



Puntas and Passementerie. By Bernhard and Ellen M. Whishaw

IN the year 1623, Philip IV. of Spain, wishing to regulate his disordered finances and to check wasteful expenditure, issued a new version of an old edict, on the dress of his subjects.

It was but one out of many such edicts and proclamations issued at short intervals by the rulers of Spain—from Alfonso IX., who in 1212 ordered his subjects to put aside superfluities of gold and silver ornaments and to provide themselves with arms, down to the comprehensive *Pragmatica* of Philip V., in 1723, against all manner of luxury and ostentation. And, as the very fact of their frequent re-issue shows, this long succession of proclamations regulating manners and customs had practically no result at all.

The edict of 1623, however, has been the indirect cause of a curious mistake in the history of Spanish lace, for a certain passage in it was mis-translated by a French writer, and a whole super-structure of error has been built up on the basis of that mis-translation.

The passage in question is as follows:—

Mandamos que todas y qualesquiera personas de qualquier estado calidad ó condicion, ayan de traer, y traigan balonas llanas y sin invencion, puntas cortados, deshilados, ni otro género de guarnición.

Or, literally rendered into English:—

“We order that all and every persons of whatever state, quality or condition, have to wear, and shall wear simple collars and without finery, points, cuts, drawn-threads, or any other kind of trimming.”

This has been translated into French as *simples rabats sans aucune invention de point coupé ou passement*, and taken as prohibiting the importation of foreign laces.

We are indebted to the courtesy of Mr. Alan Cole, C.B., for the French translation, which he quoted

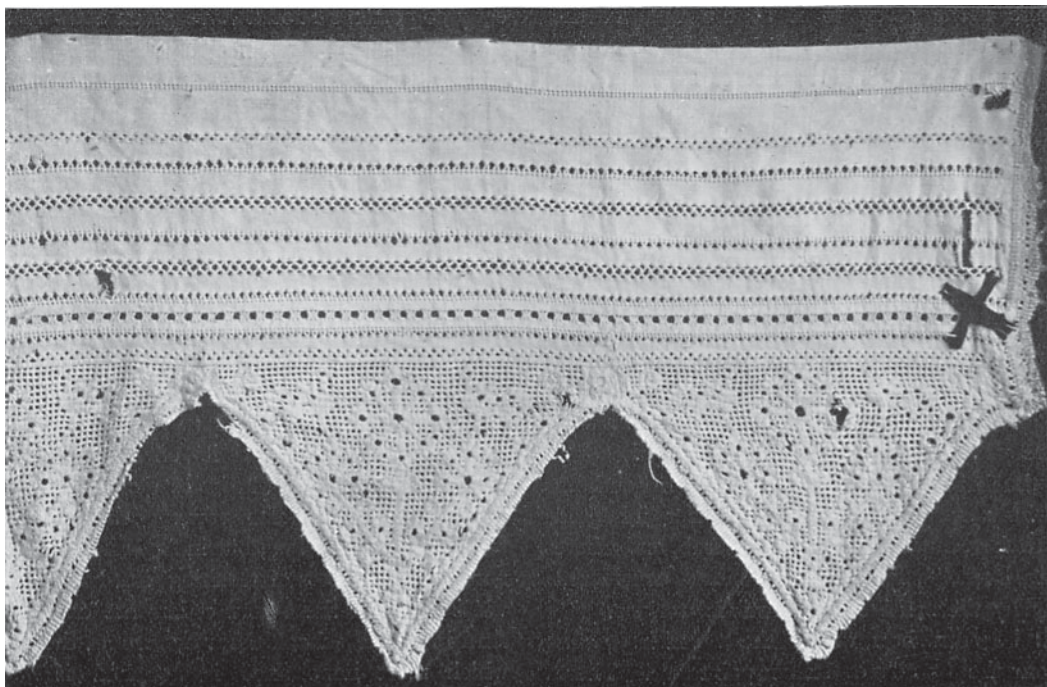
from an article by Miss Jourdain on “Lace Making in Spain,” in *THE CONNOISSEUR MAGAZINE* for 1900. Unfortunately, the Seville libraries contain hardly any English or French publications, and our efforts to procure the article in question have been unavailing. But we have no hesitation in accepting Mr. Cole’s transcript, although we have been unable to verify it.

