



## Cutwork (Reticilla) and Punto in Aria Part I. By M. Jourdain

ITALY, no doubt, was the inventor of lace, and though it is impossible to prove that the work of the earliest laces was borrowed by Italy from the East, or from the Saracens of Sicily,\* or from the Greeks who took refuge in Italy from the troubles of the Lower Empire,† the influence of oriental *design* upon the early geometric laces, is a curious and hitherto unrecognised fact. Venice in Italy was peculiarly fitted by her position

emporium, and distributor of metal-work, silk, cloth of gold, which came to her from Constantinople and Greece. We hear of Venetian merchants carrying their varied merchandise, this *de transmarinis partibus orientaliu divitias*, to the fairs at Pavia and to the markets of Ravenna and Rome. In the fifteenth century Venetian commerce covered the whole of the civilized world. The early influence of oriental art was potent in



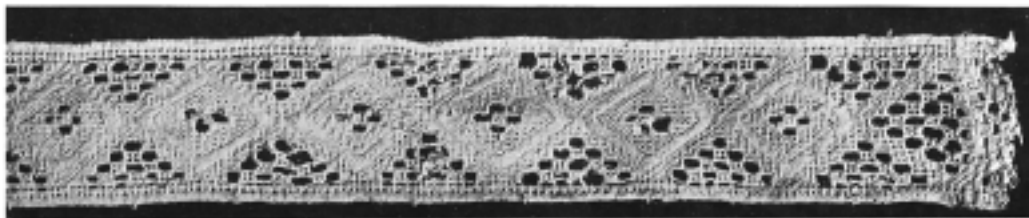
STRIP OF LINEN WITH SQUARES FILLED IN WITH BUTTON-HOLE-STITCHED ORNAMENT

to be the forerunner of European luxury and civilization. There are documents that prove that in 1390 the Venetians traded with India and had a consul at Siam. Venice was the great

the East and Southern Europe, diminishing as it proceeded westwards. Generally speaking, the *intarsia* or inlaid work, which was in such favour in the sixteenth century,‡ shows in its design the obvious influence of Eastern art; in many cases, the patterns have been taken directly from Arab sources. The same influence shows itself in the

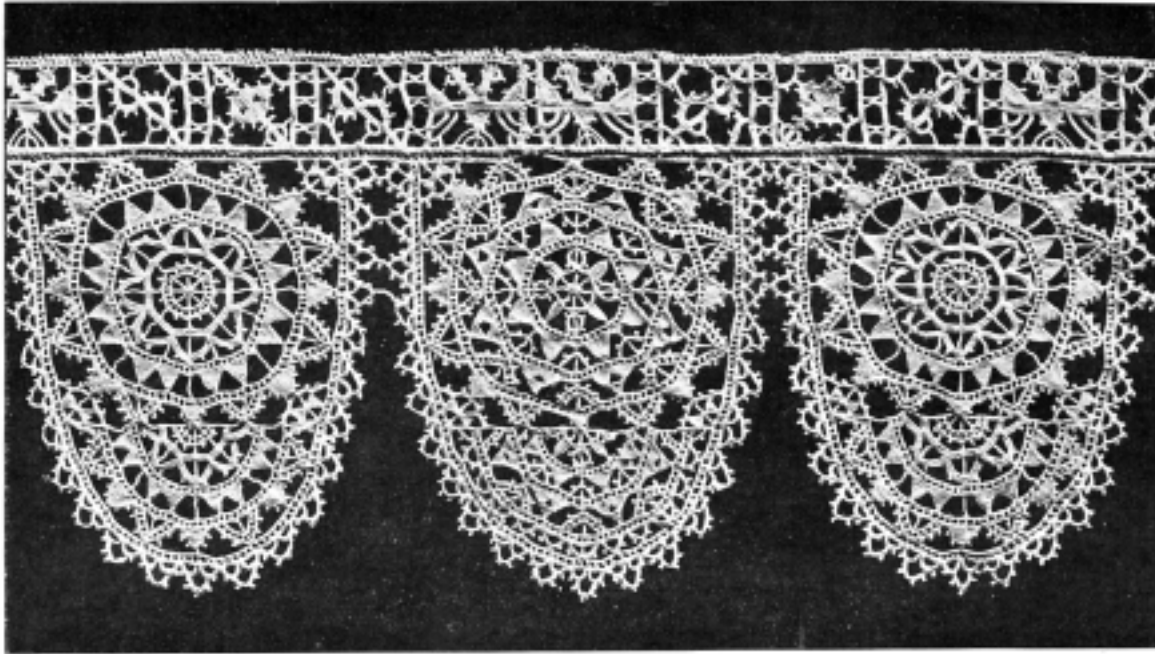
\* Francesco Nardi, *Sull' origine dell' Arte del Ricamo*, Padova, 1839. "What further confirms its Byzantine origin is that those very places which kept up the closest intercourse with the Greek Empire are the cities where point lace was earliest made and flourished to the greatest extent," e.g., Venice.  
 † *Industrial Arts of the Nineteenth Century*. Digby Wyatt.

