

TEXTILE PRODUCTION

The Musée du Vieux Nîmes keeps a loan collection of 200 cashmere shawls.

Origin and technique



Originally from the East Indies, these long or square shawls are made of wool or cashmere. The cashmere comes from Tibetan goats hair. Woven in twill (the thread passes twice over and then twice under), a medium-sized shawl required two weavers over eighteen months of work. The most beautiful shawls were made in three years.

In the 19th century, the English East India Company will import many goods from this part of the world to Europe. This explains why English women wore wool or cashmere shawls about fifteen years before the French. The Egyptian campaign allows some French officers to bring back shawls to their wives. These gifts were little appreciated until Josephine Bonaparte launches the fashion of wearing the shawl on the shoulders in France.

The twill-tapestry technique, known in French as *espolinage* or *espoulinage*, is used in Central Asia. *Espolins* (or *espoulines*) are small spindles or bobbins on which woollen threads are wrapped. They were passed from left to right on the loom only in the areas to be decorated, which allowed an economy of raw materials. In Europe, shawls were first made on a drawloom and later on a Jacquard mechanism, invented in 1801, which facilitated the manufacturing process. These looms use mapped designs (perforated cardboard) allowing an automated manufacture of the pattern.

Nîmoise production

During the first half of the 19th century, Lyon and Nîmes will convert their factories into the production of silk and cotton (or wool) shawls and later in cashmere. The Nîmes shawls will be recognisable by their bright colours and their ornamental patterns, of Indian origin, composed of stylised floral elements and palms, also called *botehs*. Exported to America, Spain, Belgium and Holland, the Nîmes shawls will win numerous prizes at the Universal Expositions between 1827 and 1867. Towards the end of the 19th century, the shawls will go out of fashion and their production stops in France.

Certain shawl makers from Nîmes, such as François Gausson senior, an associate of Denairouse, choose to settle in Paris. They win a gold medal at the National Exhibition of Industrial Products in 1827, and then separately in 1834. Gausson senior then proposes a green square shawl with complex decorations inspired by Islamic buildings after a drawing by Amédée Couder. In 1839, Gausson presents another exceptional shawl evoking an architecture staged with human and animal figures.

The School of Manufacturing

In Nîmes, the shawl patterns are created by designers from the School of Manufacturing. Pattern design cannot exist without knowing how to map or weave on a Jacquard mechanism.

A municipal by-law dating from 1820 creates a Design School. The school is free and mainly caters for the children of manufacturers and textile workers. In 1821, a chemistry lesson is created to deal with dyeing, followed by a course in geometry and mechanics applied to the arts.

The School of Manufacturing is mentioned in a directory of the Gard for the first time in 1828. It has three classes: the theory of weaving, application on the loom, and factory, printing and mapping design. The two schools are complementary; their activity is linked directly to shawl manufacturing.

Thereafter, the School of Manufacturing becomes the Practical School and its teaching will evolve more towards industry. Its activity will last about twenty years and decline at the same time as the fashion of the shawl. However, it will operate until 1907. In 1929, the content of the Manufacturing School (books, weaving notebooks, mapping cards) is donated to the Musée du Vieux Nîmes.

The varnishes



The preparatory design of a shawl is called a varnish. It is made on laid paper made translucent. It is prepared by soaking sheets of tissue paper, a thin and translucent sheet, covered with varnish made of a resinous substance and turpentine.

This transparency makes it possible to gouache the outline of the pattern in the drawing on the reverse side in the desired size of the fabric. To reproduce the pattern for weaving, another specialist draftsman maps the design by transposing it onto finely gridded paper. With this mapping, the cards of the Jacquard mechanism are perforated.

The museum owns more than 1,000 gouache varnishes which entered the Musée du Vieux Nîmes between 1921 and 1929. In 1921, Paul Fabre, a shawl maker turned carpet maker, donates the archives of the family factory, to which were added the archives of the School of Manufacturing in 1929. These “industrial designs”, as Henri Bauquier called them, were executed between 1815 and 1870.

