ABSTRACT

In the period 1770-1914 wallpaper became the premier decoration in Western interiors. Until recently, it has been studied in terms of style. Yet we continue to know little about wallpaper as a material object. Here, the full context surrounding wallpaper is under consideration: the manufacturer, the design studio, the workshop, how and to whom it was sold, and how it was hung. Beneath the style of wallpaper are the cultural foundations which give it meaning. During the eighteenth century, wallpaper was a relatively well-documented, elite product. Some questions about its context are answered by the royal archives and the extensive record-keeping of N. Dollfus & Company in Mulhouse. During the nineteenth century the consumption of wallpaper of all types increased with mechanization. This study concentrates on the better-documented products of the Zuber company in Rixheim such as panoramics and décors which were intended for elite markets. Wallpaper, often misinterpreted, is established here as a fundamental element of the culture of the interior at every level of society.

Introduction to Section 1. Toward A Historiography Of Wallpaper

The perception of wallpaper is now [1] worse than ever, due to insignificant patterns, poor imitations of a variety of materials, subject matter which includes depictions of cartoon characters - and all of these are marketed and sold under the glare of fluorescent lights in big-box stores without a word of advice. On the other hand, this depressing state can be seen as nothing more than the conclusion of a long process of democratization of this mode of decoration, a process that began at the end of the eighteenth century. Unfortunately, the current state of wallpaper makes it almost impossible to imagine the wealth of creativity which it embodied over more than two centuries. It’s as if the history of this material has been erased. Nevertheless, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, a Western interior without wallpaper was practically inconceivable.

The onset of this history is 1839. We begin by presenting the written record in context.

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The origin of “wallpaper” - either single sheets of paper pasted side by side or the more familiar rolls into which these single sheets are joined - dates from the sixteenth or seventeenth century. The first historical inquiries took place in the nineteenth century,[2] The oldest seems to be a lecture on The History Of Paperhangings by John Gregory Crace before the Royal Institute of British Architects in London on February 14, 1839. It was subsequently published in their journal.[3]
In France, the historical approach dates only to 1851, the year of the Great Exhibition of London. The manufacturer Jean Zuber-Karth read a Report on the Paper-Hangings Industry to the Société Industrielle de Mulhouse on August 27, 1851 which was published by the Society on November 26th of the same year. A history of the wallpaper industry makes up Chapter 1. Meanwhile, a somewhat different text partially based on Zuber's reporting was published a year later as one of the Reports of the Juries of the Great Exhibition.

Jean Zuber’s earlier text from 1851 traces a brief history of wallpaper from China to England and then to France, which became a leading producer “in about 1780.” He states that France continues to lead despite the entry of new countries into manufacturing, notably, by the 1830s, the United States. A practical industrialist, Jean Zuber stresses the technical dimension by dwelling on the evolution of manufacturing. He includes a statistical summary which specifies, country by country, the number of tables, workers, machines and their “horsepower,” the number of rolls produced, and their value in francs.

The English text of the Great Exhibition report, published in 1852, is more precise (for example, Savary's Universal Dictionary of Commerce is cited). This Report To The Juries about Class 26 (which included wallpaper) at the Exhibition includes a broad historical introduction to wallpaper. This official report of the Exhibition stresses the competition between French and British manufacturers which began in the seventeenth century. The commissioners emphasize the recent successes and promising outlook for mechanical printing. Finally, they reproduce many of Jean Zuber's statistics, while criticizing his underestimation of English production.

The official and unofficial reports of World’s Fairs, and commentary on them, become important historical exercises. In 1855, for example, the English report of the Paris Exhibition, written by Digby Wyatt, adds to the story of the English industry in the eighteenth century. Wyatt, using the reports of French exhibitions, also writes the first precise history of French production in the nineteenth century without major mistakes. In 1867, following the Paris Exhibition, De Kaeppelin contributes a study devoted to the manufacture of wallpapers to Nouvelle technologie des arts & métiers by E. Lacroix. He focuses on French and English production in the nineteenth century. W. F. Exner’s Tapeten- und Buntpapier-Industrie published in Weimar in 1869 takes this effort further, not surprisingly, for Exner was a jury member at the 1867 Exhibition.

The next years bring little that is new, with the exception of the chapter devoted to wallpaper by Charles Blanc in his Grammaire des arts décoratifs (1881). This centers on the aesthetic more than the historical dimension. Old accounts from exhibitions are simply recopied until the Exhibition of the Central Union of Decorative Arts in Paris in 1882, which was devoted to the “arts of wood, fabrics and paper.”

