Sample translation (from a text on the history of cotton)

Although cotton was already known in the classical world and widely used in Egypt and the Orient as early as the 11th century, Medieval Europeans often simply used its unprocessed fibres to wad their quilted clothes (doublets, etc.). A few 12th- to 14th-century items of clothing padded with cotton wool wadding—cheaper than silk wadding but just as thick and warm—have survived: notably, the sleeve of a cloak said to have belonged to Saint Martin (carbon dated to 1160–1270)[[1]](#footnote-1), two doublets belonging to Charles de Blois[[2]](#footnote-2) and the French King Charles VI[[3]](#footnote-3), and the surcoat of the Black Prince[[4]](#footnote-4). However, cotton thread was also used to make fustian or “tiretaine”, a mid-quality cloth with a wool weft and linen or cotton warp whose manufacture was attested as early as the 13th century in the suburbs of Paris[[5]](#footnote-5). In the ledgers that Mahaut d’Artois kept between 1286 and 1328, we find a few entries for various types of fustian—*tiretaine* “of Florence”, “*pourpensée*” and “*flamenge*”—intended for dressmaking[[6]](#footnote-6), alongside more regular purchases of lengths of wool and silk. A few decades previously, Jean de Joinville had described Saint Louis’ attire and noted that he wore “a cotton cap on his head”[[7]](#footnote-7): perhaps this was one of the caps made of wool, fur or cotton mentioned in the statutes of the “Paris cotton cappers”, as recorded circa 1268 by Etienne Boileau, the Provost of the city’s tradesmen, in his book on the Paris corporations[[8]](#footnote-8). In the Middle Ages, cotton was also known as “bombace” or “bombast”, and in France cotton fabrics were sometimes called “bombasins”[[9]](#footnote-9). In a 14th century version of Marco Polo’s *Travels* which is widely considered to be a copy of the original and is written in Middle French, we find several instances of the word “banbace”[[10]](#footnote-10): the ease with which the Venetian traveller identifies cotton and cotton fabrics shows that he was familiar with cotton in both plant and cloth form. In Gujarat, he mentions seeing “*banbace* good for weaving”[[11]](#footnote-11). Later, while on the island of Socotra, he notes the locals’ “very beautiful *banbasin* cloth”[[12]](#footnote-12). Although the words “bombasin” and “bombasine” were no longer in common usage in 16th-century France, they were still understood to refer to cotton fabrics[[13]](#footnote-13). These words are attested in several documents in the context of the making of doublets, in particular: in 1574, for instance, the ledgers recording the expenses associated with the funeral of the French King Charles IX mention “70 aulns of *bombazin* of Milan to make 35 funeral doublets for 22 pages and 13 lackeys”[[14]](#footnote-14).

At the end of the 16th century, Europe began to import cotton prints from India. These Indiennes, as they were called, were a revelation: not only could India produce cotton cloth in large quantities but it had developed innovative printing techniques involving mordants, rinses, whitening agents, drying methods and coatings to make its fabrics colourfast and give them a glossy sheen. These techniques were unknown in the west at the time. In Europe, Indiennes were primarily used to decorate the homes of the wealthy: the quilts and bedspreads, curtains and wall hangings made from these fabrics ushered in a new trend in expensive home furnishings. Later, in the second half of the 17th century, painted and block printed cotton fabrics were cut into clothes: dressing gowns (also known as banyans) and women’s dresses were ornamented with finely-drawn rinceaux and human, animal and plant motifs. These patterns reflected the tastes of wealthy western elites. Indeed, trading posts were sent precise instructions on the expectations and predilections of their European clients. Cotton was a prized material for clothing for several reasons: its colourful prints did not fade in the wash and it was supple, resistant to insects and mites, and good value compared with pricier and heavier fabrics. These qualities gave cotton an edge over luxurious silks and thick woollens. However, cotton fabrics probably also owed their popularity to their novelty and surprising lightness, thinness and softness. By 1602, Holland had a flourishing trade in Indiennes, and by 1613 it was the turn of England. In 1664, Colbert created the Compagnie française des Indes orientales in order to provide the French market with direct access to these fabrics[[15]](#footnote-15). By the 1670s, Indiennes were so fashionable in France that the literary texts of the period bear witness to their popularity. In Molière’s 1670 comedy *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*, Monsieur Jourdain tells his dancing teacher about his new “Indian dressing-gown”  before adding: “My tailor says that is what people of noble birth wear in the morning”[[16]](#footnote-16). In a letter to her daughter dated January 1674, the Marquise de Sévigné wrote: “My good child, would you bring me your old fan and Indian dressing-gown?”[[17]](#footnote-17). In May 1682, *Le Mercure Galant*, a monthly publication with an eye on the fashions of time, proclaimed that “Indiennes rule as never before”[[18]](#footnote-18).

