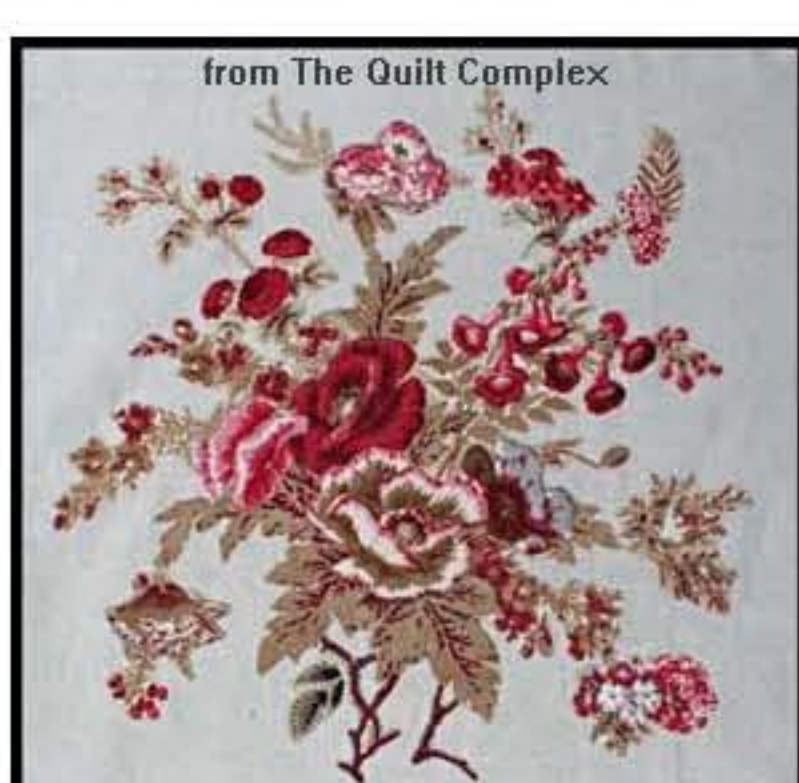


In French "broderie perse" means Persian embroidery, but it also came to refer to the lovely applique of printed chintz flowers and other motifs onto a solid fabric. These exquisite quilts have been made since the 1700s.