The 1882 exhibition gives rise to a text by P. Rioux de Maillou and Victor Potterlet, a major designer of wallpapers and co-founder of the Central Union of Decorative Arts. Now the historical dimension gains momentum, with precise references to almanacs and guides of the eighteenth century enhanced by the professional experience of Potterlet for the nineteenth century. Ten illustrations supplement the text, which spans the history of wallpaper. The authors even reproduce neoclassical wallpaper documents (then subject to strong criticism) in their analysis. The way is open for in-depth work. In 1887, the industrialist and collector Félix Follot gives a “wallpaper talk” at the Forney Library during which he displays previously unknown eighteenth-century wallpaper documents from his own collection.

Henry Havard goes further in his Dictionnaire de l’ameublement et de la décoration published from 1887 to 1890. These volumes bring together new historical data, especially on the eighteenth century. Havard is doing the work of a historian. Not content with generalities, he mines numerous sources, for example, inventories from the end of the Middle Ages and eighteenth-century publications such as guides and almanacs. Also, he quotes Savary, Diderot's Encyclopédie, and Jean-Michel Papillon. For the nineteenth century, he relies mainly on the standard exhibition reports.
Another milestone, the end of the century, again brings little information about wallpaper’s recent past. On the contrary, at the 1900 Exhibition in Paris the manufacturer and collector Félix Follot [11] is responsible, through a retrospective and centennial exhibition, for more excavations of the distant past. As he relates in his preface to the catalog,[12] he has been collecting wallpaper for more than forty years. The grandson of the manufacturer Jacquemart passed on to Follot the sample books of Réveillon and his successors up to the year 1840.

“Little by little and patiently,” Follot writes, he created an exceptional collection. This was rounded out by loans for the exhibition in 1900. He presents three hundred wallpaper documents at what appears to be the first historical exhibition of wallpaper since that of the Union of Decorative Arts in 1882. In addition, this exhibition in 1900 is accompanied by an illustrated catalog which remains a standard text. This catalog is especially important because Follot seems to have had access to sources no longer extant. The focus of the catalog is on the eighteenth century, dominated by the colorful figure of the manufacturer Réveillon (to whom he devotes the most attention). Other factories, especially those of the nineteenth century, are merely mentioned.

Many of Follot’s documents came directly to him as gifts from manufacturers. As such, these new wallpapers are well-documented, but they do not truly reflect the history of the interior. Many, for example, were produced in small numbers specifically for exhibitions. This is a major feature of the French collections which strongly influences historiography in this country. The Anglo-Saxon approach to collections, as we shall see, was different.

The second half of the nineteenth century also saw the publication of many articles about factories. As early as 1819, Sébastien Le Normand had described the Dufour factory from a purely technical point of view.[13] This text, barely modified, was issued twice more.[14] The most important set of monographs is the work of Exner in 1869, noted above.[15] It is comprehensive for French companies and those in the Germanic territories but much less so for other countries, including Great Britain. In addition, the Gillou firm inspired a monograph in 1867.[16]

Turgan, in Les Grandes Usines: études industrielles en France [17] included the following articles of interest:

- “The Wallpaper Factory of Messrs. Desfossé & Karth,” 1864, pp. 113-128
- “The Wallpaper Factory of M. Roger à Mouy (Oise),” 1880, pp. 1-6

Also, on the occasion of its centenary in 1897, the Zuber company published a brochure: La fabrique de papiers peints Jean Zuber à Rixheim.

A revitalization of the study of wallpaper now issues forth from the United States as the Americans rediscover their past. This is especially true from 1883 onwards, only a few years after their centennial. This is a past in which wallpapers have decorated walls since the Georgian era. However, they do not have wallpaper collections as such: their approach lies in a different direction, which is established by the first notable publication, Old Time Wall Papers (1905) by the educator Kate Sanborn. For the most part, the book is based on wallpaper in situ tracked down or discovered by the author.

The antique dealer Nancy V. McClelland (1877-1959) [18] took up Sanborn’s approach; while bargain-hunting in France she collected documentation. This was supplemented with a detailed inventory of wallpaper she found in situ in the United States. She was particularly interested in what she called scenic wallpapers (panoramics), of which her book Historic Wall-Papers: From Their Inception To the Introduction of Machinery (1924) was the first systematic study. She brought to light the close links between France and the United States in this field. Indeed, up to the end of the nineteenth century most of the higher-quality wallpapers hung in America came from France.
During her research trips, McClelland became acquainted with the French curator Henri Clouzot, who had long been interested in historical wallpaper - his first article about it appeared in 1912. He wrote a preface for McClelland’s 1924 book, published a *catalogue raisonné* of Dufour’s panoramic wallpapers in 1930, and produced a rough draft of French wallpaper history in 1931. This was “Le papier peint en France du XVIIe & XIXe siècles,” which he co-wrote with Charles Follot, the son of the collector Félix Follot. Their continuing collaboration led to the publication in 1935 of a landmark in French and international historiography: *The History of Wallpaper in France*.