As will be seen by anyone who knows Spanish, the French translator has inserted a redundant *de* between *invencion* and *puntas*, has omitted a comma, and has taken *cortados* as an adjective agreeing with *puntas*, although one is masculine and the other feminine and both are substantives.



NO. I.—MINIATURE OF CHARLES I. (ENLARGED) PAINTED DURING HIS VISIT TO MADRID IN 1623, SHOWING THE *VALONA*, WITH *PUNTAS*, THEN FIRST INTRODUCED

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NO. II.—DRAWN THREAD *PUNTAS*, ATTRIBUTED TO THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY

Rabats, if we take them to mean bands or cravats, were not worn in Spain until long after this edict. The *Balonas* or *Valonas* referred to are the wide falling collars (*cols rabattus*) which came into fashion at the Spanish Court in 1623. Sempere says that these collars were first made in that year for the King and “el Infante Don Carlos” (Prince Charles Stuart), who was in Madrid from March to September, paying his addresses to the Infanta Maria Teresa, all the edicts touching luxury and fashion being suspended in his honour until it became clear that the marriage would not take place. The writers possess a miniature on copper, inscribed “Charles I^e ae. 23 ³/₄” (his age at the time of the Madrid visit), in which he wears the *Valona*, which superseded the stiff ruff in the northern Courts very soon after. (No. i.)

Previous edicts, in which the trimming of ruffs and cuffs with *puntas* and *redes** was prohibited, had been issued in 1593 and 1611, but neither in these nor in that of 1623 is any reference made to foreign imports, as would have been the case had the *puntas* prohibited been French or Italian point lace.

It is a little surprising that the writers who, on the strength of this mis-translation, have asserted that Spain was a large importer of French and Italian point lace and produced no lace worth mentioning of her own, should, none of them, apparently, have

* The *redes* were *Redaño*, a pillow lace, and *Redecilla*, a lace-like embroidery on netting.

taken the trouble to turn up the passage in the original. As a matter of fact, easily verified by reference to the collection of Sumptuary Laws, *puntas* were in vogue in Spain many years before point lace was worn at the Courts of France or England.

Alfonso X., in 1256, forbade gold and silver to be worn on the covering of shields, but permitted *perpunte*s to be made of gold and silver cloth.

The *perpunte* was a kind of wadded coat or tunic, worn under the coat of mail, and we see it represented on the marble effigies of two of the officers of Fernando III., who were with him at the conquest of Seville in 1248, and whose tombs are in the chapel of San Andrés in Seville Cathedral. These effigies have *perpunte*s under their armour, and the decoration with which they are edged at the neck and at the foot are *puntas* of *fleco morisco*.

The earliest *puntas* were of two kinds: one being composed of drawn thread (No. ii.), while the other (No. iii.)—represented on the monument of 1248—was made of what is still called in Seville *fleco morisco* (literally, Moorish fringe). Drawn thread is recorded by Conde as having been worn and greatly admired at Cordova as early as 1002; and since Arabic as well as Coptic tombs in Egypt contain quantities of drawn-thread work in muslin and linen, it seems clear that we owe its introduction into Europe to the Arabs of Spain.

The other kind of *puntas*—the *fleco morisco*—still

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retains the name given to it at the time of the Christian re-conquest, and represents the earliest existing form of what is elsewhere called macramé. Two photographs of traditional Arabic design are reproduced here. The first specimen, magnified to twice its natural size, is one of several designs worked in the little town of Chiclana in the province of Cadiz, and is a detail of the edging of a fine linen towel, made some seven or eight years ago as a wedding present. The second is a still finer example (magnified to four times the actual size), which has been used for several generations as a sampler, in a family of Jerez. This family also possess some rare designs and instructions for making *fleco morisco*, which are perhaps 150 years old, and are the only ones of the kind we have yet met with in southern Spain, where every woman hands on her inherited designs to her daughter by rule of thumb, and where "pattern books" have never been considered necessary by these skilled and artistic workers.

It will be seen how widely the Spanish *puntas* differ from the French or Italian point lace. There is, however, a curious traditional connection between these *puntas* and the oldest pillow lace of France.

