

FLAT VENETIAN POINT LACE (*seventeenth century*)

Represents the Crucifixion — with Mary the Mother, Mary Magdalen and St. John. The symbols of the sun and moon also are represented. An extraordinarily distinguished example of a highly skilled technique. (See *The Development of Lace*, page 155, *et seq.*)

Lace and Its Development

III. Venetian Point and Punto di Milano

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THERE has been a general tendency to discredit the baroque art of the seventeenth century, to consider it, in its entirety, as overdone and in bad taste. This habit of mind is passing, however, and the world is beginning to estimate more justly the really valuable contributions of the period. Baroque art is a self-conscious art, which strives for a certain definite, elaborate, and imposing effect, but it achieves its intention with almost unfailing success. In general, it exhibits an over emphasis of detail, which differentiates it from earlier Renaissance expression; but it is as true a mirror of the life and customs of its day as are the earlier art expressions. Each was the normal outgrowth of its time and bears the characteristic marks of its source and environment.

Lace the Noblest Expression of Baroque Art

Italy, in the seventeenth century, had passed from her great creative period; but love of splendor had been inculcated in her very blood by the wonderful achievement of the earlier time. The seventeenth century artist, painter, sculptor, and lace-maker still lived in the traditions of the past, which they sought not only to emulate, but to surpass. That they did not succeed in this was due to the fact that the supreme creative ability was lacking; but their facility was such that they produced work which, technically, has seldom been equalled.

The seventeenth century was a very important period for Venice. Her greatest triumphs — both in politics and in art—were in the past, but she was more than sufficiently possessed of the material things of life. Her existence was one long pageant, public and private—the receptions of ambassadors, the various feasts of the Church, the annual celebration of the symbolic marriage of Venice and the Sea, and many other public functions, which gave opportunity for the display of splendid costumes, silks, satins, and brocades, laden with broad flounces of the world-famed *point de Venise*.

A Brief Recapitulation

In earlier articles it has been pointed out that Venice was the leader in the production of point lace. She maintained her supremacy in this technique from the time her workers first plied their needles on the exquisite cloths of cut work, through the period of the intricate designs of *punto in aria* evolved from the geometric reticella patterns, and long after.

Briefly to recapitulate; even after the workers had found that the rectangular network of reticella was no longer necessary, yet for a time they continued to base their patterns on reticella designs. Thus the rectangles were reproduced in the new *punto in aria* technique, which was literally what the name implies,—“a stitch in the air.”



Fig. 1 — RAISED VENETIAN POINT ((seventeenth century)

Heavy and rather meaningless scrolls. Observe, however, the patient and competent technique of the design. Note the rosaline pattern of the brides or bars that hold the pattern together.

In time, however, this copying of the old and *démodé* was discarded and the utmost boldness of pattern was undertaken.

When the *punto in aria* workers embarked upon their new freedom, their procedure was simple: they took a piece of parchment and laid the broad outlines of their pattern upon it with needle and linen thread. The parchment became merely a material means of support. When the work was finished, the few threads which held the lace in place on the parchment ground were cut. No longer were there any restrictions which confined the limits of the design.

These changes in design did not come in a moment, but when, in the second half of the sixteenth century, *punto in aria*, and later, in the first half of the seventeenth century, its full development—*raised Venetian point* appeared, it took the Venetian world by storm:—which is equivalent to saying that it took Europe by storm; for Venetian styles created the mode of world society.

Raised Venetian Point

Raised Venetian point is in reality only the full development of the *punto in aria* technique, but it is better usage

to confine the term *punto in aria* strictly to those needle laces whose designs are independent of a linen ground and do not have a background of raised work. When the raised work appears, it should be called *raised Venetian point*, or by the French name, *point de Venise*, the Italian *punto di Venezia*, *punto tagliato a foliami*, *punto rosallino* or other names. But absolute consistency in nomenclature is impossible.

Punto in aria in many ways marks the height of lace production. There is a logic and restraint about the patterns which is lost, to some extent, in the fanciful raised work of later times. Yet it must be remembered that technique retained the highest possible standards in this later work, and—if such a thing is possible—even improved

upon them. Decline lies in the fact that the adaptation of patterns to the fabric employed is not so perfect nor so consistent as in earlier lace types. The charming scrolls, leaf and flower patterns of the *punto in aria* work have seldom been surpassed in artistic propriety. They have been surpassed in technical magnificence.