While this book gathers important documentation for the eighteenth century from archives and almanacs, it hardly adds to the knowledge about the nineteenth century. This is because the sources consulted were, again, the standard exhibition reports. In his day-to-day work as curator at the Galliera Museum, Clouzot had always been interested in contemporary production. However, the subject matter of *The History of Wallpaper in France* ends at 1900. One-third of the book is devoted to Réveillon alone and three-fifths are devoted to the eighteenth century. The iconography draws almost exclusively on the Follot collection and there is not a single mention of an *in situ* wallpaper; nor are the authors interested in the commercial market. As a result, the book remains essentially a history of styles. Furthermore, the glorification of the styles of the eighteenth century cannot help but slight those of the nineteenth century. This luxuriously-published book, despite its flaws, did have the saving grace of bringing wallpaper to the attention of a cultivated international audience. It remained the only French reference book until 1967.

Returning now to the decade of the 1920s, the written record of wallpaper had also made rapid progress across the Channel. This was a decade in which three important books were published. In 1923 came Phyllis Ackerman’s *The History, Design, and Use Of Wallpaper*. It focuses mainly on motifs, but one chapter attempts an international history.

In 1926, two practical Englishmen, Alan Sugden and John Edmundson, composed the first major English synthesis: *A History of English Wallpaper, 1509-1914*. The date 1509 refers to the discovery of a paper in 1911 in Cambridge which assumed iconic status in the history of wallpaper. More modern in its design than the book by Clouzot and Follot, *A History of English Wallpaper* emphasizes technical matters and contains a series of monographs on venerable English manufacturers. Sugden and Edmundson stress the English revival after 1851, initiating the view that the English production of that period, and that of William Morris in particular, is the source of all modernity in the field of decorative arts, an opinion that persists in British publications. At least the authors (unlike Clouzot and Follot) did not stop at 1900, but included developments as far as 1914.

The last important book of the 1920s appeared in 1929. This was the first-ever catalog of the Victoria & Albert Museum wallpaper collection by Charles C. Oman. In a marked departure from the collecting methods of Follot, the wallpapers of the V & A museum were retrieved from residential installations. The author introduces his work with a scholarly history of wallpaper centered on England and France. It should be noted that Oman’s catalog was the first published since Félix Follot’s in 1901.

Since 1923 a ground-breaking museum devoted exclusively to wallpaper has existed in Kassel, Germany. But, no catalogs have been published, not even for the exhibitions that the museum organized in various German cities before 1939. The German contribution to the history of wallpaper resided instead in the technical works of the nineteenth century: Schmidt (1856), Exner (1869), and Seemann (1892).

However, a critically important work was carried out at the Kassel museum in 1970, unparalleled in Germany, but also in the Western world: the three-volume *Tapeten, Ihre Geschichte bis zur Gegenwart*, under the direction of Heinrich Olligs. In addition to a broad synthesis of knowledge, the volumes include extensive documentation for the German industry. Unfortunately, the language barrier has greatly reduced the influence of this fundamental work, particularly in Anglo-Saxon countries. The same applies to Albert Haemmerle’s survey of Buntpapier in 1961 and Frederieke Wappenschmidt’s *Chinesische Tapeten* in 1989. The latter, never translated, has been woefully neglected by Anglo-Saxon historiography, which has resulting in repeated misattributions of Chinese wallpapers in British interiors.”
Research was not revived in France until the exhibition “Trois siècles de papiers peints” (Three Centuries of Wallpaper) at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs de Paris [24] in 1967. The extensive catalog of this exhibition highlighted the Parisian collections and at the same time revealed the quality of the collections kept in Rixheim by Zuber & Cie. The approach remained centered on style. Yet even if the exhibition did not present much new research, it did establish an inventory of the large French collections.

Jean-Pierre Seguin, curator in the National Library's Prints and Drawings Department, set up a research program as part of the 35th section of the CNRS (National Centre For Scientific Research), highlighting the collections of Zuber & Cie in Rixheim and the Forney Library in Paris [25]. The Forney collection was the subject of a catalog in 1980.[26]

As for the Rixheim collection, inventoried up to 1850, it gave birth, after long negotiations, to the Wallpaper Museum (Musée du Papier Peint) in 1982. The museum was enriched by the collections of the nearby Musée de l'impression sur étoffes in Mulhouse and by continual acquisitions ever since.[27] The Rixheim collection also holds, apart from wallpapers, the written archives of the Zuber & Cie manufactory and other documentation since 1790. In summary, this is the oldest and most coherent archival collection of wallpaper known.