COTTON FABRICS

The quilted bedspreads

A kind of bas-relief on fabric, the quilted bedspread is born in the 12th century in Sicily and arrives in France in the 14th century via Marseille, imported by wealthy merchants. This sculpture on fabric became the emblem of an entire region. It is first reserved for the nobility before it is democratised. Decorated with representations of plants and animals, which symbolise life, the quilted bedspread is a platform of expression for the women who make them by hand. Their production fell into disuse with the invention of the sewing machine at the beginning of the 19th century.



Indienne fabrics

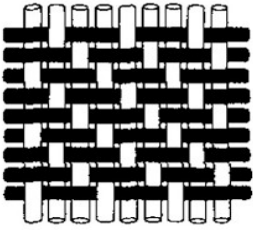


Coming from the East and India, the *indienne* fabrics arrive in Marseille in the 17th century. Made of cotton, the *indienne* fabrics are painted, dyed or printed with motifs paying homage to flora and fauna. In the 17th and 18th centuries, Europeans were dazzled by these patterns and the discovery of cotton.

Patterns are obtained with wooden printing blocks, rollers, stamps or hand-painted. *Indienne* fabrics were banned for almost a century so as not to compete with local silk production, but were well established on the textile market by the end of the 18th century. Their motifs can be found on scarves, petticoats, aprons and shirts in all social categories of the population, as well as on upholstery fabrics, or on the famous quilted blankets born in Marseille.

NIMES SERGE

Origins



Since the Middle Ages, the City of Nîmes has developed high-quality and very economical textile products. Serge is one of them. This twilled fabric, whose oblique crossed weave (twice above and once below) gives it a more resistant character than canvas, has been used on a large scale for everyday clothing and furnishings.

There are different types of serge whose names, given by merchants and manufacturers, served to identify their quality, and their place of invention and manufacture. Nîmes serge is thus a textile appellation based on the name of its region of origin. But it is manufactured throughout southern France, as is the case with the royal manufacture of *Sieur Ayrolles* in Carcassonne. Nîmes serge is renowned as far away as England from the end of the 17th century.

Mystery hovers over the origin of the denim appellation which has fuelled many legends, including the Nîmes origin of denim. The first point to clarify is a question of vocabulary:

- The jean is a cotton serge twill-weave fabric with warp and weft threads of the same colour.
- Denim is also a cotton serge, but is characterised by an indigo blue warp yarn that is not thoroughly dyed and an ecru weft yarn. This combination, for the sake of economy, explains its natural and progressive fading after washing.
- Jeans, an abbreviation of the American expression "a pair of jeans", is a precisely shaped pair of trousers made of denim.



It is likely that time has created confusion between the two types of fabric (jean and denim) and their respective names.

Fustian (twill fabric of wool and cotton, or wool and linen) such as the Genoese twill, also known as *jean* or *jeane*, were made from the 16th century onwards. From the 18th century, cotton will be preferred to wool for the manufacture of fabrics. The Lancashire region rapidly produces and distributes *jean* on a large scale. It is therefore normal to see jean and denim produced in the United States from the earliest developments in the cotton industry. From 1778, John Hargrove, an Irish émigré living in Baltimore, probably a weaver who became a minister in the Methodist Episcopal Church, will play a major role in the development of the American textile industry. His treatise on weaving lists 9 variations of *jeans* and 3 of denim.

In the 19th century, *jean* and denim are still two different fabrics and their production increased throughout the 19th century following the development of the American industry. The well-cut and durable trousers are made in *jean*. Three main products will emerge in the United States: dungarees (overalls), trousers and jackets.

And Levi Strauss?

Levi Strauss (1829-1902) settles in San Francisco and founded a company that trades fabrics and manufactured goods throughout California. Jacob Davis, one of his clients, a modest tailor who makes trousers from tent fabrics which he reinforces with rivets on the pockets and tension points, offers him an association to finance the patent registration of the riveting process. In 1873, they establish their first clothing factory: Levi Strauss & Co. Fluctuations in the delivery of fabric from Europe prompt them to source from the Amoskeag denim factory in New England.