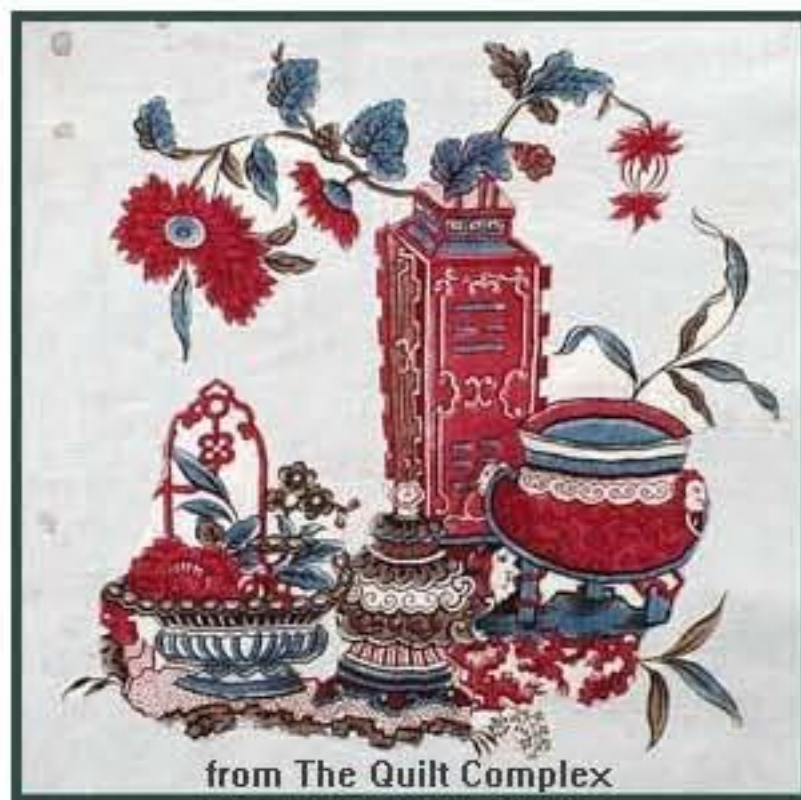
#### Painted Chintz Fabrics From India

The first chintz or painted cotton fabric was imported to England from India as early as 1600. The original prints were those in fashion in India at the time. As many English consumers did not find them appealing Indian textile producers began to design prints based on floral and other themes from English art.

When oriental motifs became popular in England and Europe these were also worked into the prints. The result was fabric with a fascinating and sometimes incongruous mixture of east and west. Most popular of these prints was the Tree of Life depicting a large tree filled with a variety of species of both flowers and birds. Although these fabrics originated in India they became known as "Persian" prints. This chintz fabric was often made into bed coverings using the whole piece of cloth.



#### English Textile Interests Get a Ban Put on These Popular Prints



The English textile industry became alarmed with the increasing popularity of this cotton print fabric from India fearing that England's wool and silk trades would be threatened. The influence of this powerful industry soon brought about a ban on the import or production of printed cotton in both England and the colonies.

It might have been because this ornate fabric became so costly and difficult to obtain that women began cutting out motifs from these "Persian" prints and sewing them to a background fabric. Whatever the reason this ingenious technique of broderie perse became a popular technique. What a perfect

opportunity this must have been for a woman to display her creativity and skills with the needle!

#### Techniques Seen in Museum Examples

Broderie perse was for show and these bed coverings were used for special occasions. Only the wealthy had the leisure time and money needed to make them. Some of these skillfully made bedcoverings were left unlined to serve as summer bedspreads for guests. Others were layered and quilted. Because they were created for show they were well cared for and preserved. As a result a few have survived to be viewed today.

Rare examples of large bed coverings covered with intricately appliqued birds, flowers and other motifs can be found in museum and private collections.

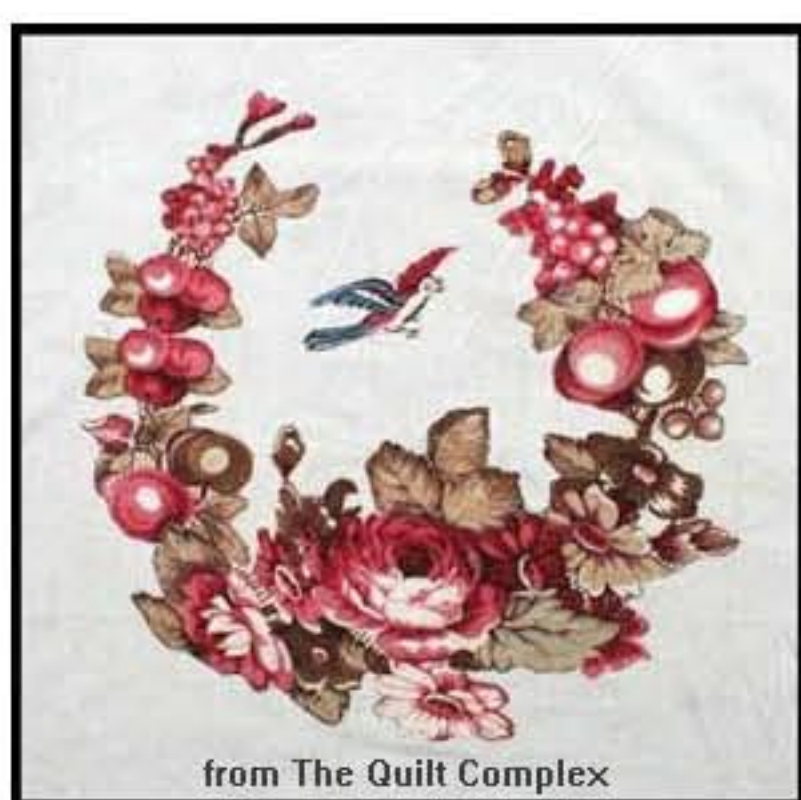
Sometimes each motif was narrowly turned and invisibly stitched to create an exquisite scene. But quilt historian, Barbra Brackman,



