

Milanese Lace

By M. Jourdain

MILAN, like many another centre of lace-making, was early famed for its embroideries.* In 1584 an "Università" of embroiderers was already in existence, and flourished until the middle of the seventeenth century. Coryat mentions that the Milanese embroiderers are "very singular workmen, who work much in gold and silver."† "Tarnete uno d'oro et seda negra facta da ossi" (bones) is mentioned in the Sforza inventory in 1493, and it is interesting to find that bobbins are still called "ossi" at Cantu, and "ossoletti" ‡ at Canton Ticino. It is in this inventory that are to be found the earliest records which are quoted in reference to Italian lace, the well-known instrument of partition between the sisters Angela and Ippolita Sforza Visconti.§ *Trina* is

* Brantôme, in his *Dames Galantes*, remarks that the embroiderers of Milan "ont sceu bien faire par dessus les autres."

† "No city of Italy is furnished with more manuary arts than this, especially two, embroidering and making of hilts for swords and daggers. Their embroiderers are very singular workmen, who work much in gold and silver."—*Coryat's Crudities*, 1611.

‡ "Ossoli, bobbins to wind silke vpon. Also knuckles or knuckle-bones."—*Florio, A Worlde of Wordes*, 1598.

§ "Lenzuolo (sheet) uno di revo di tele (linen thread), cinque lavorato a punto.

"Peza de *tarnete* (trina) d'argento facte a stelle.

"Lenzolo uno de tele, quatro lavorate a *radixelo*.

"Peza quatre de *radexela* per mettere ad uno *moscheto* (*zanzariere*—mosquito curtain).

"Tarneta uno d'oro et seda negra facta da ossi (bones).

mentioned there under its old form, *tarnete*, but *trina*, like our English "lace" and the French "passement," was used in a general sense for braid or *passement* long before the advent of lace proper. Florio, in his Dictionary,|| gives *trine*, cuts, tags, snips, pinck worke on garments, and *trinci*, gardings, fringings, lacings, etc. It will be seen that the "trine" of the Sforza inventory are always of metal and silk.

Fratini, in his *Storiadell Industria Manufatturiera in Lombardia*, states the inhabitants of the Cantu district made lace from about 1600. Towards the middle of the eighteenth century the industry had fallen into decay. "The Milanese," writes Lalande, "only fabricate lace of an inferior quality,"¶ to which may be added the later testimony of Peuchet, who writes that the laces are very common and not highly priced.**

"Pecto une d'oro facta a *grupi*.

"Binda una lavorata a poncto de deii fuxi (two bobbins?) per uno lenzolo."—*Instrumento di divisione tre le sorelle Angela ed Ippolita Sforza Visconti, di Milano, 1493, giorno di Giovedì, 12 Settembre*.

|| *A Worlde of Wordes*.—John Florio, London, 1598.

¶ *Voyage en Italie*, 1765.

