

Italian Pillow Lace

By M. Jourdain

Punto a Groppo. Early Pillow Lace

(Merletti a Piombini). Genoese Lace

PUNTO A GROPPO, or knotted lace, a treatment of the fringed ends of stuff, may be considered an early form, or forerunner, of pillow lace, being made (when made separately as a fringe) on a pillow, though by knotting, and not by plaiting. A fringe of loose threads was formed at the edge of the material—generally linen—by drawing the warp threads, and then binding or knotting the weft threads together in tassels. During the sixteenth century much of this work was produced at Genoa, and it is mentioned in various early pattern books from 1530 to 1551 among other *punti*.*

After 1551, when the name appears for the last time in an edition of M. Pagan, it disappears from pattern books, supplanted by the new pillow lace, for which "Le Pompe" gives designs a few years later. Macramé—a word of Arabic derivation used for a fringe or trimming—by which similar work is known in modern times, was introduced in Genoa in 1843.

The earliest pillow lace appears in the form of twisted or plaited thread

* Tagliente, 1530, has *grop-pi moreschi et arabeschi*; the "Giardinetto novo" (1542), Il Speechi (1544), M. Pagan (1545), *punti gropposi*. The Sforza inventory, a *grupi* (1493); this, however, may refer to embroidery with knotted work (e.g., "Lavoro uno de rechamo facto a grupi").

edgings for ruffs. Judging from the pattern books in which they appear, they have the same dentated edge, but a more wiry make, and a lighter, more open appearance than the contemporary needle-points, and were consequently a more effective contrast to the lawn ruff.†

In Le Pompe (1557) small round loops are shown at the edge of various details, and this ornament also appears in Parasole. It consists of a single thread ‡ brought out in a loop and carried back again. Larger loops of plaited thread are also used to give a light appearance to the pointed vandykes. The design is geometrical like cutwork, but the pattern is formed

of *lines* rather than *solid forms*, and these lines are less rigid and precise than the more solid needle-point. A narrow "footing," though worked in with pattern, appears in many of these *merletti a piombini*.§ The first