However, this period was short-lived: in 1686, two years after the death of Colbert, the French Council of State made it illegal to either import or wear Indiennes. The purpose of this ban was to put a stop to the exodus of French capital to the Indies and to the damage that the fashion for foreign cottons had inflicted on French silk and woollen manufactories. With this ban, Indiennes became an item of contraband all the more desirable for being difficult to find. Powerful aristocrats and those on the higher echelons of the French administrative apparatus flouted the ban, sourcing Indian cottons from foreign, often Dutch, traders.

In 1759, the ban was lifted and France started importing Indiennes again. However, the French understood how these fabrics were made by then[[19]](#footnote-19). Several cotton manufactures opened their doors in France—notably in Orange, Aubenas, Bolbec, Nantes, and Boutiran—producing relatively low cost cottons with Indian style patterns which soon attracted a wider market. The most well-known of these establishments were the manufacture of Orange, and the manufacture of Jouy that was created by Christophe-Philippe Oberkampf in 1760 before being expanded four years later and becoming a “royal” manufacture in 1783[[20]](#footnote-20). The Indiennes of Jouy and Orange were made from Indian cotton and block printed with brightly coloured patterns that were regularly updated. They rapidly became very popular and were sold far and wide by *marchands-merciers* (a corporation of merchants that tended to sell fashionable goods). In the second half of the 18th century, Indiennes were used to make dresses, negligees, caracos, petticoats, mantelets, waistcoats, dressing gowns with matching caps, and other summer or informal clothes. These soft, comfortable and fashionably uncomplicated clothes were better suited to the more active lifestyle advocated by doctors, hygienists and philosophers[[21]](#footnote-21).

In the last quarter of the 18th century, brightly-coloured Indiennes gave way to sheer white muslin and percale cottons. These fabrics “which come from the Indies and are surprisingly delicate”, according to the *Encyclopédie,*[[22]](#footnote-22)were made into handkerchiefs, bonnets, headdresses, tuckers, shifts, petticoats, pinafores, peignoirs, and sleeve flounces, as well as baby layettes, bridal trousseaux and more, according to Garsault in his 1771 book on the art of the *lingère* (linen maker)[[23]](#footnote-23). The Marquise de La Tour du Pin wrote an evocative account of the bridal trousseau she was given in 1887: “Gathered in vast armoires […] was the beautiful trousseau that my grand-mother had given to me; it was worth 45,000 francs and was entirely composed of linens, laces, and muslin dresses. There was not a single silk dress”[[24]](#footnote-24). Muslin dresses were emblematic of the wardrobe of well-born women : devoid of trains, panniers and the like, they were ideally suited to walking and other outdoor pursuits associated with the pastoral lifestyle advocated by artists and writers at the end of the century. The vogue for thin cotton dresses continued under the First French Empire.