From work clothing, jeans gradually becomes a leisure garment for the American middle class vacationing on the ranches of the American West during the first quarter of the 20th century. Jeans associated with the image of cowboys and cowgirls are subsequently worn by actors, such as Marilyn Monroe or James Dean, in western films. In the 1950s, rebellious youth seek to distinguish themselves from their elders and wear jeans on a daily basis. This fashion spread throughout Europe in the post-war period also thanks to the cinema, before becoming an elemental part of women's and men's wardrobe today. It is during this period that the name *jean* would gradually change from *jean* fabric to trousers made in this fabric.

Indigo

True Indigo is theoretically a dark, purplish or even reddish blue. Only the *indigofera tinctoria*, native to tropical Asia, contains enough active ingredients to make it particularly attractive and economical. Deep and intense in colour, these pigments are about 20 times more active than the other 800 plant species that can be used to produce indigo.



Imported to Europe from India during Greco-Roman antiquity, crushed and dried indigo leaves arrived in the form of a ball. Until the discoveries of Marco Polo in the 13th century, it was thought to be a mineral pigment. In the 15th century, Vasco de Gama opened the route to India, via the Cape, making possible regular trade between the West and the East, resulting in a massive import of indigo. Some European regions banned the use of this pigment, as it endangered local vegetable dyes, particularly pastel in the Toulouse region. In 1737, its trade became legal again in Europe. It was not until 1883 that the German Adolf von Baeyer developed a synthetic indigo. This invention would gradually replace natural indigo.

LE GRAND SALON

French billiards

19th century

inlaid mahogany

Made in Nîmes by Bernassau Jr.

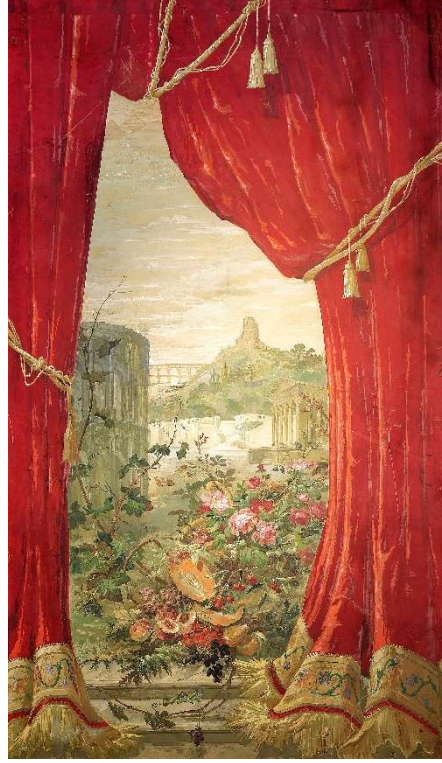
Musée du Vieux Nîmes collection



This Charles X period billiard table comes from a residence in Parignargues (Gard). The museum also keeps some wallpaper decorating the game room walls from this site. Made of rosewood, it is inlaid with light lemonwood marquetry reproducing hunting scenes about the "good savage" fighting ferocious beasts to protect his wife and children, a theme in vogue in the 19th century. Gilded bronze masks with female heads and rosettes also adorn the four feet.

This billiard table is the work of the cabinetmaker Bernassau Jr., who was based in the rue Saint-Eugénie in Nîmes. In the 19th century, Nîmes had two master billiard players (then four in 1880): Larnac and Bernassau. The Bernassaus won numerous prizes throughout the 19th century at local and regional exhibitions (vermeil medal in Nîmes in 1863).

Two large panels
19th century
Gouache decoration
Manufacturing school



On the right, dating from the 19th century, a gouache decoration by the artist Fabre depicts a theatre curtain accompanied by floral motifs revealing a landscape showing the Roman monuments of Nîmes and the Pont du Gard. From the flower basket, located at the bottom of the panel, our gaze rises upwards, discovering the Maison Carrée (on the right), the Amphitheatre (on the left), and the Jardin de la Fontaine before noticing the Pont du Gard and the Magne Tower at the top of the scenery.

Created by Emile Prunier, the large gouache project on the left is composed of bouquet and satyr decoration. Coming from the Municipal Manufacturing School, Prunier won first prize and the gold medal for this achievement.

Some doubts remain about the use of these two panels. They could be sets used by the Nîmes theatre.