Lace adapted itself to the mode and influenced it in turn. *Reticella* and *punto in aria* had been used to embellish the stiff ruffs which stood out about the head, and they were again employed when fashion decreed that the ruff should fall on the shoulders. *Punto in aria* was in demand also when the so-called *col rabattu*, or falling collar, came into vogue, in the early seventeenth century. Later, when courtiers and dandies wore wigs with pendant curls, these collar styles passed. In their stead the jabot, and lace frills for the

sleeves and knee breeches became the fashion for men. For these purposes no lace was ever more fitted than the beautiful *raised Venetian point*.

Lace Making Passes to France

In the middle of the seventeenth century the court of Louis XIV began to assert its power over the world, and the leadership of fashion gradually passed from Venice to

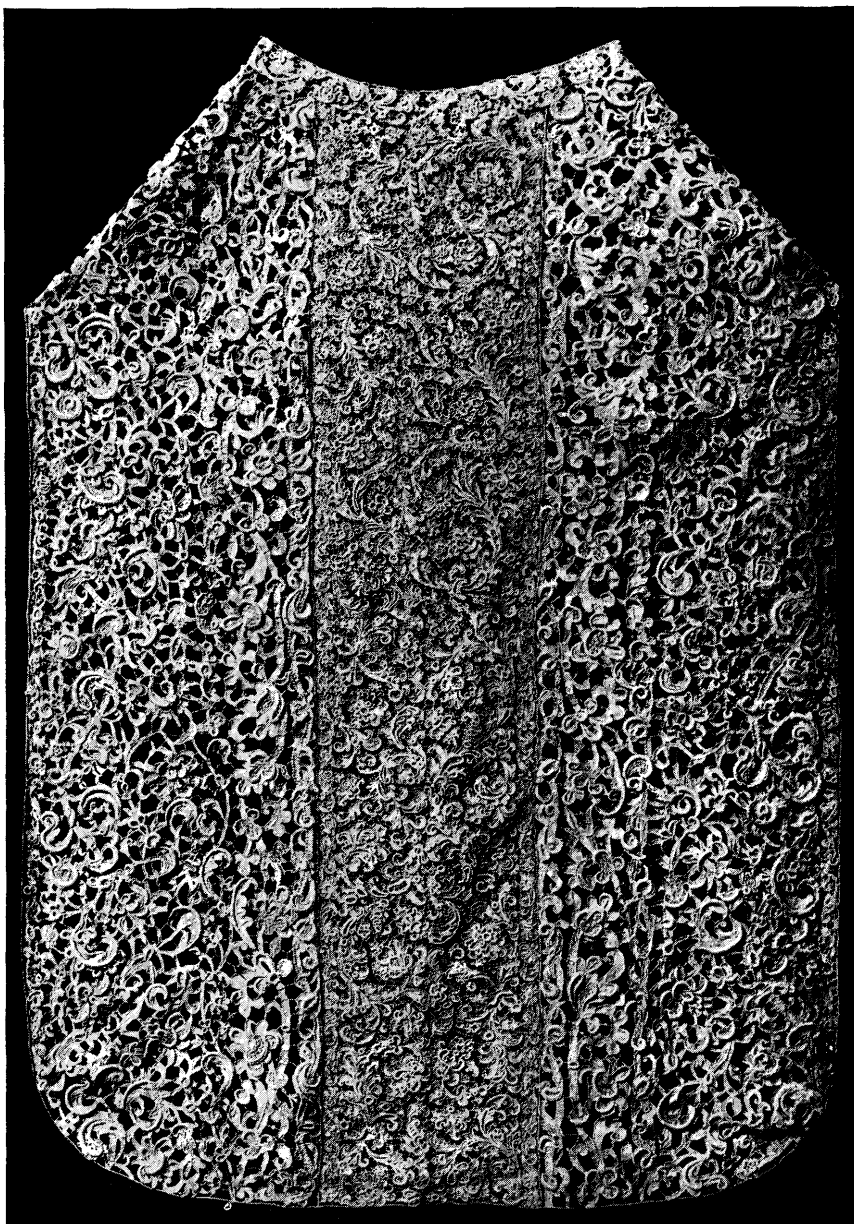


Fig. 2 — VENETIAN POINT CHASUBLE (seventeenth century)

A magnificent example from the third quarter of the century. Design so richly complicated as to be almost self supporting without brides.