‡ Lewis F. Day, *The Art Journal*, 1882.



CUTWORK

*The Connoisseur*

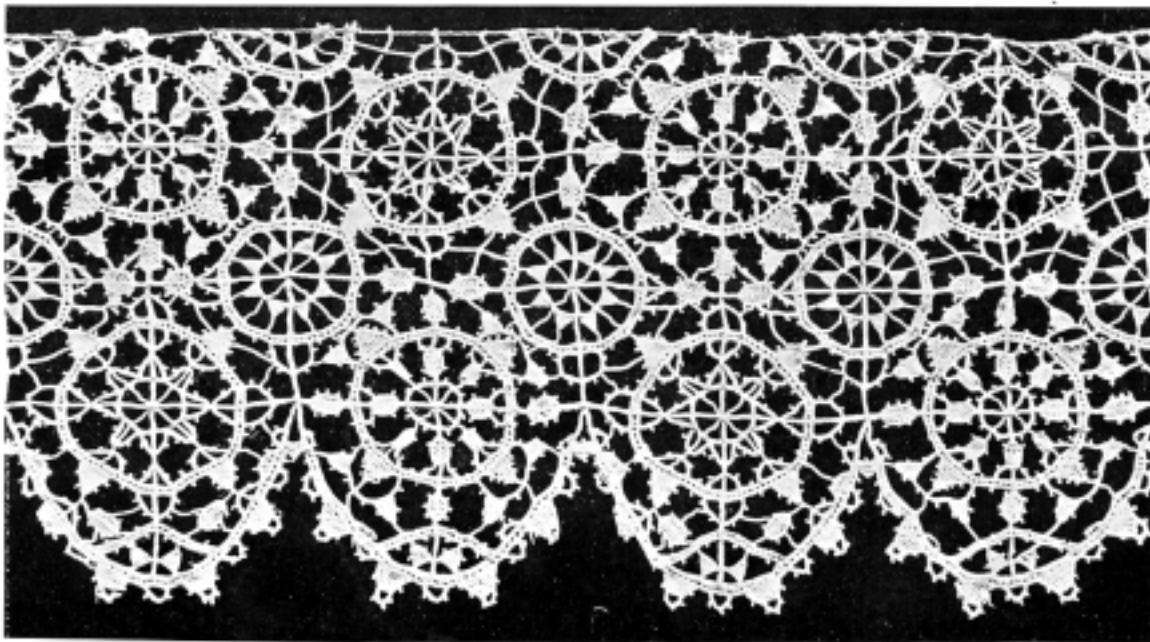


INSERTION OF *RETICILLA*, WITH DEEP SCALLOPS OF NEEDLEPOINT 16TH OR 17TH CENTURY V. AND A. MUSEUM

stuffs, embroideries, damascened metal-work, and other such objects, of which the industries were naturally directly affected by the importation of Eastern models and Eastern methods. The influence of the East upon European ceramic art and the artistic pottery of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, especially that of Italy, has

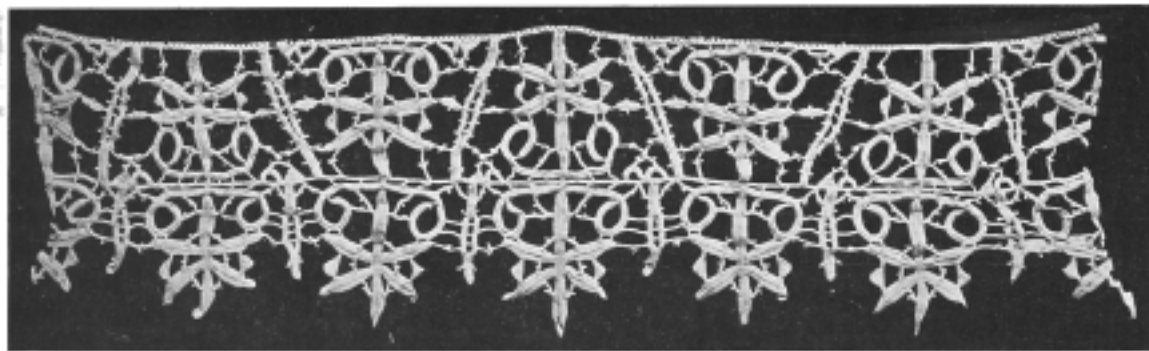
been noticed. "In the painting of the Coronation of the Virgin,\* by a pupil or follower of Giotto, in the National Gallery, there is a band of ornament on the upright of the step beneath the throne,