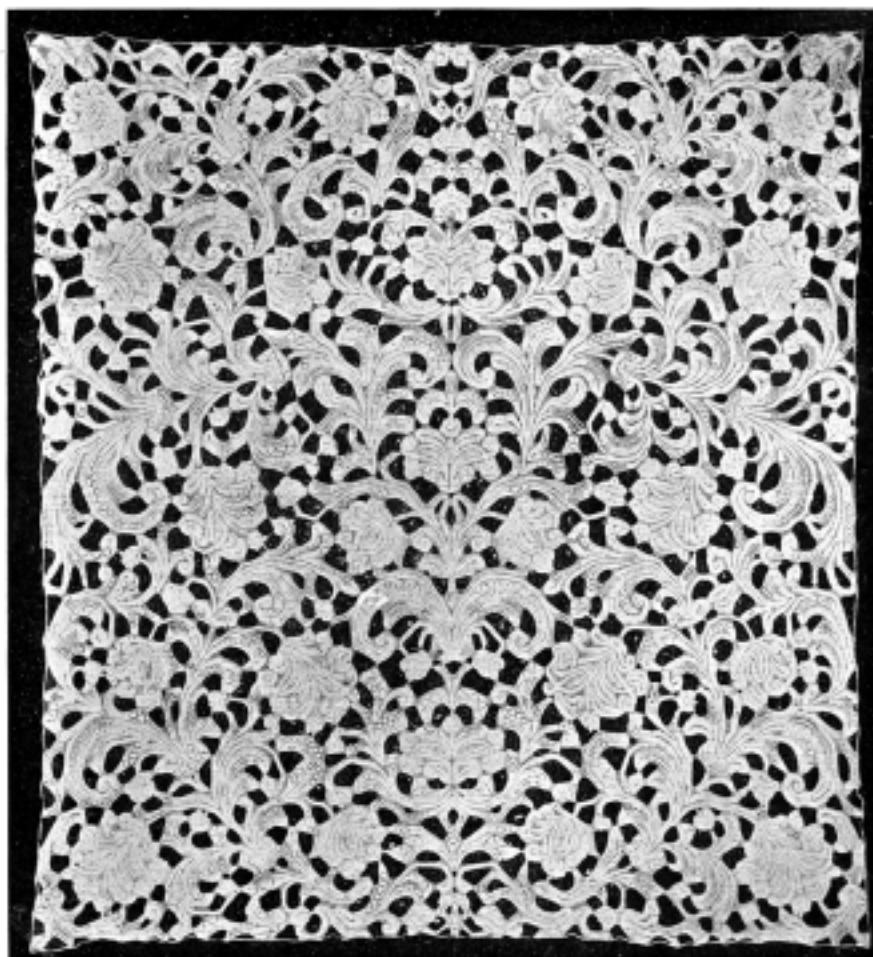
** *Milan. Dentelles en fil*. "Elles sont très-communes. Cette fabrique n'a rien qui puisse nuire aux fabriques françaises de même espèce, ni pour la concurrence ni pour la consommation de Milan. Beaucoup sont employées par les paysannes de la Lombardie. La plus fine peut procurer quelque manchettes d'hommes d'un prix fort modique."—*Dictionnaire Universel de la Géographie Commercante*, 1789.



BORDER OF PILLOW-MADE LACE

MILANESE, SEVENTEENTH CENTURY (ABOUT 1650-60)

Milanese Lace



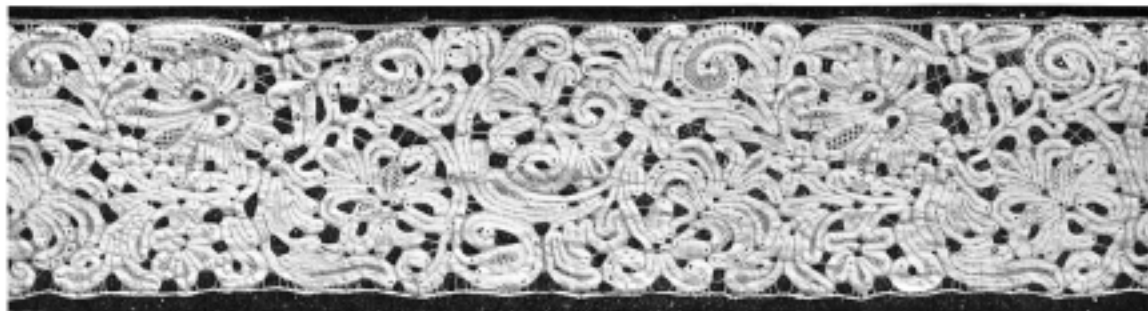
PANEL OF MILANESE LACE

SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

The earlier Milanese laces are not grounded with the *réseau*, but covered by bold rolling scroll designs held together by brides, sometimes of twisted strands of thread. A specimen in the Bolckow Bequest, catalogued as Italian or Flemish, but certainly Italian in treatment, has a design of large flowering scrolls, in the centre of which is a lady playing a lute, toward her flies a cupid bearing a heart, and on the other

side is a nude figure with a flowing scarf. In the upper border the cupid, blindfolded, has a bow and arrows. One very fine piece of Milanese lace in the Victoria and Albert Museum has no brides; the details of the pattern touch one another.* The *toile* is a close, firm, even braid, varied with pin holes, or

* No. 42, 1903.