Gradually, the presence of professional curators at the helm of wallpaper collections in Kassel, Paris, New York, Boston, Manchester, and Rixheim led to numerous high-quality publications that have established knowledge on a scientific basis [28]. Catalogues raisonnés began to appear [29], generally as part of large exhibitions; for example, panoramic wallpapers (1990) and arabesque wallpapers (1995). From 1982, the Follot collection has been presented at auction houses with great success.[30] Regularly occurring sales of antique wallpapers have become a specialty of the Paris market; these celebrate newly-discovered wallpaper documents and give rise to high-level catalogs which are of great help to historians.[31]

The wallpaper collection of the Bibliothèque nationale de France, formed from the registrations of copyright in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, has been cataloged.[32] The documentation of the world of wallpaper is expanding and now includes Sweden [33], the Netherlands [34], Belgium [35], and Switzerland [36]. In the abundance of new publications, the most original remains that of Catherine Lynn (Wallpaper in America, 1980), which, for the first time, places wallpaper in its technical, economic and human context by relying on a broad selection of archives. This book also provides a new look at the nineteenth century, freed from the prejudices that had clouded our vision.

The multiplication of articles [37] and the exchanges at specialized conferences [38] and exhibitions are finally providing a substrate for detailed studies on which to base new syntheses. Back in 1964, Mario Praz’s An Illustrated History of Interior Design (1964) had inaugurated an interpretive approach based on unpublished images of the interior. Fresh collections of these interior views continue to offer researchers untapped potential. This is true not only in the Anglo-Saxon world [39] but also in the Netherlands [40], the Czech Republic [41], and Russia [42].

For its part, the academic world is finally developing research in the field of wallpaper. After Sabine Thümmler's publication in art history (1988) followed by Isabelle Kapp’s (1996), Christine Velut defended the first thesis on wallpaper in 2000, specifically, on the topic of Parisian wallpaper 1750-1820. This opened up completely new horizons for research.

But whatever the interest in the history of wallpaper today, we remain in a field where scholarship ultimately has little to show in comparison to other decorative arts. This is due to a deeper problem, that of the status of wallpaper. While wallpaper was admittedly the main form of interior decoration in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, it has been from the outset the subject of negative criticism. Wallpaper has been regarded by thought leaders as "decoration at a discount" and often despised in comparison with other, supposedly more noble forms of decoration.
In the eighteenth century, there were some positive appraisals. Yet, wallpaper critics were united in their insistence that wallpaper imitated other materials at a lower price. They did not yet recognize wallpaper’s originality and its autonomy from other types of decoration. For example, when Quatremère de Quincy commented on arabesques in 1788, he denounced

...the popularity of wallpapers which have come into use because of the ease of proliferation, which reduces by routine and repetition the standards of taste and genius.[43]

His criticism did not acknowledge that wallpaper does not merely imitate other materials - wallpaper also develops original formulas that have no equivalent in other materials. An anonymous text attacking the management of Thierry de Ville d’Avray at the Royal Garde-meuble in 1790 [44] stated that:

He has even infected [45] the apartments of the royal family with these kinds of wall hangings. In royal residences such décor is only suitable for the lodgings of domestics.

The nineteenth century saw the development of arguments: “Wallpaper came at just at the right time to meet a necessity, an economic fact of the greatest interest: the democratization of luxury.”[46] It was stated that wallpaper was “…if not the equivalent of luxury, at least the illusion of it”.[47]

In one of his novels Jules Verne condemns wallpaper in the name of hygiene. After all, it might be “loaded with a thousand subtle poisons.”[48] In 1873, Viollet-le-Duc recommended the more durable (and less banal) painted canvases because “you are sure not to see your hangings everywhere else.”[49] Adolf Loos' moralizing edicts against wallpaper (for example, in Ornament und Verbrechen, 1908), go in the same direction. Le Corbusier asserted that wallpaper should be replaced with “a pure layer of white [paint]” because “if you clean your home... you clean yourself.”[50]

But isn't the worst disparagement the current mediocrity of our interior surroundings? It is not easy to imagine the splendor of antique wallpapers in these conditions, and therefore, to study them...

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Endnotes:

1. As of 2003. In an attempt to salvage the viability of wallpaper, some go so far as to promote new designs created by schoolchildren.... [ed. note: The footnotes of the online version of the thesis and the PDF version of the thesis are a bit scrambled. The PDF version can be downloaded from the online version. I have favored the online numbering for footnotes since that is the most accessible version.]

