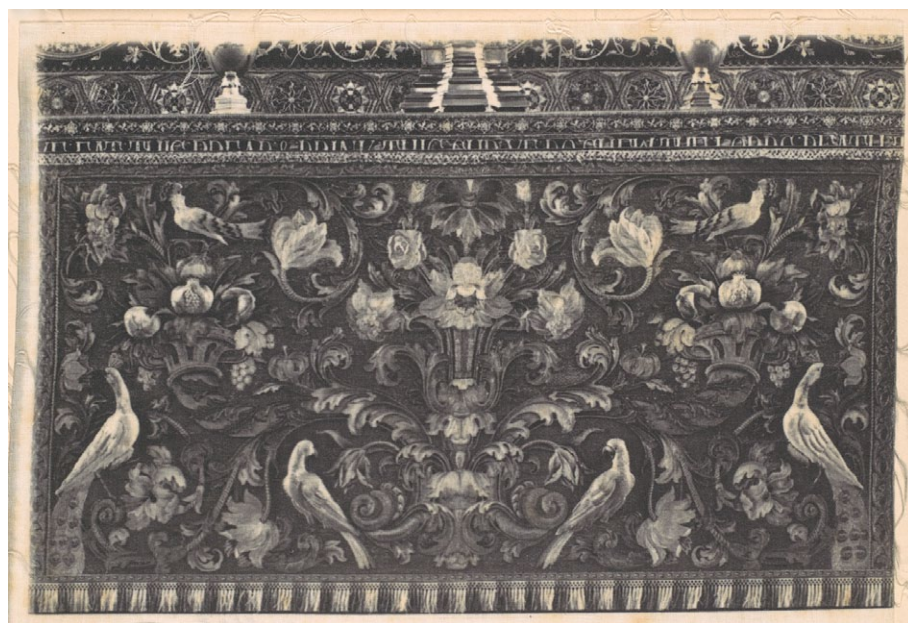


*Platinum Printing on Textiles*

Ronel Namde

*The great feature of platinotypes upon fabrics is their permanence: No amount of washing can destroy the image!*

— Willis & Clements, 1885



1

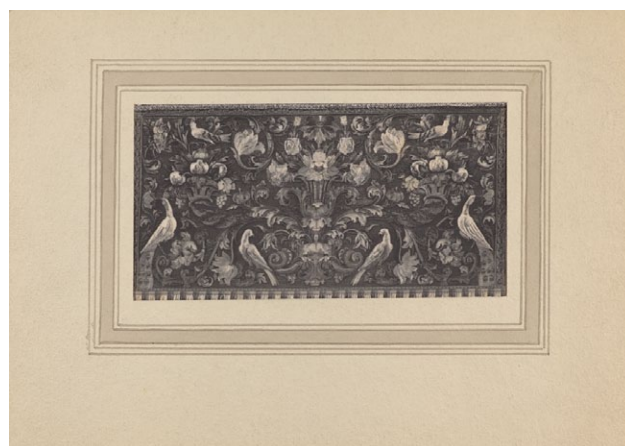
The printing of platinum photographs on textiles was mentioned in articles and advertisements as early as 1883 and continued into the 1920s.<sup>1</sup> These platinum prints were marketed as extremely versatile, with uses ranging from artistic and decorative to industrial (fig. 1). The process was suggested for the reproduction of oil paintings, portraits, and landscape photographs, and for the decoration of household items such as pillow shams, handkerchiefs, and doilies (fig. 2).<sup>2</sup>

The earliest product announcements described “beautiful platinotype prints on the textile fabric recently introduced by the Platinotype Company” and gave pricing per square foot of presensitized fabric (see fig. 2).<sup>3</sup> Willis & Clements and J. C. Millen marketed specific chemistry for “printing on fabrics and supports other than paper,” to be sensitized by the practitioner.<sup>4</sup>

The textiles advertised as suitable for the printing of platinum photographs included those made of flax, cotton, silk, and combinations thereof.<sup>5</sup> In general, fine, close-knit fabrics were recommended for the hand application of chemicals; for rougher fabrics, such as coarse linen, coating with beeswax or celluloid was advised before sensitiz-

ing.<sup>6</sup> Of the textiles sold by the Platinotype Company, sateen was purported to give the best sepia tones, while all could be used to print black tones.<sup>7</sup> Nainsook was said to give fine detail and be most suitable for prints sewn onto other fabrics. Sateen gave fair detail, whereas oatmeal cloth gave a “rough artistic surface, very suitable for bold decorative subjects” (see fig. 2).