In a note (p. 224) to *Les Broderies et les Dentelles* (Charles et Pagés, Paris, n.d.) it is stated that at Le Puy, where the first French pillow lace is supposed to have been made, the word formerly used in the local patois to designate lace was *pointas* or *las pointas*, and it is supposed that the *maringotiers* of Le Puy in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries took their wares to sell in Spain, and brought back the Spanish name for lace. The authors are misled, like everyone else, by the original mis-translation of *puntas*, which does not mean and never has meant lace, although some of the *fleco morisco* was certainly of a lace-like fineness in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Otherwise, it seems as if they must have perceived how unlikely it is that these

early colporteurs should have given a Spanish name to a French product which they themselves had conveyed to Spain.*

On the other hand, the Arabic feeling in the designs of the laces of Le Puy and Auvergne—which give them a strong family likeness not only to the designs of the ancient *fleco morisco*, but also to the pillow lace made in Arabic Almagro (Old Castile) from time immemorial—suggests that the *maringotiers* brought back the Arabic product, as well as the Spanish name, from their excursions into the Peninsula.

This supposition is strengthened by the fact noted by MM. Charles et Pagés (p. 225, note), that lace making in Le Puy and its environs was formerly taught by *les Béates*, who were generally lay-women, but sometimes had taken vows. *Béates* are no longer to be found in Le Puy, but in Andalusia the universal name for members of teaching sisterhoods is *Beatas*, while those of the closed orders are called *Monjas*. And in all the schools kept by *Beatas*, the subject to which most importance is attached is *labores*, a generic term, including, besides every kind of needle-work, many styles of embroidery, *puntas* of *fleco morisco*, and pillow lace, similar in character to that of Almagro, Auvergne, and Le Puy, but far more markedly 'Arabic in design.

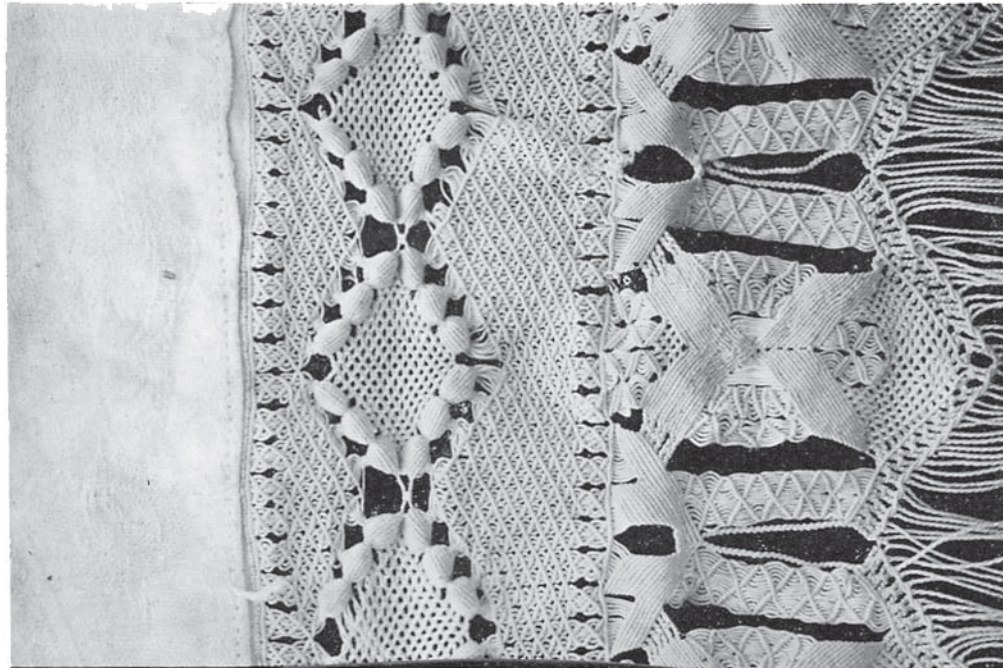
Thus it seems probable that in the fifteenth century, when thousands of Moriscos were still living and working in Andalusia, the *maringotiers* of Le Puy carried the terms *pointas* and *béates* from Spain into France, together with the products and the system of teaching.