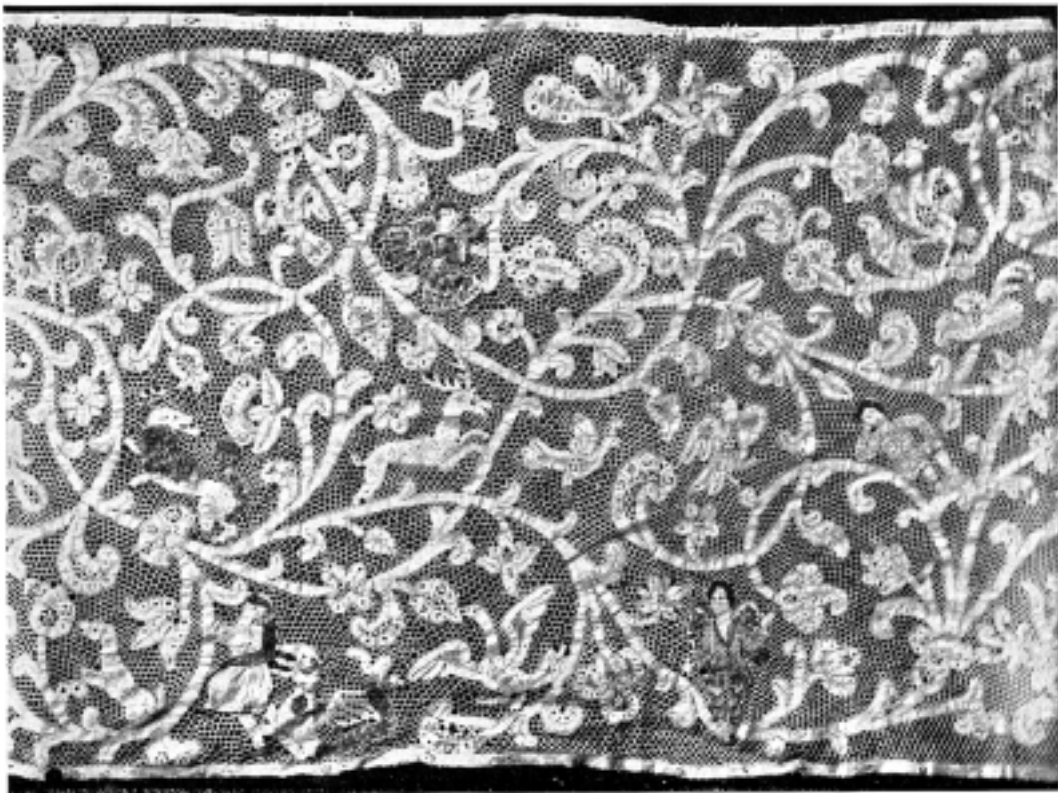


MILANESE LACE (WITH BRIDES)

SEVENTEENTH CENTURY



PORTION OF A BORDER OF MILANESE LACE LATE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY



PORTION OF A BORDER OF MILANESE LACE LATE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

Milanese Lace



MILANESE LACE (DATED 1733)

MUSÉE DES ARTS DÉCORATIFS, BRUSSELS

larger open devices. The réseau ground was introduced by 1664, at which date a portrait by Gonzales Coques shows a straight-edged piece of Milanese with meshed ground.*

The réseau is of various kinds. Its most common type is a diamond-shaped mesh, formed with a plait of four threads like Valenciennes, but many experimental grounds, loosely worked, are met with in earlier pieces. In one specimen the threads are knotted at the points of intersection.

The pattern is first made on the pillow by itself, and the réseau ground is worked in round it afterwards, sloping in all directions so as to fit the spaces, while Valenciennes is worked all in one piece, pattern and réseau together. If the lace is turned upon the wrong side the strands of thread of the Milanese réseau can be seen carried behind the pattern. The designs are beautiful, and consist of light ribbon-like scrolls and conventional flowers,† which enclose small chequer or other simple fillings. Animal forms, eagles, hares, bears, hounds, archaic in drawing, but always vigorously treated, are frequently introduced. In the spirit of these scenes can be traced the

characteristics of the Lombard, who, according to Ruskin, covered every church he built with the expression of his fierce energy and scenes of hunting and war—incidents entirely absent from Venetian, and only experimentally introduced in other laces.