Sapho, 1849, waxed plaster, James Pradier (to the right of the room)

Nemausa, circa 1851, porcelain biscuit, James Pradier (left of the room)



These statues are the work of James Pradier (1790-1852), whose real name was Jean-Jacques Pradier. Born in Geneva to a Protestant family from Toulouse, he moved to Paris in 1807 where he entered the Ecole des Beaux-Arts the following year. Winner of the *Prix de Rome* in 1813, he made his debut at the Salon in 1819 and very quickly became famous. Nicknamed "*the last of the Greeks*", he was the most renowned sculptor during the reign of Louis-Philippe. His works are imbued with ancient inspiration and romanticism. His female statues are of great meticulousness and elegance.

James Pradier will fulfil numerous public commissions, including those of the City of Nîmes. In the last years of his life, he stayed several times in the city to create the Esplanade fountain, inaugurated in 1851, representing an allegorical female figure of the city of Nîmes. The Nemausa statue is a preparatory sketch for the creation of the fountain. The Museum of Fine Arts keeps several important works by James Pradier in its collections.

To the right of the large salon, the Greek poetess Sapho takes on the features of the actress Juliette Drouet, the artist's mistress from 1825 to 1828.



Wedding wardrobes
18th and 19th centuries
Walnut
Pierre Pillot

Made between the 18th and 19th centuries, these wedding wardrobes are in the Louis XV spirit. Made of varnished wood with moulded decorations, this walnut furniture was used for the dowries of young brides.

To the right of the exhibition room, the wardrobe has metal fittings and symbolic decorations. Wheat and flower motifs represent the prosperity of lovers, as do olive branches and vines, also attributes of peace and love.

The fruit baskets are the wish for a prolific and fruitful relationship, while the hunting horns indicate that we are in a well-to-do family.

The cabinet on the left is also decorated with olive branches, a symbol of prosperity and love. The upper crossbeam is decorated with two hearts between two quivers, which shows us the importance of the family, while the lower crossbeam is decorated with an urn, bow and garland.. Fruit baskets and ears of wheat are also symbols of abundance and prosperity. It bears the engraved stamp of Pillot, a master cabinetmaker from Nîmes.

Originally from Fontenay sur Seine in the Paris region, Pierre Pillot (1748-1822) apprenticed with Mathieu de Bauve for six years before working as a journeyman with this master cabinetmaker for nine years. He settled in Nîmes around 1776 in the Prat district of L'île du collège. Pierre Pillot had a habit of engraving his mark on the furniture he produced, a method that certainly stemmed from his Parisian training. His production consisted mainly of seating (chairs, armchairs, wing chairs, sofas) and more rarely chests of drawers, cabinets or consoles.



FURNITURE

Figurative wardrobes from the Lower Languedoc region

The museum's first figurative cabinet (The Life of Moses) was acquired in 1936. Since then, six other cabinets and a façade (dated 1688 and signed BRES) have been added to the collection. Their subject matter: the Creation of the World, the Life of the Virgin, the Life of Jacob, Susanna and the Elders, the Four Horsemen and the Cardinal Virtues.

Wardrobes appear in the 17th century, after chests and cabinets. They were part of the wedding trousseau, like household linen, jewellery, various domestic utensils and work tools.

These figurative cabinets combine the know-how of two trades: master carpenters and master sculptors. They are decorated with very rich bas-relief carvings and are characteristic of the Lower Languedoc region. They have the particularities of regional furniture: rare, produced over a fixed period of time, and prevalent in a limited region.

These wardrobes are mainly made of walnut. Only the shelves and the back sections are made of chestnut. They are massive: the height/width ratio is almost equal to one, which gives them a rather heavy appearance, contrasting with the slender cupboards found at the time. The sides are very plain and contrast with the richly decorated front. The uprights are carved, usually with plant friezes. They open with two leaves, each divided into two panels with a smaller one in the centre. They are surmounted by a crosspiece decorated with a heavy frieze and then by a richly decorated cornice. Their iconography is mythological and religious in character.

