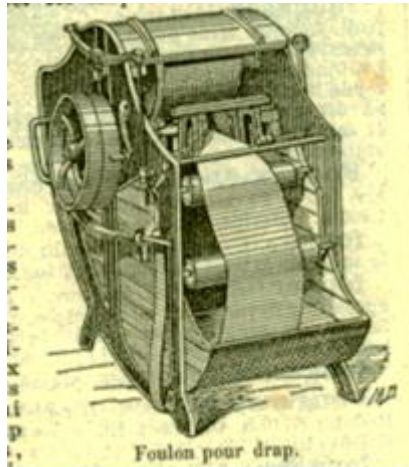


The History of Fulling Mills



The first references to fulling can be dated back to as early as Roman times where the operation was carried out in suitable workshops called “fullonicae”.

Pieces of fabric were bathed in large basins filled with water and beaten by the workers (slaves) with their feet, and then rubbed and wrung under supervision of officials (freemen).

Smectic clay (or Fuller’s Earth) was added to hot water which, combined with the rubbing action of the feet, felted the wool.

The fabric was then washed in urine to eliminate impurities, put to dry, then roughened or thickened by brushing it with cardoons (Artichoke Thistles) or porcupine quills to lift hairs, then topped, pressed and purified with sulphur fumes.

Ruins of a large fullery and its tank have been found at the port of Ostia (Rome), where the fabric was foot-pressed in a mixture of water and urine (a sanitary block was built next door to prevent running out of materials).

Fulling was once a very important business, in the Middle Ages Fulling Mills were already being built near water sources where mallets operated by hydraulic power could beat the fabrics.

Nowadays fulling is carried out industrially and is still used for particular tasks and for the manufacturer of old fabrics such as loden, a water-resistant material made from sheep's wool, from which the lanolin hasn't been removed.