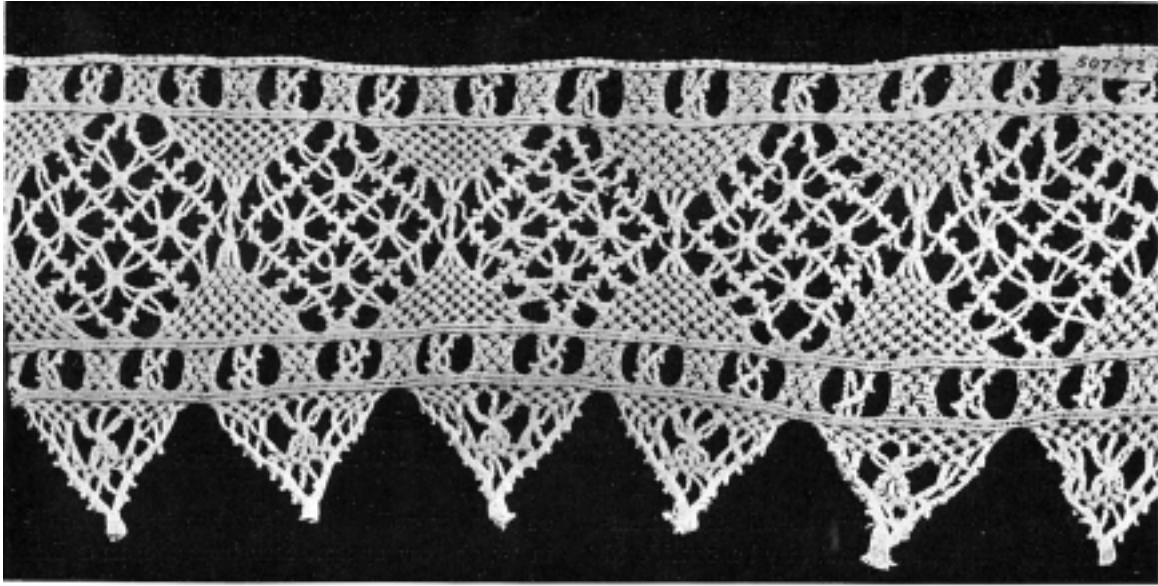


MACRAMÉ

† "Ces guipures plus souples et plus vaporeuses que celles à l'aiguille, distribuées à flots au bord des enroulements de gaudrons à triple rang, donnaient à l'objet une certaine élégance qui rendait supportable son développement exagéré; tandis que les passements de point coupé à l'aiguille, d'une nature plus ferme, fournissaient un pli sec dont les bords aigus, se tenant rangés trop correctement, les faisaient ressembler à une armée de piques qu'on aurait dites disposées pour la défensive." — *La Dentelle, Seguin*.

‡ This ornament of minute loops is also shown in Fig. 3.

§ "Merletti," all manner



MACRAMÉ

edgings were narrow, and when a greater width was required the vandyked edge was sewn on to an insertion. The threads composing the pattern are, as has been said, plaited together, not worked across each other at right angles to form a linen-like *toile*. The development of more important ornamental devices is shown in certain paintings, such as that of

of little battlements, also the several wards or springs in a lock, by met long purles wrought in bone-laces, usually worn in bands or ruffs.—*Dictionary of Florio and Torriano, London, 1659.*

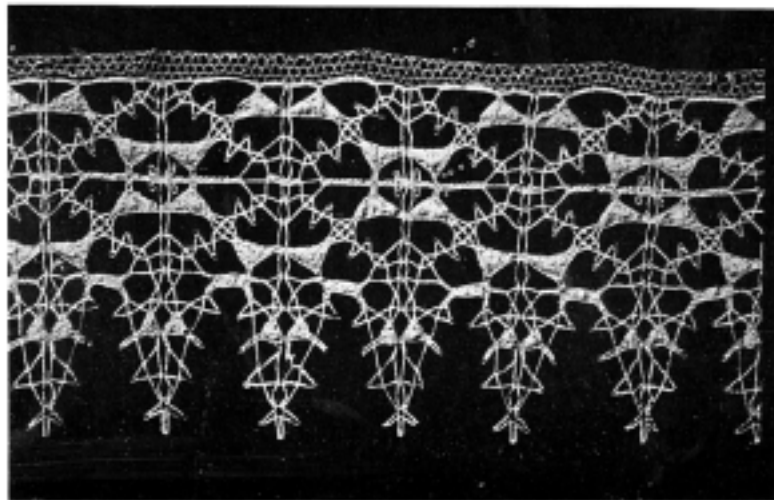
The Italian word for lace, *pizzi*, is also derived from the vandyked character of the early laces. “Pizzetti,” tongs, languets, lappets, labels or lachets of anything, also peaks in bands and cuffs or any other linen.—*Dictionary of Florio and Torriano, 1659.*

“*Pizzo*,” a peake or tip of anything.—*Florio, A Worlde of Wordes, 1598.*

Charles of Saxony, 1582, whose ruff is trimmed with deep and elaborate *merletti a piombini*.

Some later specimens show the transition from geometrical design to a conventional scroll with leafy ornaments. The type of lace shows an appreciation of the decorative value of open spaces to form a background to the solid portions. To this period belongs the scalloped border of a collar in which the various portions are held together by loops, and in some places by twisted threads. The catalogue of the Victoria and Albert Museum refers to the important bed cover* as of similar workmanship, which is stated to be “either Flemish or Italian,” and is catalogued under the Flemish