The majority of the Moriscos were the descendants of the Arab tribes who held southern Andalusia for many centuries, and who were not ousted from Seville and the neighbouring country districts by the Almohades, or Moors

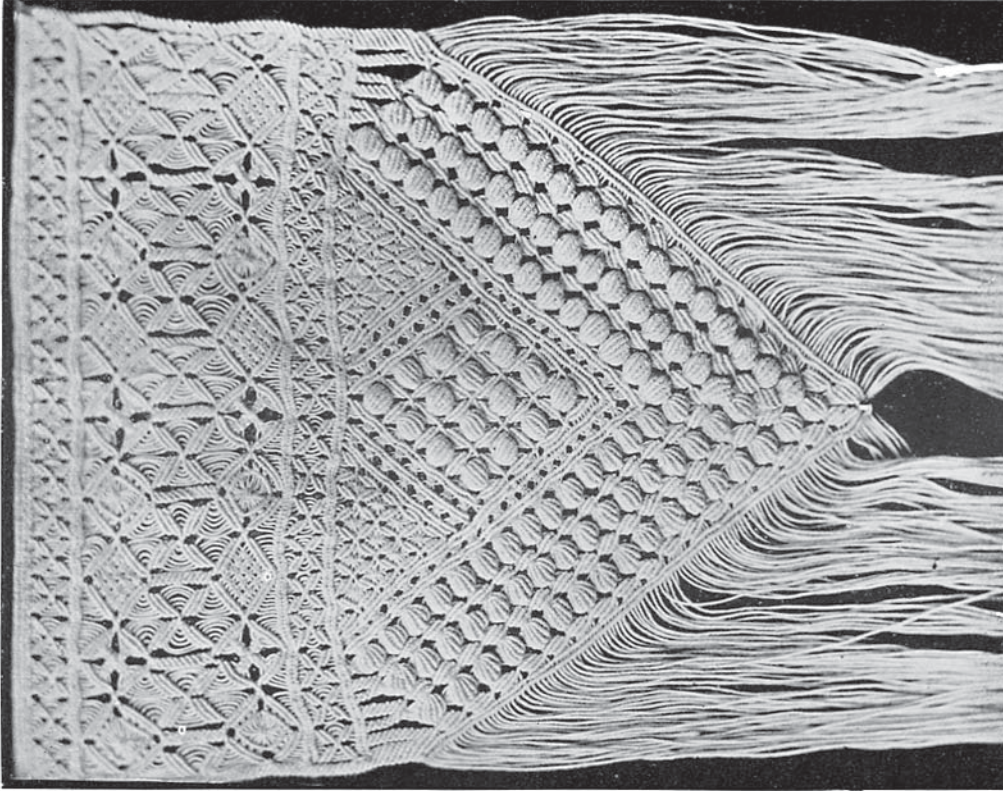


NO. III.—PUNTAS AND TRENZA FROM THIRTEENTH CENTURY MONUMENT IN SEVILLE CATHEDRAL

* The *réseau* or net composing the ground-work of pillow or needle lace is commonly called *el punto*, never *la punta*.



NO. IV.—MODERN *FILCO MORISCO* (MOORISH FRINGE) OF TRADITIONAL DESIGN



NO. V.—ANTIQUE *FILCO MORISCO* (HIGHLY MAGNIFIED)

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NO. VI.—BIRTH OF ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST
15TH CENTURY SPANISH, SHOWING PASSEMENTERIE OF
THE PERIOD (BARCELONA MUSEUM)

of Morocco, when they conquered the cities and established a nominal dominion over the whole of Moslem Spain in 1146. The Arabs of Seville and their compatriots of Granada looked upon the Almohades as far worse enemies than the Christians, and when the allied armies of Castile and Granada conquered the last scion of the Almohad princes at Seville in the thirteenth century, the Arabs, or Moriscos, as they are termed in the enactments of the time, were encouraged to remain in their homes by the wise and far-seeing Fernando III., who gave them the same rights and privileges as the Christians, and permitted them the free exercise of their own religion. Thenceforth the Christian chroniclers made no distinction between Arabs, Moors, and Berbers, but classed them all as Moros or Moriscos, to the confusion of later historians.

Thus plenty of Arab women remained to teach their *labores* to their Christian sisters, and it was not until two centuries later, when Granada fell, that any

wholesale expulsion took place. Even then, although the Kingdom of Granada was almost depopulated, large numbers of Moriscos in the provinces of Seville, Huelva, and Cadiz escaped the edict, aided and abetted by their Christian friends, relatives, or masters. And they not only remained in the country, but multiplied during the next century, for another 500,000, more or less, are said to have been expelled in 1609-10, by order of Philip III.