France. Yet for years nothing could replace the Venetian laces for French costumes. Colbert, Louis' great minister, tried to stop their importation by a prohibitive duty. This made them only the more expensive and, therefore, the more admired and sought after by the court. He had merely played into the hands of the extravagant tastes of the French courtiers and great ladies. In 1665 however, he devised a far more efficacious means of gaining his ends. He bribed many of the best Venetian workers with exorbitant payments to move to France. After that he supported their work with princely liberality in these new lines in the centers of Alençon and Argentan. By decree, Venetian Point became French point, and numberless workers were set at work copying Venetian models. Naturally, when the fashionable world found itself able to obtain lace of nearly as good quality as the Venetian, at a much lower price, a large part of the market of Venetian workers was taken away.

Venice tried in vain to maintain the ebbing tide. Laws prohibiting emigration were passed but were evaded too often. The remaining workers redoubled their efforts, but the miraculous fabrics which they produced but slightly

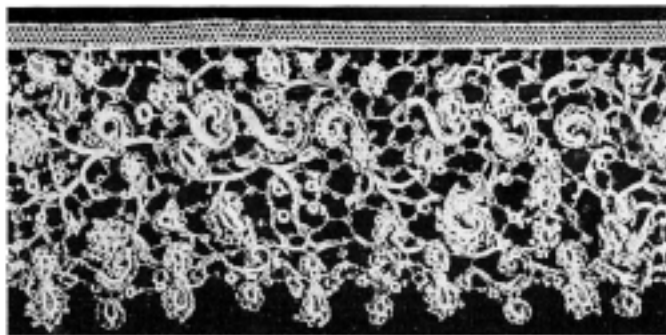


Fig. 3 — RAISED VENETIAN POINT (early eighteenth century)
Somewhat over-elaborate and confused.

delayed the inevitable end. For a brief time superior quality maintained the actual Venetian product in the markets of France, but the decaying republic of Venice could not withstand the competition, backed as it was by the vigor and strength of the French monarchy then at the summit of its power. Thus supremacy in lace making passed from Italy to France.