Coats of arms are frequently met with, and animals which no doubt represent family badges. The double or Imperial eagle is of very common occurrence (even in church lace). This is to be accounted for by the fact that Charles V. conceded as a mark of special favour the privilege of bearing the Imperial arms to several Italian as well as Spanish families, who used them instead of their own arms.‡

A specimen,§ Victoria and Albert Museum, shows a curious mixture of motifs, secular and religious. The pattern consists of a central device of a double-headed eagle surmounted by a large coronet. Beneath the eagle is a pierced flaming heart, and on each side of it a little prancing dog. On each side of this central group springs a blossom and leafy scroll with a pelican preening its feathers and another little bird.

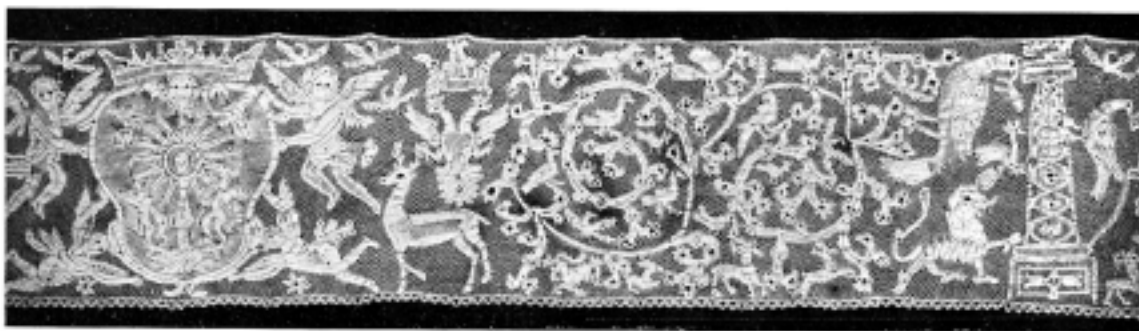
The very curious piece of Milanese lace in the possession of Mrs. Hibbert, shows a clumsily-drawn

* Milanese lace is almost always straight-edged.

† Not conventional beyond recognition, like these highly ornamental flowers of Venetian rose point. The pink, lily and other flowers are met with often treated naturalistically.

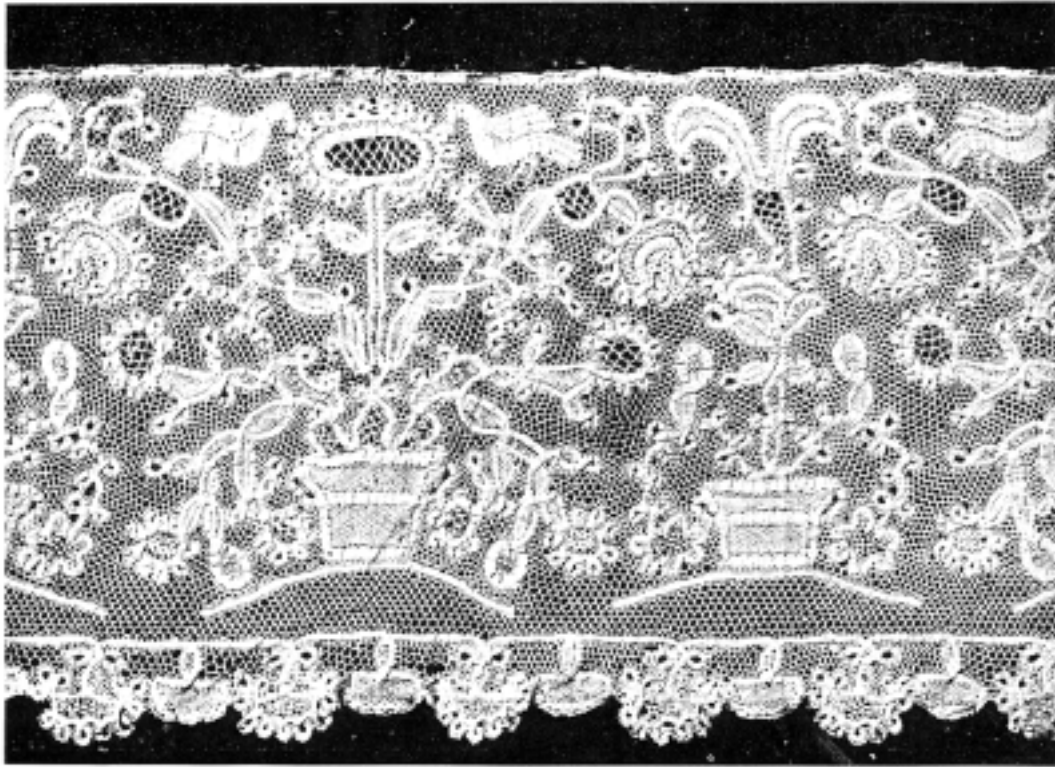
‡ From 1535 till 1714 Milan was a dependency of the Spanish Crown.