The trunk

Dating from the 17th century, this chest is made of carved walnut with lion paws feet. The treatment and craftsmanship of this chest are similar to those on the cabinet known as *La Genèse* (The Creation of the World), displayed in this room. The use of certain iconographic elements suggests that it was made in the Cévennes: trees in the shape of artichokes, a city in perspective, winged monsters, putti. In the style of the 17th century, the characters in the corners refer to ancient statuary: a warrior in breastplate and feathered helmet on the left; on the right a long-haired woman accompanied by a child seems to be dressed in half a coat of armour. The figures on the façade of the rear corners recapitulate exactly the uprights of the so-called Languedoc wardrobes.



POTTERY AND CERAMICS

The Musée du Vieux Nîmes's collection of glazed earthenware pottery was assembled between 1923 and 1930 by Henri Bauquier, the museum's founder and first curator. The pottery arrived at the museum among an array of everyday objects given by private individuals or in a series donated by a local manufacturer. Some rare pieces are from the 17th or 18th century. Most of them date from the second half of the 19th and early 20th century. In total, there are more than 1,300 pieces of a very wide variety: kitchen and toiletry utensils, materials used in hydraulic works or in the firing of ceramics.

Production sites

The geological richness of the Gard and its clay soil have in the past favoured the establishment of potters, in particular in Alès, Beaucaire, Nîmes, Pont-Saint-Esprit, Uzès or Sommières (42 communes in all). At the end of the 19th century, faced with foreign competition, the workshops closed progressively as a consequence of their unsuitability to industrial organisation and an evolution of the taste and lifestyles of the customers. Today, some production continues in workshops, such as in Anduze or Uzès.

Manufacturing and its use



There are three techniques for making pottery: modelling, throwing on the wheel and molding (also called stamping). After each process, the production is dried and then fired. This is known as terracotta. The sealing of pottery with glaze is linked to the evolution of lifestyles and will meet a strong demand for tableware, the manufacture of storage containers and various objects.

Colours and decors

The content of ferric particles explains the differences in the colouring of clays. Different manufacturing techniques will make it possible to vary this palette. A transparent glaze made from lead, minium or alquifoux is sprayed or soaked onto the glazed clay. This glaze can be tinted with metal oxides before firing at 900° degrees to give a green, rust, blue or marbled effect. From the 13th century, oxidation firing associated with lead glaze (vitrifiable enamel) enabled pottery to be made waterproof. In the 16th century, this invention led to the use of coloured decorations in engobe (a thin layer of clay). Usually, the engobe neutralises the colour of the clay before the application of the enamel which will give the pottery its final hue during the firing.

THE PICHON D'UZES FACTORY

It is one of the few fine pottery companies to have survived since the 19th century. It benefits from the "Living Heritage Company" label awarded by the Ministry of the Economy, Industry and Employment to French companies with excellent craft and industrial know-how.

Faïence



Faïence, a fine tin-glazed earthenware, won acclaim throughout Europe and France in the 19th century. In the Gard, faïence was produced only in large urban centres such as Alès and Nîmes.

The first relief decorations were enhanced by a transparent glaze, but the real innovation remains a pattern made from printing inked tissue paper onto biscuit-fired pieces (having undergone a first unglazed firing). Later, potters used transparent glazes coloured with metal oxides. This technique is similar to that used to make glazed earthenware, but the whiteness of the modelling clay eliminates the need for engobing while giving similar colour effects after firing.

The municipal project and faïence in Uzès

Not a single faïence factory exists in Uzès before the beginning of the 19th century, according to the land register. A project to establish a factory is launched in 1806-1809. Its aim is twofold: to employ the hospital's residents and to manufacture pipeclay (fine earthenware). The chemist Jean-Antoine Chaptal provides valuable advice. At the same time, the municipality asks Marseilles manufacturers, Messrs Guiraud and Perrin, to carry out the first tests with clay from the Uzège region. The experimental firings carried out in Marseille are disappointing. Nonetheless, the project persists and the Teissier and Company factory, created on January 2, 1819, is the real starting point for earthenware in Uzès. Two families of faïence makers follow one another: the Vernets (a company which no longer exists) and the Pichons.