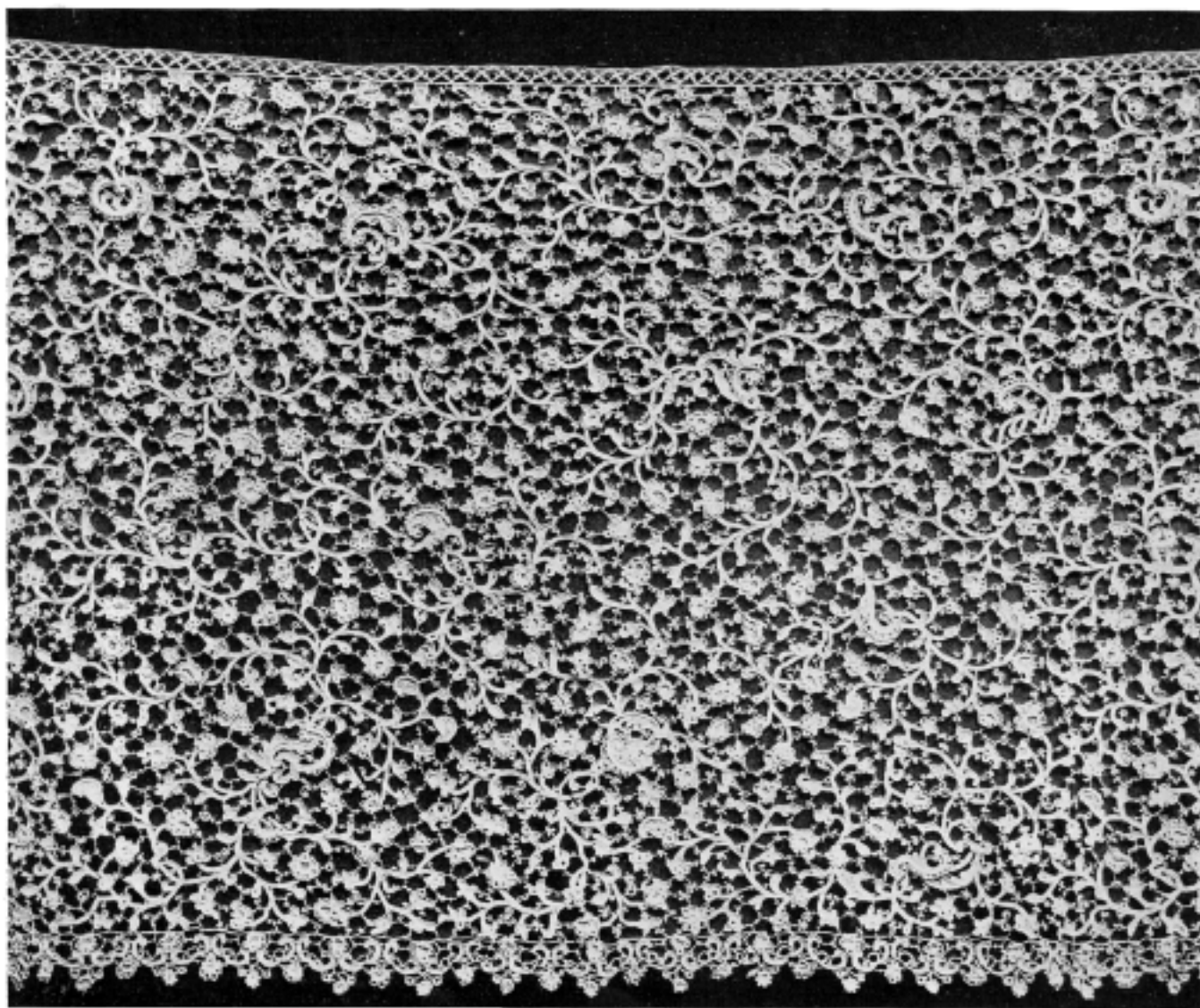


Fig. 4 — RAISED VENETIAN POINT (seventeenth century)

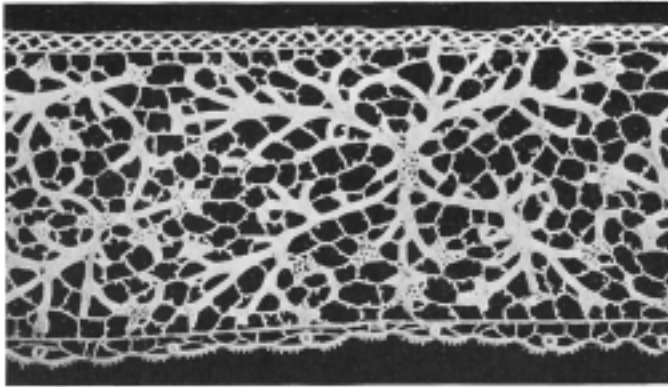


Fig. 5 — FLAT VENETIAN POINT
Pattern based on branch coral.

Discussion of Illustrations

The illustrations clearly show the general character of *raised Venetian point*. Figure 1, perhaps the earliest, shows broad scrolls interrupted by the rather meaningless details of Baroque design. The pattern is held together by brides or bars, in this piece decorated with little rosaline designs and picots. On account of these rosaline details such lace is sometimes called *rose point*, which is the only correct use of this name. The modern lace, *rose point*, is quite different in that actual roses are introduced in the design. Close examination will reveal how the solid portions of the lace were patiently worked with stitch after stitch of buttonhole work, and how, after that, the edges were worked in low relief, while certain details were developed in almost the full round, and how finally the decoration was completed with rows of picots of the little points, which line the edges.

The splendid chasuble,* (Fig. II,) shows pure *raised Venetian point* of the third quarter of the seventeenth century. It exhibits no rosaline details and is in even fuller relief than the other piece reproduced. It will be seen, in both of these pieces, that the design is almost self-supporting and that the brides are not all important. However, at

*A chasuble is a vestment used in the service of the church.

length the brides began to play a preponderant part in lace design, finally to resolve themselves into the net ground, which appeared toward the end of the seventeenth century, and which is the foundation of nearly all eighteenth century lace.

The growth of the brides with little rosaline designs is seen in Figures 3 and 4. The former piece is probably early eighteenth century and shows the over elaboration of the latest types with details in almost full relief and the most fully worked picots.