\* *The Godman Collection of Persian Ceramic Art belonging to F. Du Cane Godman, with examples from other Collections.* London, 1894. Henry Wallis.



NEEDLEPOINT BORDER VENETIAN, 16TH OR 17TH CENTURY VICTORIA AND ALBERT MUSEUM

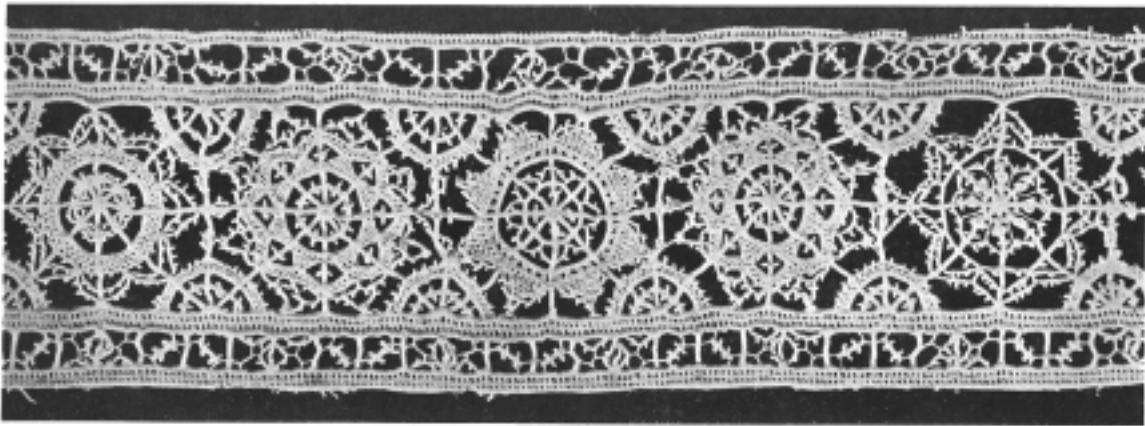
## *Cutwork and Punto in Aria*



BORDER AND VANDYKE EDGE OF NEEDLEPOINT LACE (*PUNTO IN ARIA*) ITALIAN, EARLY 17TH CENTURY THE WHOLE PATTERN UNITED BY *BRIDES PICOTÉES*

composed of stars and crosses, as in Persian wall-tiles. Again, in the picture of the Circumcision, by Marco Marziale, in this Gallery, star shapes, similar to the tiles, figure in the ornamentation

came into fashion in Europe, the motives of oriental design—these same stars and crosses—were first applied to linen ornamentation in Venice, and it is possible that from Persian drawn-thread



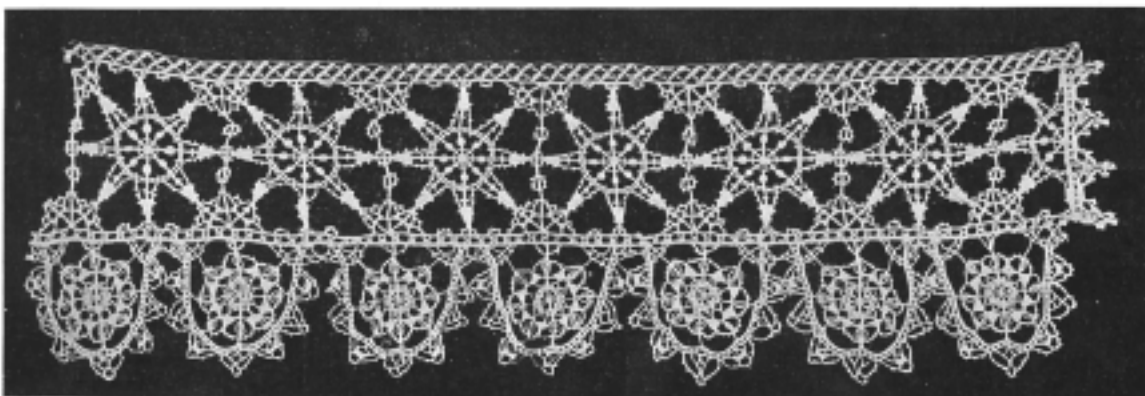
PART OF A BORDER OF INSERTION OF *RETICILLA* VENETIAN, 16TH CENTURY

of a linen cloth.” As Venice\* was the place where embroidery and trimming of white linen first