reports "Many were appliquéd with a tiny blanket stitch over raw edges. Rather than carefully cutting around each flower, most seamstresses cut a general shape. The secret is matching the background of the chintz to the appliqué background. From a distance the two blend and give the illusion of more detailed cutting." <sup>1</sup>

It appears that paste was sometimes used to adhere the motif fabric to the background before appliqueing. Quilt historian, Kimberly Wulfert shares the following information on pasting. "In more than one source I have read paste was used in the early 1800s by women making cut-out-chintz quilts. A later reference is in 'Chintz Quilts, Unfaded Glory.' Bullard and Shiell quote from the 1882 Dictionary of Needlework to describe how to make broderie perse quilts and paste is mentioned. The fabric is stretched on a frame before the fabrics are pasted down and allowed to dry. Then remove it from the frame to stitch the edges down. There's no mention of what the paste is made of." <sup>2</sup>

#### Women Bring Broderie Perse to the American Colonies



It appears that Broderie perse is a more recent name while in early times it was referred to as "Chintz Applique". It was not limited to the Persian style fabric. Often flowers and other motifs from glazed chintz were used. Although the art of broderie perse was developed in England early in the eighteenth century, it wasn't long after American women were settled on these distant shores before they began to carry on the tradition of broderie perse. They were eager to use these lovely prints but the yardage was scarce.

The story goes that in America's colonial times England would not allow the colonies to produce printed fabric and the price was

extremely high for imported prints. Men would pick up a yard of this precious cloth when on business in Charleston, Baltimore or New York. The women would then take these "Persian" prints and applique the flowers and birds to homespun fabric. The result was called a one-yard quilt. This story may well be a mixture of myth and fact but it does reflect the times.

#### Printed Chintz is Produced First in England then Finally In America

In time the English were allowed to make their own prints and by the last part of the eighteenth century Americans were also producing chintz fabric.

England protected the lucrative business of textile manufacturing by not allowing skilled textile workers to immigrate to America. Nevertheless a few slipped through. By the late 1700s textile manufacturing was established in America. The invention of the cotton gin made it much easier to produce cotton fabrics. Soon after powered looms were up and running.

As broderie perse become more and more popular some fabric was produced specifically to be cut apart and applique. These often included an urn or vase full of flowers as a central motif.

#### Broderie Perse Done on More Than Just Whole Cloth

As we look at the evolution of broderie perse in America we find that the earlier examples were often done in a medallion style arrangement with an arrangement of flowers or other objects in the center often with circling flowers or vines. These were usually not pieced quilts and if any piecing was done it was done as a border. The medallion pattern was most commonly used from about 1775 to 1840.

The printing of panels made to be used in medallion quilts brought about another variation of chintz appliqué. Often these panels included a central motif with surrounding decor intended for the center of a medallion quilt. But some quilters expressed their creativity by cutting up the panel then appliqueing the elements in various parts of a medallion quilt. In this case time was saved as instead of cutting out each single motif sections of the panel could be appliqueed on as a whole.



After 1840 when cotton fabric was readily available broderie perse was often seen in pieced quilts with each square showing a different flower, bird or other motif. What a perfect example this is of the creative evolution that has occurred all along in quilt making.

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Thank you to [The Quilt Complex](#) for giving permission to display the examples of broderie perse shown above. Visit their site to discover the services they provide to museums, collectors, dealers, individuals, and quilt guilds.

References:

<sup>1</sup> "Cut-Out Chintz or Broderie Perse Appliqué", "Barbara Brackman, The Quilt Detective: Clues in the Needlework, 2005, digital newsletter # 11.

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