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Paper Mills at Fabriano

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Paper was introduced into Europe by the Arabs, with production by Europeans starting first in Spain and then Italy; the earliest documented mills there being Genoa in 1235 and Milan 1255. Fabriano was perhaps the third location for a mill, first documented in 1283, and it rapidly became known for the high quality of its output, its success being due to various innovations which improved the manufacturing process.

Fabriano papermakers invented the water-powered drop hammer. The waterwheel turned a shaft which operated multiple hammers fitted with metal nails on the heads, replacing the stone mortar and manual wooden beater used by the Arabs. These were more efficient at grinding down the fibers, producing a cheap but good quality supply of pulp (fig. 1).

Arab paper had been sized using starch (derived from wheat), good in a dry climate but ineffective in a humid climate where bacteria grew, causing the paper to deteriorate. Fabriano paper lasted because their papermakers had a local supply of gelatine (a by-product of tanneries) to use for sizing.



Fig. 1. Interior of Fabriano mill. Originally published by Willem Blaeu and reprinted in 1704 in *Het Nieuw Stede Boek van geheel Italie* by Pieter Mortier. On the right the trip-hammers pounding the pulp; in the middle, a man screening the beaten pulp through a sieve; on the left, the sheets being pressed and dried.

Fabriano mills also improved the quality of the mold, using extremely fine brass wire. This led, from the end of the thirteenth century, to the first use of watermarks, a way of marking the sheets *cont. on pg 39*

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with a personal sign that acted as a trademark. From simple signs such as crosses and circles, over three hundred years Fabriano papermakers designed watermarks based on animals (real and mythical), plants and even the figure of St. John. The watermark belonged to the individual papermaker, not the mill, so one mill could have numerous watermarks.

By the fourteenth century Fabriano had at least forty paper mills, a source of income and employment, but a very unpleasant environment. The constant beat of hammers made them noisy, and the vats of ammonia used to clean the linen rags, from which the paper was made, were unpleasantly smelly. Over the next three centuries the trade declined, due to various reasons including taxation by papal authorities, a decrease in quality (at the same time as output from other countries was improving) and protective tariffs imposed by other countries.



Fig. 2. Pietro Miliani. Stamp Day. 1994. Sc 2001.

By the eighteenth century only three paper mills remained.

Its resurgence was due to Pietro Miliani (1744 – 1817) (fig. 2) who in 1782 founded a mill at Fabriano. He introduced modern methods of production, integrating previously separate operations into commercially effective output.

His high quality paper became

in demand; customers included the printer and type designer Giambattista Bodoni and the engraver Francesco Rosaspina. Success led Miliani to purchase a second mill. In the nineteenth century the company, continued by his descendants, took over four more mills (figs. 3–4).



Fig. 5. Paper and Watermark Museum. Stamp Day. 1994. Sc 2002.

The company name Cartiere Miliani-Fabriano was a deliberate marketing ploy to invoke the historical reputation of Fabriano and its industry. In the twentieth century, output continued during the two world wars, but finally in 2001 the company was taken over by Fedrigoni Cartiere S.p.A., ending all paper production at Fab-



Fig. 3 (Above). Correspondence from the Miliani mill, 21 April 1877 to Rieti, with numeral cancel 75 and Fabriano cds.

Fig. 4 (Below). Postcard from the Miliano mill, 08 August 1911, to San Severo, with Fabriano cds and PM perfin on 10c. stamp.



riano. However in 2013 the town's history was recognized by it being designated as a UNESCO Creative City for its crafts and folk art, and the industry is commemorated by the town's Paper and Watermark Museum (fig. 5), housed not in a mill but a former Dominican Monastery.

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