§ About 1650.



MILANESE (DATED 1733)

MUSÉE DES ARTS DÉCORATIFS, BRUSSELS



MILANESE LACE (WITH RÉSEAU GROUND)

figure seated upon an ornamental fountain. The graceful scrolls include various long-tailed birds, angels, horsemen chasing stags and lions; while part of the pattern has a kind of knot-work upon the more important motifs; the lion's mane, the angel, the horsemen are ornamented with this work in *black silk*, as is also the double eagle surmounted by a crown. It is dated 16..5.*

In church lace, figures of the Virgin, angels, and monograms occur.

An interesting piece, dated 1733, in the Musée des Arts Décoratifs, at Brussels (of which two photographs are given), should be studied. The first portion, with arms of "Julius Cæsar Xaverius Miccolis abbas et rector S. Mariæ Graecæ, A.D. 1733," and its repeating scroll design with its characteristic birds and stags is perfect, while the second portion shows a hopeless confusion of motifs carelessly thrown together, and the réseau mended. The angels supporting the shield, with its rayed monstrance, is followed by a stag and a crowned double-headed eagle, which are quite unrelated to the design and to each other. The scroll, instead of repeating like the first portion, is twisted into a broken almost angular volute, and the

single supporter (from the abbot's arms in portion i.) is transferred to an ornamented pillar, upon either side of which birds are arranged without any regard to the law of gravity.

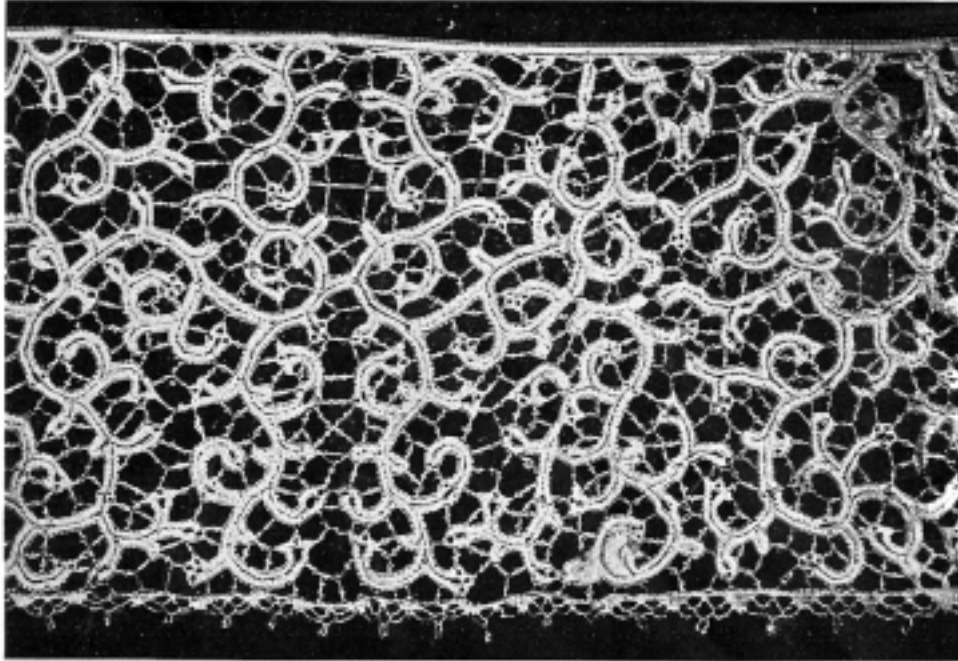
No. iii., with its *naïve* rendering of floral design, is perhaps a late or peasant rendering of Milanese work; the twisting, ribbon-like convolutions, which may be seen in the stems of the flowers and other ornament, became more prominent in the decadence of Milanese lace. The trade name for such lace is "Genoese tape," but it was made both in Milan and Genoa and the district. The design consists merely of the tape looping back upon itself, and linked together by brides with picots, or with a réseau ground. It has been much used for church vestments, and was frequently of considerable width. Mrs. Palliser found in the parish church of Santa Margherita an old worn parchment pattern for lace of this ribbon-like design, which she dated as about 1592.

