paralysed by the out-dated guild regulations. In 1751, two St. Gall merchants introduced embroidery, which they had seen made at Lyons by two Turkish women. This new activity developed rapidly. At the end of the 18th century, spinning, weaving and embroidery provided employment for 80,000 to 100,000 men and women working in their homes in the district of St. Gall. Historical events, from the French Revolution to the second world war, and the introduction of spinning machinery, looms and embroidery machines, did not fail to leave their mark on the development of the textile industries of eastern Switzerland. We shall only mention, in passing, the big embroidery crisis of 1920. Owing to the social and economic consequences of the first world war, aggravated by the economic crisis that began ten years later, this depression led St. Gall to the very brink of



Linen embroidery and « ajourage », from a water-colour by D. W. Hartmann, St. Gall (1793-1862).

(By courtesy of the firm Zollikofer & Co., St. Gall)

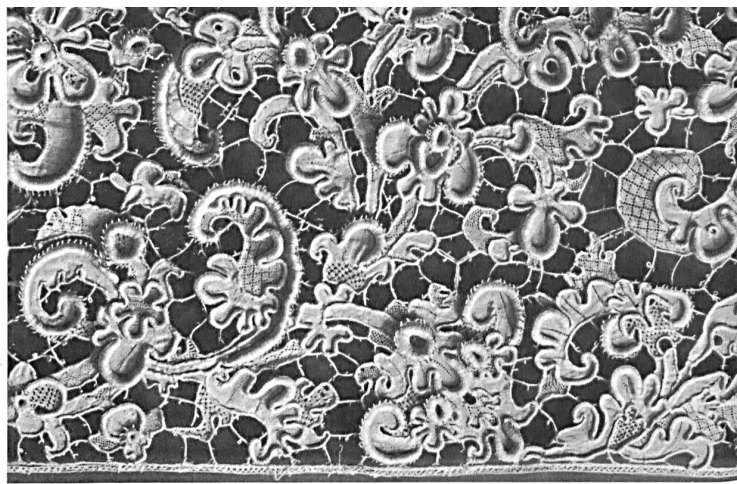


The St. Gall of today, a town of more 70 000 inhabitants; in the back-ground, the Lake of Constance.

Photo Gross



Iklé collection : openwork embroidery on linen ;
Switzerland, 17th century.



Iklé collection : Venetian lace in relief ; Italy,
17th century.

ruin. Many concerns were ruined and disappeared, others sought salvation in new fields, which was the start of the factories making lingerie, stockings, buttons, knitwear, ready-to-wear clothing and even products unconnected with textiles. At the same time, the technical development of the finishing industry made possible the extraordinary progress that took place in « finished » cotton fabrics, among which we also include printed handkerchiefs. Just before the last war, a sudden change in fashion brought about a new vogue for embroidery and this trend now seems to have come to stay. Readers of this periodical are sufficiently well informed concerning the products of the Swiss embroidery and fine cottons industries for it to be necessary to speak of them here.

The « Commercial Directory, » the vocational training schools

Early in their history, the merchants of St. Gall united in order to protect their interests. They maintained warehouses in distant countries, organised regular postal services, even negotiated trade agreements with foreign princes. The merchants' guild—backed by no army, no territorial power, but merely its own skill—enjoyed widespread powers with regard to the organising and supervising of trade. It has survived right down to our day under the name of « Commercial Directory, » an association which fulfils, among other duties, the functions of a chamber of commerce but which concerns itself with other fields too, in particular commercial and vocational training. In keeping with the spirit of its statutes, the « Directory » is responsible for a number of schemes of public interest, concerning in particular the textile industry. It created, for example, the Materials Testing Institute, which later became a federal institute (EMPA), as well as the Higher Institute of Commercial Studies. In order to enable manufacturers to keep abreast of trends in fashion, in 1863 the Directory founded a permanent exhibition of samples which in 1878 became the Museum of Industrial Arts. To this were subsequently added vocational courses for designers which developed into the present « School of Textiles and Fashion ». The aim of this institution is to train designers for embroidery and the textile industries in general, as well as women and girls for making different kinds of hand- and machine-made embroidery, and cutters, dress-designers and workshop forewomen for the ready-to-wear clothing industry, of which there are many factories in the district. It forms



Iklé collection :
the Antependium
of Sarnen (Switzerland) ca. 1330.
Embroidery in linen
and coloured
silk on a linen
ground. In the
centre, the Lamb
of God, surrounded
by the An-
nunciation and
the symbols of the
four Evange-
lists.
Photo G. Mangholz

part of the cotton industry's group of textile schools, which includes the Wattwil School of Weaving (see T. S. No. 3/1951), the Embroidery Schools of Eastern Switzerland (also housed in the Museum), the St. Gall School of Textiles for Merchants, the Textile Finishing School and the School of Hosiery and Knitwear (see page 109), the last two being also situated at St. Gall.

In the Museum of Industrial Arts, students of the various schools, apprentices and members of the local industries as well as private individuals, have at their disposal vast sources of information. There is, in particular, a collection of 1,500 screens on which are mounted samples of lace, embroidery and other textiles from all countries from the 16th century to our day, 65 albums of samples of machine-made embroidery from approximately 1900 to 1915, samples of novelties in printed fabrics changed every month, etc. One room in the Museum contains a permanent exhibition of the finest modern creations of the local industries: embroideries, embroidered fabrics, fine cotton fabrics, etc.

The Iklé collection

In addition to this rich mine of information, which calls for a more detailed description than space permits us to give, there is a collection of textiles which is considered among the finest and richest in the world. Leopold Iklé (1832-1922), a merchant from Hamburg who made his home in St. Gall, started a collection of laces and embroideries in order to draw inspiration from them for the creation of new designs. Over the years, his knowledge of the subject having become greater and his collector's enthusiasm being aroused, Iklé succeeded in acquiring items of considerable interest. In 1904 he made a gift of his collection to the Museum of Industrial Arts in his adopted country. This collection of some fifteen hundred items, which contains fabrics going back to the time of the pharaohs, a number of marvels of the 17th century—the great period for lace—items for religious and secular use from all countries and of incomparable artistic and technical value, as well as embroidered costumes, represents a priceless source of inspiration for all those who have a creative role in the field of textiles, clothing, furnishing, etc. This great collector, who gathered together all these precious wonders, proved at the same time to be a scholar, drawing up a descriptive catalogue which is an invaluable aid to the study of one of the most interesting and fascinating of subjects.

Finally, it should be added that the Museum of Industrial Arts at St. Gall has recently acquired another collection of the same kind, which will be on view to the public once it has been arranged and set out in a manner worthy of the collection which it comes to join. *

R. C.

* We shall inform readers of this event in due course.

1 At the Museum of Industrial Arts: a pupil of the Textile School consults an information screen.

Photo Hege

2 At the Textile School: a young designer at work.

3 At the Textile School: a pupil of the « Lorraine » embroidery class.

Photo Hege

4 At the Fashion School: fitting a model.

Photo Peter Grünert