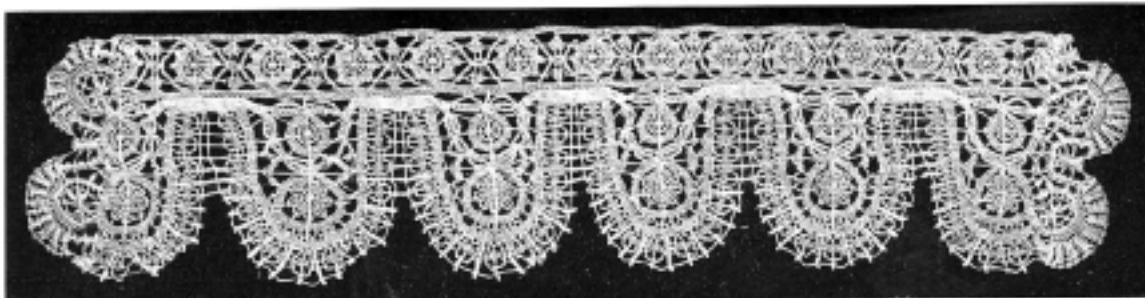
* 270-80.



“MERLETTI A PIOMBINI”

(EARLY VANDYKED PILLOW LACE)

Italian Pillow Lace

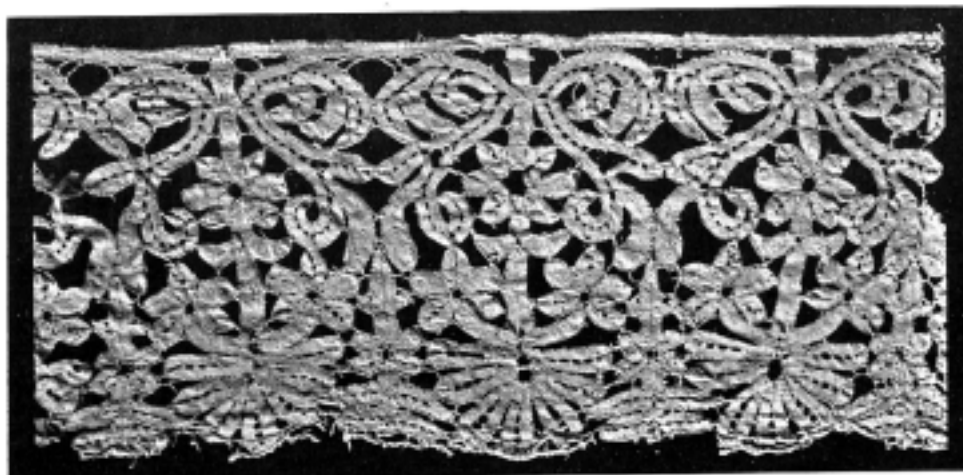


ITALIAN PILLOW LACE, WITH ROUND SCALLOPS

(VICTORIA AND ALBERT MUSEUM)

laces. To judge, however, by the peculiar lightness and precision of the design, the "value" of the background, the design of the bordering pattern with its arrangement of diagonals with scrolling ends, and the

Spain, and the sixth circle from the centre is formed by the collar with jewels of the Golden Fleece, and within the four corners are two-headed eagles, displayed and surmounted by crowns.



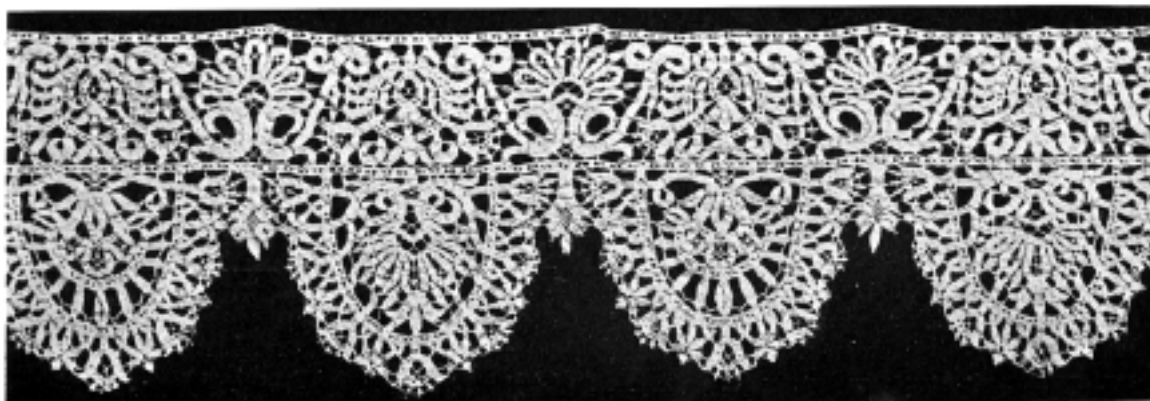
PILLOW-MADE TAPE LACE
BY TWISTED THREADS