1. . Conserved in the Church of Bussy-Saint-Martin (Seine-et-Marne) ; see Caroline Piel, Isabelle Bédat, “La manche de saint Martin à Bussy-Saint-Martin”, *Coré*, No 2, 1997, p. 38–43. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. . Lyon, Textile Museum, inv. 30307. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. . Chartres, Musée des Beaux-Arts, inv. 2895. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. . Canterbury Cathedral. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. . Françoise Piponnier, “A propos des textiles anciens, principalement médiévaux”, *Annales. Economies, sociétés, civilisations*, 22th year, No 4, 1967, p. 869, 873. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. . Jules-Marie Richard, *Mahaut, Comtesse d’Artois et de Bourgogne, 1302-1329*, Paris, H. Champion, 1887, p. 160–195 and 222–224. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. . *Mémoires du sire de Joinville, Histoire de saint Louis*, in : *Nouvelle collection des mémoires pour servir à l’Histoire de France (…)*, J.-F. Michaud et J.-J.-.F. Poujoulat (ed.), Paris, Guyot, 1853, p. 193. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. . G.-B. Depping (ed.), *Règlements sur les arts et métiers de Paris, rédigés au XIIIe siècle et connus sous le nom du Livre des métiers d’Etienne Boileau […]*, Paris, Crapelet, 1827, p. 251–253. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. . “Des chapeliers de coton de Paris” (title XCII) in Camille Enlart, *Manuel d’archéologie française depuis les temps reculés jusqu’à la Renaissance*, vol. III : le costume, Paris, Picard, 1916, p. 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. . Jean-Baptiste-Gaspard Roux de Rochelle (ed.), *Voyages de Marco Polo, première partie (…)*, in *Recueil de voyages et de mémoires*, vol. I, Paris, impr. d’Everat, 1824, p. 11, 211, 225, 226, 230. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. . “banbace bone à filer”; *ibid*. p. 225. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. . “ont dras banbasin mout biaus”; *ibid*. p. 230. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. . See Victor Gay, *Glossaire archéologique du Moyen Âge et de la Renaissance*, Paris, 1887, vol. 1, article: “bombasin”. In his 1549 dictionary, Robert Estienne associated *bombasin* with cotton: “de la fustaine, du bombasin et toute autre chose faicte de coton” (“fustian, bombasin and other cotton fabrics”). [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. . “70 aulnes de bombazin raze de Milian pour faire 35 pourpoints de deuil à 22 pages et 13 lacquais” ; Gay, *Ibid*. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. . The Dutch East India Company was created in 1602; the English originally created the East India Company in 1600 but reorganized it in 1613. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. . “Je me suis fait faire cette indienne-ci […] Mon tailleur m'a dit que les gens de qualité étaient comme cela le matin” ; Molière, *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme*, 1670, Act I, sc. 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. . “Ma bonne, apportez-moi votre vieux éventail et votre vieille robe de chambre des Indes”; Madame de Sévigné, *Correspondance*, vol. I, Paris, Gallimard NRF “Bibliothèque de la Pléiade”, 1972, p. 687. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. . Corinne Thépaut-Cabasset, *L’esprit des modes au Grand Siècle*, Paris, CTHS, 2010, p. 134. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. . Brigitte Nicolas, *Au bonheur des Indes. Musée de la Compagnie des Indes*, Quimper, Palantines, 2014, p. 49. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. . Aziza Gril-Mariotte, Les toiles de Jouy. Histoire d’un art décoratif, Rennes, P.U.R., 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. . Denis Bruna, Chloé Demey (ed.), *Histoire des modes et du vêtement*, Paris, Textuel, p. 224–225. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. . “qui nous viennent des Indes et qui nous étonnent par leur finesse”; *Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, t. IV, Paris, Briasson, David, Le Breton, Durand, 1754, p. 306. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. . François-Alexandre de Garsault, *L’Art de la lingère*, Paris, L. F. Delatour, 1771, p. 11–22. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. . *Mémoires de la marquise de La Tour du Pin. Journal d’une femme de cinquante ans (1778-1815)*, Paris, Mercure de France, 1989, p. 82. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)