2. The most accessible historical account of wallpaper is The Papered Wall edited by Lesley Hoskins (1994). In the eighteenth century, Jean-Michel Papillon’s profuse work, Traité historique et pratique de la gravure en bois (Paris, 1766) includes many references to “tapestry papers” (the contemporary term for wallpaper). Jean-Baptiste Réveillon’s “Justification” (Relation historique et très intéressante des malheurs arrivées au Sr Réveillon..., Paris, 1789) is a plea on his own behalf for redress of the misfortunes of the House of Réveillon during the Revolution; it is accompanied by an account of manufacturing before 1789, see Jacqué (1995), p. 38 and passim. Charles C. Oman and Jean Hamilton’s 1982 catalog for the wallpaper collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum includes a chronological bibliography for the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (pp. 457-460). Eric Entwisle's A Literary History of Wallpaper (London, 1960) is a useful reference book.
3. John Gregory Crace (1809-1899) was the most important English decorator of his time. He often used high-end French wallpapers: see Megan Aldrich, ed., *The Craces, Royal Decorators 1768-1899*, (Brighton, 1990).

4. Jean Zuber the younger (1799-1853).


6. This theme persisted until the beginning of the 20th century. The main battlefields for the wallpaper industries of the two countries were the Exhibitions (World’s Fairs) where France regularly won almost all the medals.

7. See Appendix 13 for Jean Zuber’s statistics.

8. Sir Matthew Digby Wyatt (1820-1877) was one of the major designers in nineteenth-century England and played a leading role in the organization of the 1851 Great Exhibition in London. [ed. note: Citations for the reports of nineteen World’s Fairs (Exhibitions) appear in the bibliography of this thesis at 2. Sources imprimées, 2.2. Rapports et comptes-rendus d’expositions industrielles.]


11. The Follot collection has generated public and private sales since 1982; masterpieces from it have entered the Musée des Arts Décoratifs in Paris and the Musée du Papier Peint in Rixheim.


13. *Description de l’art du fabricant de papier de tenture de toute espèce* (Description of the Art of the Manufacturer of Wallpaper of All Kinds), in *Annales de l’industrie nationale et étrangère*, Vol. 8, No. 34, October 1822, pp. 5-51 (unsigned text).


20. On this occasion, Clouzot coined the term “panoramic.”

21. See Shipley (A. E.): “The Master’s Lodgings, Christ College, Cambridge,” *Country Life*, 1916, Vol. 40, pp. 406-412. Like the *Protat Bois*, a medieval woodblock found in France in 1898, the Cambridge fragments deserve a modern study. Both artifacts were originally viewed in a nationalist context. In the face of ground-breaking German research on the origins of printing, a tendency arose in the early-twentieth toward claims that the cultural artifacts of France or England were earlier than those of the Germans.

22. Which was still in limbo at this point.

23. This catalog was reissued and completed by Jean Hamilton in 1982.

** [ed. note: To some extent this has been corrected by citations to Wappenschmidt’s text in the 2016 publication *Chinese Wallpapers in National Trust Houses* (de Bruijn, Clifford, Bush), National Trust.]

24. The exhibition traveled in a reduced form throughout France.


28. The book edited by Lesley Hoskins in 1994 brings the writings of these curators together.

29.
Among the best, we can mention the summary of the SPNEA (Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities) collection in Boston: *Wallpaper In New England* (1986) by Richard Nylander et al.


31. The writing of Bernard Poteau and thereafter Xavier Petitcol put these catalogs on a historical footing.

32. By the historian Christine Velut. [ed. note: Some of Velut’s work on this catalog was published in 2018 as *Murs de papier: 1798-1805* (Bibliothèque nationale de France).]


35. See Geert Wisse’s research and articles.

36. See the pioneering work of Hermann Schöpfer and Marc-Henri Jordan, the latter on eighteenth-century France. The Swiss research community has taken a keen interest in wallpaper: see for example the 1994 Alaman symposium.


38. See, for example, following the 1996 Neuchâtel conference, *Copy and Paste* (*Copier coller: papiers peints du XVIIIe siècle*). Despite its clumsy title, this remarkable publication in 1998 brings together a completely new corpus about eighteenth-century wallpapers.


40. See the recent synthesis by Fock (C. Willemijn), ed., *Het Nederlandse interieur in beeld 1600-1900*, Zwolle, 2002.


42. The recent book by Volodazsky et al. follows numerous publications in this field in the 1980s and 1990s.
43. “Arabesques,” an article in the *Methodical Encyclopedia*.


45. My emphasis.


47. White (1881).