How great a part they had played in the textile industries of the country until then, may be judged by the fact that whereas in 1519 there were 16,000 silk hand-looms in Seville, by 1649, says Sempere, the silk trade of Seville was destroyed. To-day, one hand-loom, with one or two unimportant factories of machine-made silk ribbons, represents all that remains of what, up to four centuries ago, was one of the most important silk and velvet weaving industries in Europe.

The *puntas* were not the only form of decoration of the class now called *fleco morisco*: for the same work was produced in the form of insertions for trimming dresses, etc., from a very early period. These insertions, sometimes sewn, as the name implies, between two pieces of another material, but more often in early days stitched directly on to the fabric, were and are still called *pasamanos* (pass-hands), because they were made entirely by dexterous twists and turns of the hands, without any implement or apparatus to assist the worker.

The earliest known example of *pasamanos* is to be seen in the Museum of Vich, on a portion of the chasuble of St. Bernard Calvó, who died early in the thirteenth century. From that date Señor Gudiol, Curator of the Museum and author of a most exhaustive work



NO. VII.—PUNTAS DE BORLILLAS
16TH CENTURY "MORISCO" DESIGN

Puntas and Passementerie

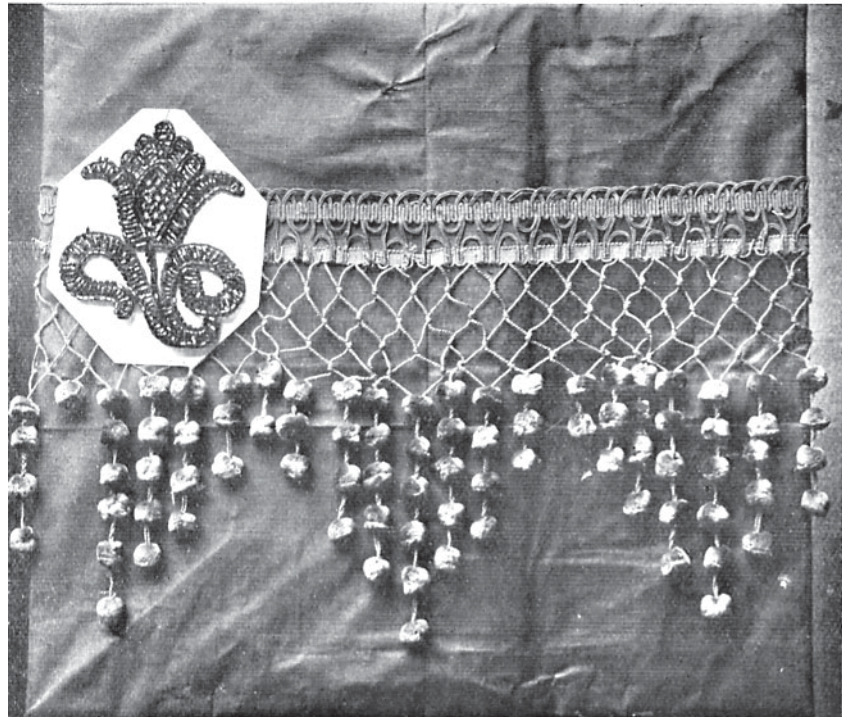
on archæology,* finds occasional if rare mention of *passamans* in the Catalonian archives down to 1505, when the Guild of *Galoners* was formed in Barcelona. But Señor Gudiol tells us that all the best textile work in Spain during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries was Spanish-Arabic, and that Catalonia, who emancipated herself after little more than a century of Moslem rule, naturally felt the Arabic influence less than other parts of Spain. If, then, even in Catalonia Spanish-Arabic fabrics are recorded in the ecclesiastical archives of the thirteenth century, we should no doubt find many more such records in the cities of the centre and south, which were not reconquered until from two to four centuries later, if there were anyone to do for them what the distinguished Catalonian archæologist has done for his own province.

In the National Museum of Barcelona there is a most interesting fifteenth century picture of the birth of St. John the Baptist. In this seven women, visiting St. Elizabeth, are depicted in dresses, apparently of velvet, trimmed at the neck with *pasamanos* of the Morisco class, though very elementary in design compared with the Morisco *pasamanos* of Andalusia. [We are indebted to the courtesy of Señor Pirozzini Marti, Secretary of the Museum, for the reproduction of this picture.] (No. vi.)