The Pichon family

Jacques Philippe Pichon is at the origin of this faïence-making family. He has five children, one girl and four boys, three of whom will become earthenware makers and give birth to the workshop still operating in Uzès. When Jacques Philippe Pichon dies in 1830, all the children cede the rights to the movable objects used in the manufacture of fine pottery to their brother François. On his death in 1877, his three sons, Jules, Alphonse and Auguste, take over the factory. From 1892 to 1964, the company passes from father to son. That year, Jean-Paul Pichon starts a second factory at Pont des Charrettes while his brother, Bernard, continues to run the family business which closes in 2009. Today Christophe Pichon, Jean-Paul's son, continues the family tradition and exports its products all over the world.

The Pichon know-how

In the 1950s, the Pichon workshop continues to use porous red clay from the Uzès region to make kitchen items which are enamelled in traditional tones such as olive green or Provence yellow. Today, the local clay has been replaced by a white clay containing a high proportion of kaolin. Oriented towards the table arts, most products are wheel-thrown or cast in molds. This differs from the baskets, a family speciality, whose clay cords are braided like basketwork before being decorated with small clay flowers. All the pieces are then dried, engobed and then undergo a first firing at 1100° C called biscuit firing. A lead and sand-based coating is then applied before they are fired at 980° C to allow the glaze to melt and bring shine and colour to the pieces.

The mixed clays



The speciality of the Pichon manufacture is undoubtedly the mixed clays, whose exact date of appearance is uncertain. The craftsmen work a mixture of coloured clays into the clay batch giving the effect of marble with multicoloured veins. The oldest have only three colours: white, red and black. Green is obtained by adding copper oxide and blue is the result of the addition of cobalt ferrite. These two tones appear during the third quarter of the 19th century. Floral decorations will be added later.

The sedan chairs

18th century

Wood, glass, textile, painted canvas, leather

Inventory 920.20.1 and 944.1.13

These two sedan chairs are decorated with painted country scenes evoking the seasons. One of them, coming from the former Nîmes Hospital collection, has been part of the museum's collections since the museum was created in 1920. The other was donated in January 1944 by Senator Silhol.

They were restored in 2019 for their new exhibition with the help of the FRAR (Regional Restoration Aid Fund) Occitania Region.

Owned by wealthy people, these sedan chairs were designed around 1720. They make it possible to escape city traffic jams but also to avoid getting dirty while walking through narrow alleys. This means of transport also makes it easier to move in spaces too narrow for horse-drawn carriages.

In a very refined rococo style, these two sedan chairs are made of polychromed and gilded painted wood with copper and ferrous alloy fasteners. The legs and corners of the upper cornice are carved. The outer parts are decorated with painted canvases of rural representations and plant motifs. The chair's interior and the bottom of the door are upholstered in velvet. The seat was padded and the armrests were fringed. Studded leather was originally used for the canopy and floor. There are also windows that can be raised. Several trades (saddlers, upholsterers, carpenters, etc.) are involved in the production. They were also known as "coachbuilders".



UZES CABINETS (GRAND STAIRCASE)

The Uzès cabinets are another example of the creativity revealed in regional furniture which entered the collections of the Musée du Vieux Nîmes in 1928, thanks to Henri Bauquier. They are narrower and do not have the pediment of the figurative wardrobes. These wedding wardrobes are made up of six panels: three per door, including a small one in the centre between two large ones of the same size. The structure is fairly simple and they are made of inexpensive wood: pine, chestnut, fir or lime.



The origin of the painted decorations is unknown, as is the exact reason for the name "Uzès cabinet". It is said that Italian artists were invited to paint the ceilings of the Duchy's castle. This event could be the origin of a fashion for polychrome furniture. The gilding and paintings on wood of the organ of the Uzès cathedral dedicated to Saint Théodorit attest to an equally important influence of Boulle marquetry on the furniture of Versailles. The thin yellow lines on a black background of the early cabinets reproduce elements of ironwork. Painted flowers evoke the wood inlays of Boulle marquetry.

When taking the stairs of the bishop's palace, the first Uzès cabinet seen, inspired by Louis XIV, reveals two central medallions representing spouses facing each other. Unlike other examples, their monogram is not represented. Each of the six door panels is surrounded by white arabesques. The four largest panels are decorated with floral compositions in shades of red and white used to represent the spouses.

Although black is the background colour of the two Uzès cabinets exhibited in the Musée du Vieux Nîmes, certain furniture pieces have been painted in shades of bluish green, green or blue, or even white. Cabinets with a red background are much rarer.

