

FLAX IN FIELDS AND GARDENS

FLAX IN FIELDS (2nd part)

'LINUM USITATISSIMUM'

HISTORY AND CULTURE

Linum usitatissimum, from the family 'Linaceae', is one of the earliest cultivated species and the oldest fibre in the world, traces of which dating back 36,000 years have been found in the Dzudzuana cave in Georgia. It is difficult to determine when this plant was first cultivated, but it was probably at the time the Pharaohs ruled in Egypt, that production of flax began developing to make clothes, funerary fabrics, sails for boats and ropes or nets. The seeds were also savoured for their nutritional qualities, as is still done nowadays.

In France, while the Gauls were already cultivating flax, it was Charlemagne who had it grown in the royal domains at the end of the eighth century, before cultivation became widespread from the eleventh century onward.

Flax fibre is apparent in the composition of the Bayeux Tapestry, produced around that time.

At the beginning of the 19th century, the invention of the flax spinning machine by Philippe de Girard was what made the north of France one of the first centres of industrial spinning mills in Europe (at Cambrai).

With mechanisation, small production facilities were no longer interesting to industry and the surface area of cultivated flax fell drastically. It was not until the end of the Second World War that the cultivation of flax was revived in France (by Belgian farmers), and crop surfaces increased from 20,000 to the 75,000 hectares now in production.

Flax is mainly grown in Northern Europe, in France, Belgium, and the Netherlands. Flax thrives in a temperate and humid coastal climate with largely stable temperatures, rich and deep soil, such as in regions close to the sea like Picardy, Seine Maritime, Eure, Calvados, and Orne ... these areas produce the finest linen fabrics in the world.

To be continued