In Valencia, in 1372, *pasamanos* of gold and silver were forbidden, only *pasamanos* and *trenzas* of silk being permitted.† These *trenzas* also are Arabic in origin, and are still made by Sevillian señoritas for use as waist belts. They are wide bands of silk thread, plaited into geometrical patterns. The essential difference between the *pasamanos* and the *trenzas* of the edicts is that the one is open work while the other is close. The band above the *puntas* of the Seville monument is a good example of this *trenza*, with raised bosses, probably of gold, in the original. (No. iii.)

The edict of 1623 in which *puntas* are forbidden, also prohibits every kind of trimming in *pasamaneria* of gold, silver, or silk. But a century later, in 1723, sashes may be adorned with *pasamanos* or silk embroidery, if they are of Spanish make. Coaches must not have the fringes called *puntas de borlilla*. These bear the same name to-day, and are illustrated in No. vii.

The term *pasamanos* is now applied to every kind of trimming of a guipure type: soft pillow or machine-made lace insertions being distinguished as *entre-dos*. In fact, the Spanish *pasamanos* of to-day is the same



No. VIII.—*PUNTAS DE PASAMANERIA* MADE BY HAND, WITHOUT PINS OR OTHER IMPLEMENTS
EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURY

as the French *passementerie*: or more accurately perhaps, the French *passementerie* is the offspring of the Spanish *pasamanos*.

As French books of reference are practically non-existent in Seville libraries, we have not been able to find out exactly when the term *passementerie* was first used in France; but so far as we can discover, neither the product nor the word were known there as early as the thirteenth century. When the *Révolution des Passemens* was published, the word seems to have been used in France to include both laces and embroideries; but here it has always been limited to the stiff guipure-like ornamentation related to the Arabic "fringe"—if one can apply so modest a term as fringe to the amazingly complicated work of the traditional *fleco morisco*.

* *Nocions d'Arqueologia sagrada catalana*, Vich, 1902.

† *Sempere*, vol. i., p. 197.

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The true Morisco *pasamanos* still exists, for we have heard of an antique counterpane of state, trimmed with fine silk *fleco morisco* and *pasamanos* to correspond, as having been used only ten years or so ago by a proud mother when she received her friends in bed (like St. Elizabeth in the Catalan picture) after the birth of her first baby.

Counterpanes have always been the subject of elaborate and costly decoration in this part of Spain, because it is usual for the mother to be "at home" to receive congratulations, when her child is twenty-four hours old. The custom no doubt contributes to the high mortality of mothers and infants, but has had the advantage of producing some wonderful works of art in the way of bed fittings. A counterpane for a large double bed, which we saw recently, was made entirely of pillow lace, admirably worked in a bold design, displayed over a lining of rich blue silk. The bride-to-be, who had worked it herself for her trousseau, had broken off her engagement, and now wished to turn her talent to account. She asked 200 pesetas, or say £7 10s., for a piece of pillow lace four square yards in extent, which had taken her two years to complete.

But this modern effort pales before the inconceivable patience and industry required by a



NO. IX.—THE MARTYRDOM OF ST. CUCUFATE, BY MESTRE ALFONSO, 1473, SHOWING THE *PUNTAS* OF THE PERIOD ON THE RIGHT (BARCELONA MUSEUM)

from the portraits of Velasquez and El Greco, had they any particular fondness for Italian point when

counterpane of equal size, adorned throughout with strips of *pasamanos* and edged with *puntas*, of the microscopic Arabic work illustrated in No. v.

Puntas are not point lace, nor anything at all resembling it. But there is no doubt that the women who have produced Morisco *puntas* and *pasamanos* from the thirteenth century could have made point lace in the sixteenth had they so desired.

They neither made it nor imported it, and the lace known abroad by the name of Point d'Espagne is French or Italian in origin, not Spanish. The women of Castile and northern Spain never had any special gift for *labores*, nor, if we may judge from the portraits of Velasquez and El Greco, had they any particular fondness for Italian point when it was the rage in all the other Courts of Europe. Out of thirty-nine portraits of El Greco point lace is seen in eight only.

But the secluded women of Andalusia, thanks to their precious heritage of Arabic patience and industry, always have been expert in their own *puntas*, *pasamanos*, and pillow lace, not made for sale—for the Andalusian *labores* have never been exploited in commerce—but for pure artistic delight in the creation of beautiful work.



NO. X.—SEAL OF FERDINAND AND ISABELLA, GIVEN IN 1502, SHOWING HARNESS ADORNED WITH *PUNTAS DE PASAMANERIA*