THE NIMOISE TEXTILE INDUSTRY

The collections of the Musée du Vieux Nîmes display a textile department that exemplifies the importance of the manufacture and trade of fabrics in Nîmes from the Middle Ages to the first half of the 20th century.



Wool

From the 15th century onwards, the city of Nîmes enjoys an important wool and linen trade. Medieval drapery merchants occupy the top of the bourgeois hierarchy alongside the moneychangers. In the second half of the 16th century, the woollen craft industry gives the city its first period of prosperity. The art of wool is devoted to basic operations, the development and transformation of the raw material, manufacture of commonly used coarse cloth, serge and *cadis*, intended for the local market.

Subsequently Nîmes develops the manufacture of rather light and inexpensive sheets: these are *londrins*, London-style *nim's* cloth. These *nim's* sheets are shipped to America or the Levant. This is the start of large-scale trade. Production in Nîmes will revitalise thanks to exports: family workshops develop; foreign products such as indigo and cotton are imported, the latter from the French West Indies in the second half of the 18th century.

Silk: an economic boom for Nîmes

Drapery made Nîmes prosperous in the first half of the 17th century. Nîmes specialises in the production of coarse fabrics (*cadis*, serge and light sheets) for a local and less wealthy clientele. Trimmings and dyeing complete the rest of this economic activity.

To reduce labour costs, wool production is transferred to the countryside in the second half of the 17th century. Silk work and the making of silk and silk stockings remain in the large towns that had been transformed into workshop towns. Nîmes then produces silk and hosiery.

The countryside is an abundant source of manpower experienced in artisanal work, whereas the function of Nîmes is to exchange, manage and produce a well-organised merchant network. These two factors are the basis of textile industrialisation in Lower Languedoc.

In the 18th century, the dominance of Nîmes is strengthened with silk and hosiery, supported by silk production in the Cévennes, which moves from a food-producing economy made up of agricultural production to a market industry. At the beginning of the century, there were 461 master weavers in the hosiery industry in Nîmes and 367 in the countryside. Although Nîmes retains its dominance, the backup of the countryside allows production to double. The city is then a centre for the construction of weaving looms and remains the only one capable of housing the largest entrepreneurs.



International trade will develop in the 18th century, favoured by colonialist policy, the emergence of new countries, and the role of the Huguenot diaspora. The merchant trader, often belonging to the Protestant bourgeoisie, is a central figure of this period since he organises this commerce. Almost all stocking and fabric production travels abroad: notably to Spain and the West Indies.

Nîmes textile production in a few figures

In 1717, the Nîmes industry tallies 675 weaving looms for 77.2% of the production of woollen stockings and 21.4% of silk stockings. In 1740, thanks to skilled labour and experience in silk work, this industry produced 5,000 pairs of woollen stockings and 2,000 pairs of silk stockings. Six years later, three out of every four trades work with silk.

In 1789, Nîmes has 2,571 looms dedicated to the manufacture of silk fabrics, 1,207 manufacturers and 25 workers attached to their operation and the supervision of female and child labour. There are 1,500 new master weavers in the first two-thirds of the 18th century, including 1,102 in the period from 1731 to 1765 alone.

At the beginning of the 19th century, production turns to the manufacture of the so-called cashmere shawl. In 1852, the city is one of the 3 major centres of the cashmere shawl industry, along with Paris and Lyon. In 1840, 140,000 shawls are woven in Nîmes, 215,000 in 1841 and 350,000 in 1846. From 1855 onwards, competition becomes fierce. Towards the end of the 19th century, shawls will go out of fashion and production stops in France.

In the 20th century, thanks to a skilled workforce, the factories turn to the production of carpets and ready-to-wear before collapsing in the 1960s and 80s.

The loom: Paulet or Jacquard?

Although fortunes were created here, certain names of Nîmes manufacturers remain forgotten. This is the case of Jean Paulet (1731-1791), the son of a silk fabric manufacturer, who invented a loom and mechanical techniques for reading designs in 1770. These innovations were never patented by the city, allowing the Lyon-born Joseph Marie Jacquard (1752-1834) to copy them and make his fortune after having registered the patent for the Jacquard loom in 1801.