Strong peasant laces were made on the pillow very freely throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth century in Northern Italy. Coryat † notices in Piedmont "that many of the inns have white canopies and curtains made of needlework, which are edged with very fine bone-lace," and in Venice that "the sides

* "There are representations in it of Perseus and Andromeda, possibly also of Jason and of Europa."—*Note by the owner.*

† *Coryat's Crudities*, 1611.

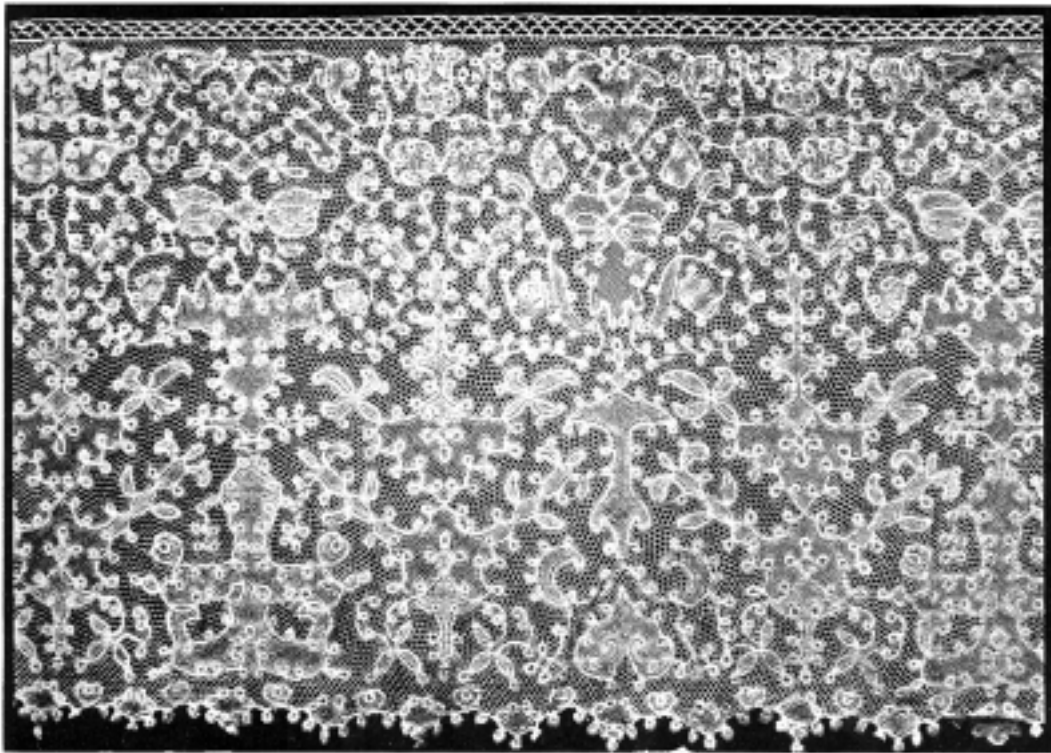
Milanese Lace



MILANESE OR GENOESE LACE (LATE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY)

under the benches" in the gondolas are "garnished with fine linen cloth, the edge whereof is laced with bone-lace." About fifty years ago sheets and pillow-

cases, towels and table-cloths were still to be bought from country inns, trimmed with pillow lace, of coarse thread, and indeterminate pattern.



MILANESE OR GENOESE LACE, LATE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY IN THE POSSESSION OF LADY TREVELYAN