

Schweizerisches Nationalmuseum (Hg.)

Indiennes

Material for a Thousand Stories

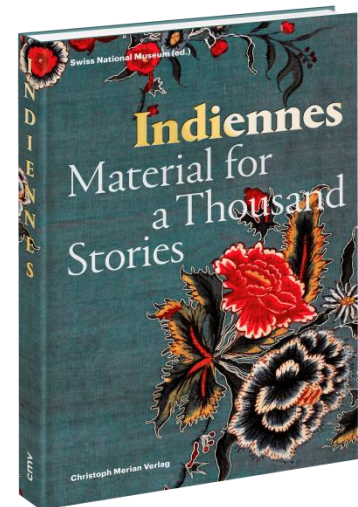
In the 17th century, *indiennes* – printed and painted textiles from India – were a popular trading commodity in Europe. Western factories, including numerous companies in Switzerland, imitated these precious items and soon *indiennes* were everywhere. For almost two centuries, the unprecedented enthusiasm for these fabrics with their exotic motifs left its mark on the society, economy and fashion of the time.

As early as the late 18th century, *indiennes* industrially-produced in Europe were able to compete, and as a consequence the trade flows were reversed: India's once thriving textile industry got into difficulties as a result of imports of cheaper textiles from Europe. Unemployment, poverty and hunger became widespread. As of the 19th century, raw cotton was the main product exported for processing in industrialised Europe. With that, Bombay became a centre of the global cotton trade.

The opulently designed publication *Indiennes* and the exhibition of the same name at the Landesmuseum Zürich (30 August 2019 to 19 January 2020) tell stories about textile production, address the theme of the colonial heritage, and outline the trade routes between India, Europe and Switzerland. By means of numerous coloured reproductions of masterpieces from both Indian workshops and the prestigious French and Swiss factories, the book highlights production secrets and myths about the thriving and wide-ranging market that made *indiennes* the first-ever globalised product.

The book deals with countless links within Swiss *indiennes* production, for example, textile production in Glarus, or the Volkart Brothers, who through their transit trade built up a trading empire in India in the 19th century and became one of the world's largest cotton exporters. As of 1834, the Basel Mission sent their missionaries out to India to convert people there. At the same time, the newly founded relief services, hospitals and schools had to be financed. Brickworks, printing shops and weaving mills earned the necessary revenue, but also unleashed a debate as to whether it was permissible for the Mission to make a profit.

Indian cotton took on another significance in the 20th century: as of the 1930s, hand-spun and hand-woven cotton clothing (Khadi) became the 'trade mark' of Mohandas Mahatma Gandhi and a symbol of the political liberation of India. The Swiss press-photographer Walter Bosshard was given the opportunity to portray Gandhi in a private setting and his striking photographs travelled the world.



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136 pages, 75 mainly colour
illustrations, hardcover, linen bound,
20 x 29,5 cm

© 2019 Christoph Merian Verlag

CHF 36.– / EUR 32.–

ISBN 978-3-85616-893-3

A printable file of the book cover and other reproductions are to be found in the media release on this new publication under:
www.merianverlag.ch/infos/presse

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