work with whipped stitches—possibly of the late

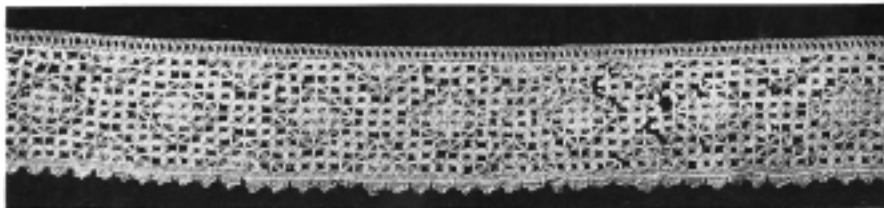
\* Venetian linens for fine towelling and napery in general at one time were in favourite use during the fifteenth century. In

the *Ducs de Bourgogne*, by the Comte de Laborde, more than once we meet with such an entry as: “Une pièce de nappes, ouvrage de Venise,” etc.



BORDER OF *RETICILLA* WITH VANDYKES OF *PUNTO IN ARIA*, ABOUT 1580 VENETIAN VICTORIA AND ALBERT MUSEUM

## The Connoisseur



PIECE OF *RETICILLA*, THE LINES OF THE LINEN FOUNDATION ENTIRELY COVERED WITH NEEDLEPOINT IN THE COLLECTION OF MR. A. BLACKBORNE

fifteenth or early sixteenth century—the Italian art of drawing out threads and stitching over them was derived.\*

What were these principles of design thus borrowed? †Interlaced, repeating star-shaped and polygonal ornament, purely geometrical; never naturalistic, or combined with figured ornament.‡ The Mussalman religion has always been shy of encouraging naturalistic art.

These geometrical forms are exclusively used in early Italian *reticilla* and *punto in aria*, at a date when flowing scrolls, and conventionalised flower ornament was freely used in the designs for embroidery. § ||

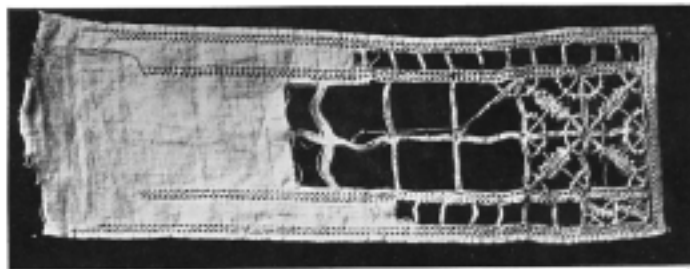
The three types of lace we have to consider are: *punto tagliato* (cut work), *reticilla*, and its derivative *punto in aria*.

Cutwork was made in various manners. "The first consisted of arranging a network of threads upon a small frame, crossing and interlacing them into various

complicated patterns, beneath this network was gummed a piece of fine cloth called *quintain*, from the town in Brittany where it was made, then, with a needle, the network was sewn to the *quintain* by edging round those parts of the pattern that

were to remain thick, the last operation was to cut away the superfluous cloth; hence the name of cutwork."\*\* Cutwork is also used for *Reticilla* (Greek lace). It is this sense that Fynes Moryson uses it when he writes that "The Women in Italy are Curious workers with the needle, of whom other Nations have learned to make the laces commonly called Cuttworkes."

*Reticilla*, †† first mentioned in the Sforza inventory (1493), is not named in the pattern books



PIECE OF LINEN, SHOWING *RETICILLA* IN PROGRESS

\* *Journal of the Society of Arts*, July 26th, 1895. A. S. Cole.

† "On peut considérer l'art arabe comme étant un système de décoration fondé tout entier sur l'ordre et la forme géométriques, et qui n'emprunte rien ou presque rien à l'observation de la nature."—*Les Arts Arabes*. J. Burgoin, 1873.

‡ "He who draws a human figure or even a representation of any kind of animal," says the Sunna, "shall give it his soul at the Day of Judgment, and thus perish."