THE MAIN LINES OF THE PATTERN ARE LINKED TOGETHER
ITALIAN, SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

beautifully conventional treatment of every detail, it would be Italian, and probably Venetian.

The piece is said to have belonged to Philip IV. of

The workmanship of this piece is remarkable. The plumage of the eagle is imitated by means of small holes left in the plaiting, in each of which a small loose



BORDER OF COLLAR, SCALLOPED
PLAITED THREADS, A SPECIES OF TAPE
AND IN SOME PLACES BY TWISTED THREADS

THE NARROW BANDS TWISTED TO FORM THE ORNAMENT, ARE OF
THE VARIOUS PORTIONS ARE HELD TOGETHER BY LOOPS,
ITALIAN, SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

The Connoisseur

loop or *picot* of thread appears. "The cross-bars of twisted threads which hold the feathers of the outstretched wings in their places are separate details of twisting, and are looped into the edges of the feathers. This is also the case with the trellis-work which occupies the space between the central circular device and its square border."*



COVERLET OF ITALIAN PILLOW LACE (VICTORIA AND ALBERT MUSEUM)

GENOESE PILLOW LACES.

Genoa first imitated the gold threads of Cyprus, and her gold works, at first restricted to bed trimmings, was largely used for ornamenting dresses in the fifteenth century. After about 1420 this industry rapidly declined, and its workers emigrated. Genoese thread pillow lace, which appears to have preserved the heaviness inseparable from metal passements, does not appear in portraits or inventories until just before the middle of the sixteenth century.† The

* *Descriptive Catalogue of the Collections of Lace in the Victoria and Albert Museum, 1881.*

portrait of Henri II., Duc de Montmorency (d. 1632), one of the earliest examples, shows a deep and elaborate collar with a scalloped edge and wide insertion, and the popularity of Genoese lace was doubtless coincident with the first introduction of the falling collar, as it died out with the appearance of the cravat ‡ (about 1660).

The lace, as has been said, was coarse and solid, a characteristic which is early noticed in the *Revolte des Passements*, where it is spoken of as having "le corps un peu gros." This very heaviness and solidity was eminently suited to its use upon boot-tops, garters, shoe-roses, carriages, as well as upon collars, scarves, aprons, etc.

In a specimen illustrated the fringe of threads recalls the earlier *punto a groppo* of Genoa, and shows the "wheat grain" § ornament which re-appears in the various examples, combined with vandykes of *merletti a piombini* of the usual plaited and twisted type. As a general rule the lace used to decorate the collars of the period appears to be of two distinct types: first, a scalloped lace (which was used contemporaneously with the Flemish edgings for collars of the seventeenth century), the pattern of which consists of a tape-like, simple design, strengthened and connected by short brides. In the centre of the scallop is the profile of a flattened carnation. A succession of these carnation-like forms produces the effect of ornamental scallopings to the border. This lace was in vogue

about 1640, succeeding the more formal scallops of the earlier part of the century.