Three cautions were given in manuals and texts for printing on fabric instead of paper. First, photographers



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Figure 1. Frederick H. Evans, *[Needlework Altar Cloth, Durham]*, c. 1900s–1910s. Platinum print on cotton, 12 × 16 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Gordon Conn, 1954 (54.550.5), [www.metmuseum.org](http://www.metmuseum.org), ©The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

1a. Print presented in Evans’s signature hand-ruled mount, 18.6 × 26 cm. Courtesy: Lisa Barro, Photograph Conservation, The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Figure 2. Platinotype Company advertisement for “Sensitised Fabrics.” From *Instructions for Working the Platinotype Process*, 6th ed. (London: Platinotype Company, 1883), n.p.

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**SENSITISED FABRICS.**

<b>NAINSOOK</b> (very fine muslin) at per square foot (144 square inches of Sensitised surface ...	ditto	ditto	1/-
<b>SATEEN</b> ... ..	ditto	ditto	1/6
<b>OATMEAL CLOTHS</b> ... ..	ditto	ditto	1/6
<b>LINENS</b> , according to quality	ditto	ditto	1/ to 1/6

**JACONETTE and JEAN** at similar prices.

*Special quotations for large quantities.*

NAINSOOK gives fine detail, and is suitable for prints to be sewn into or on other fabrics. SATEEN gives fair detail, and is suitable for d'oyleys, mats, and transparencies. OATMEAL CLOTH has a rough artistic surface, very suitable for bold decorative subjects on banner-screens, antimacassars, cosies, mantel-cloths, &c. It gives admirable results.

Other fabrics, such as silk, satin, &c., are under experiment, and will probably be introduced shortly.

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were encouraged to use plenty of acid bath or a stronger solution to clear the textiles.<sup>8</sup> Second, great care was advised when handling the textiles to prevent creases from forming while preparing, sizing, coating, printing, or processing the photographs.<sup>9</sup> Finally, printing by actinometer was sometimes recommended because of the difficulty of keeping the cloth in proper registration with the negative while inspecting the progress of the printing.<sup>10</sup>

The platinotype on textile was publicized as extremely permanent and durable. An 1887 *Scientific American* supplement touted, “If treated with the platinotype solution, the printed fabric can, according to Mr. Willis, be washed when soiled without injury to the image.”<sup>11</sup> Another publication claimed, “Dirty platinotype fabric prints may be cleaned by washing and boiling in the same way as a piece of plain fabric.”<sup>12</sup>

Platinum printing on textile continues to be mentioned in alternative photography books and guides in modern literature, and it was used by twentieth-century photographers such as Robert Mapplethorpe (1946–1989).<sup>13</sup> Yet despite numerous advertisements and mentions in manuals and exhibitions, few platinum prints on textiles have been identified in collections. Their scarcity may be an indication that Willis & Clements’s claims of their permanence and indestructibility were overstated.<sup>14</sup>

## Notes

The epigraph is from Willis & Clements 1885, n.p.

1. Berkeley 1883; Willis & Clements advertisement for “Enlargements,” *Photo-Era Magazine: American Journal of Photography* 54 (1925): n.p.
2. Willis & Clements 1885.
3. Liverpool Amateur Photographic Association 1883.
4. [Tennant] 1899.
5. Specific fabrics mentioned include fine and coarse linen, sateen, muslin, nainsook, sarsenet, satin, union cloth, jean, jaconette, and oatmeal cloth.
6. “Platinotype Fabric” 1912.

7. “Platinotype Fabric” 1912.
8. Berkeley 1883; “Printing on Fabrics” 1887; Burbank 1891, 107.
9. Robbins 1897; [Tennant] 1899; [Tennant] 1914.
10. “Platinotype Fabric” 1912.
11. “Printing on Fabrics” 1887.
12. “Platinotype Fabric” 1912.
13. Blacklow 2009, 139.
14. Photographic Society of Great Britain 1883, 12.

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