§ "L'idée qui domine dans le dessin des premières dentelles ne se rattache, par aucun côté, aux tendances de l'art décoratif du siècle où elles furent créées."—*La Dentelle*. J. Seguin.

|| "En pleine Renaissance italienne Léonard de Vinci lui-même, à ce que nous apprend Vasari, perdait son temps à combiner laborieusement des entrelacs."—*Les Elements de l'Art Arabe*. J. Burgoin.

until Vecellio (1592). It is worked upon linen as a foundation; threads were withdrawn or cut †† out of the linen to form the open spaces, and the remaining threads overcast with button-hole stitches. The effect of this work is identical with that of the geometric patterned needle-point lace, or early *punto in aria*; and the same patterns are equally suited to both classes of drawn linen and needlepoint lace, as may be seen by an examination of Vinciolo's pattern-book. The drawing out of the threads, by means of which the framework

necessary for the *reticilla* pattern was produced, was more laborious than the construction of skeleton frame-works of thread, firmly tacked down upon a piece of parchment—the



VANDYKED EDGING OF NEEDLEPOINT

\*\* *History of Lace*. Mrs. Palliser.

†† "Lenzolo uno de tele, quatro lavorato a radexelo."

‡‡ Hence *cutwork*.

## Cutwork and Punto in Aria

foundation of *punto in aria*.<sup>\*</sup> The crossings of these intersecting lines of thread were secured, and then all the foundation threads were covered with the button-hole stitch. The elaboration of this foundation into solid pattern was effected by adding row upon row of button-hole stitches sometimes close, sometimes open in effect. These skeleton designs were made in squares, and by joining several similar bits together, a long border was constructed.

The basis of design in both types of lace is very similar. According to the pattern books it is "open squares or diamond shapes with diagonals from corner to corner, and two bars from side to side, the diagonals and bars crossing one another at the common centre, and so forming a radiation of eight lines bounded by a square." In the earliest examples the geometrical forms are simple; the details of the ornament touch one another. Later, the design becomes more refined and complicated, and *picols* are freely used. In some late specimens of *punto in aria* of the seventeenth century there is a raised rib upon the design, and some have the pattern emphasized by a raised button-hole stitched border. The restriction of design to a series or combination of squares † (the

constructive basis of *reticilla*), is broken through in later specimens, and curved lines are introduced; the next step was the fuller mastery of design, shown in the representation of figures (the border of Judith and Holofernes in the possession of Mr. Arthur Blackborne), of light scroll designs, as in "flat Venetian"—Venise à plat. This change in the character of *punto in aria* took place at the very close of the sixteenth century, when the pattern books give all varieties of odd figures to be worked on lace. ‡ One design of Vecellio represents, within a border with a dentated edge, a harp, guitar, fiddle, horn, organ, trumpets, and pipes; and dolphins, running hounds, hunting scenes, Amorini, and mythological figures, are commonly introduced. Greek and Levantine work of the seventeenth century introduces curious archaic figures and devices with vases and stiff flower sprays.

(To be continued.)

versales rayonnantes, produisant les combinaisons les plus variées et les plus pittoresques de toutes les formes géométriques les plus ingénieuses du cercle et du carré parfait." *La Dentelle*. J. Seguin.

"Ce genre, inspiré à la fois du gothique et l'art oriental, avec ses enlacements de lignes qui, sans s'interrompre, se croisent, s'éloignent et se rejoignent, dessinant à la fois des ronds, des carrés, des étoiles enchevêtrées les unes dans les autres, a quelque chose de vague, d'indécis." (*Ibid.*)

‡ *Parasole* (1616) the patterns for *Ponti in aria* are varied, apparently to show variety in stitch, some of which are close, some open. The *punti in aria* patterns are most rich and varied, and include in almost every design grotesque figures and animals.

\* Mentioned in Taglienti (1530) and *passim*. In Taglienti it is mentioned as a stitch "*in aere*."

† "À l'exception de celui intitulé: Le Pompe, ... tous les autres (dessins) présentent des modèles à bases circulaires étoilées, coupés de diagonales, de perpendiculaires, et de trans-



MAN'S FALLING COLLAR OF LINEN WORK WITH A BROAD SCALLOPED BORDER OF CUT AND DRAWN LINEN WORK, WORKED OVER AND FILLED IN WITH BUTTON-HOLE STITCHES  
FIRST HALF OF 17TH CENTURY VICTORIA AND ALBERT MUSEUM