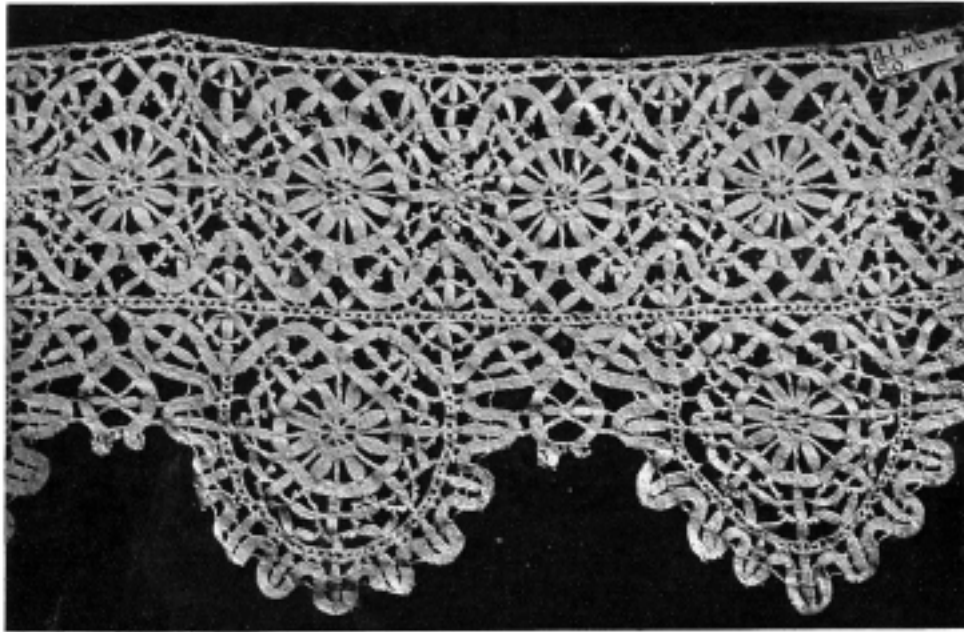
The second type, *Point de Gènes frisé*, is made entirely with plaits of four threads each, following the

† Vulson de la Colombière states that Genoese lace was not used in 1597.

‡ The cravat was a natural consequence of the periwig, which seems to have arisen in France about 1660. In England the Duke of York first put on one in 1663-4.

§ These "wheat-grains" are also a feature of Maltese lace. In 1833, Lady Hamilton Chichester introduced lace-making into Malta, and by adapting Genoese designs evolved what is known as Maltese lace by means of workers imported from Genoa.

Italian Pillow Lace



GENOESE PILLOW LACE WITH ROUND SCALLOPS
(IN THE NOTTINGHAM CASTLE MUSEUM)

EARLY SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

design, and is characterised by small oval enlargements resembling grains of wheat which are sometimes arranged as beads on a thread and sometimes composed into trefoils and quatrefoils, or spokes radiating from a common centre. This lace, made up of an insertion and an edging of deep rounded scallops, is well-illustrated by Lenain in his portrait of Cinq Mars. The scalloped edge and the insertion were made separately, but were supposed to harmonise in pattern. In an early comedy of Corneille, *la Galerie du Palais*, a character criticises a piece of point de Gênes, of which

“la dentelle
Est fort mal assorti avec
le passement.”

In the portrait of the Duc de Montmorency a figure of a horseman can be seen in the insertion—an isolated example, for in

no other illustration or extant specimen has any deviation from simple geometrical design been introduced in *point de Gênes frisé*.*

By the middle of the seventeenth century the varieties of pillow lace had been considerably developed. The thin wiry pillow lace had been discarded, and the heavier Genoese collar laces went out of fashion, as we have said, by 1660. A tape lace with a straight edge between the ornament of which were grounds of meshes, or of bars or brides, was subsequently made in Genoa, and is remarkable for the twisting of the tape, always looped back upon itself.



PORTRAIT OF HENRI II., DUC DE MONTMORENCY (1595-1632)
BY LENAIN

* The name is an old one. In the wardrobe of Mary de Medicis is enumerated among other articles a “mouchoir de point de Gennes frisé.”—*Garderobe de feu Madame*, 1646. *Bib. Nat. MSS. F. Fr. 11,426*.