Flat Venetian Point

A little later than the *raised Venetian point* in development, but contemporaneous with most of it was *flat Venetian point*. This started with Renaissance scroll patterns and developed the same general features as the raised work. The exquisite square, made for some ecclesiastical use, has all its details worked

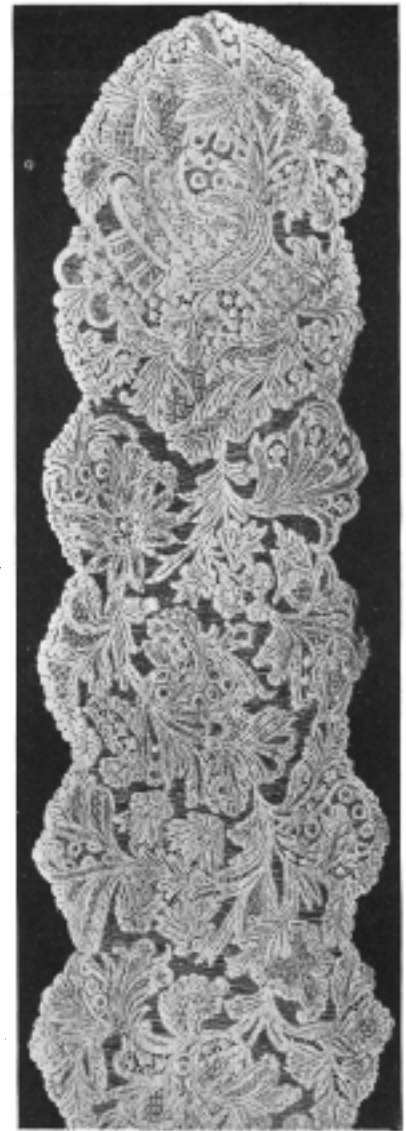


Fig. 7 — VENETIAN POINT
An exquisite embroidery on a net ground.

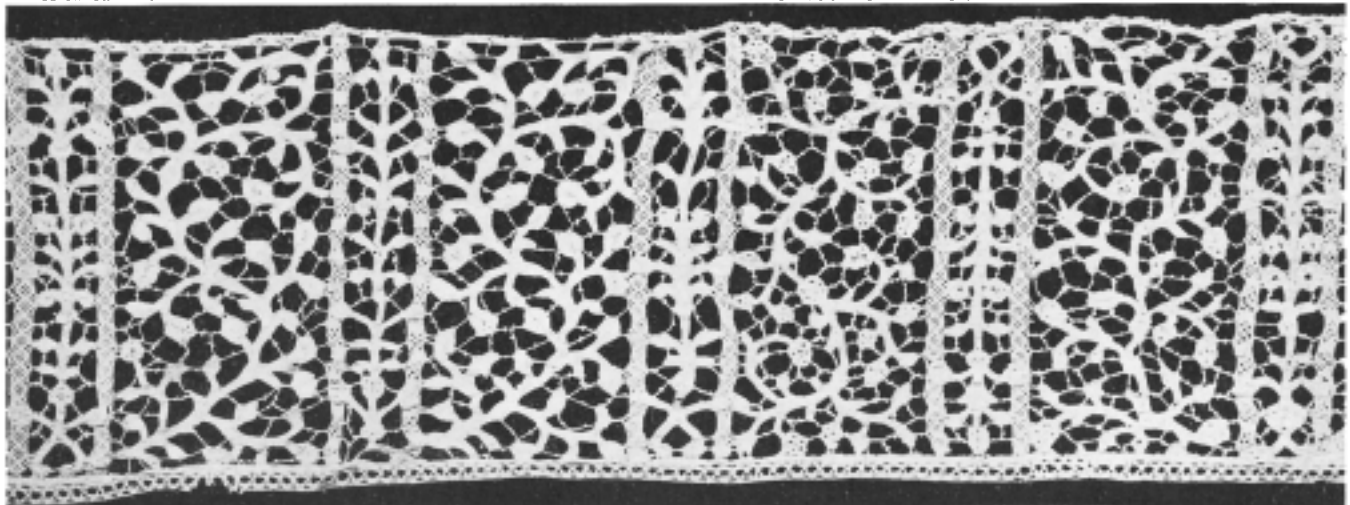


Fig. 6 — MILANESE BOBBIN—seventeenth century)

Tape lace made on a pillow and afterward supported by four bars similar to those in the coralline point lace.

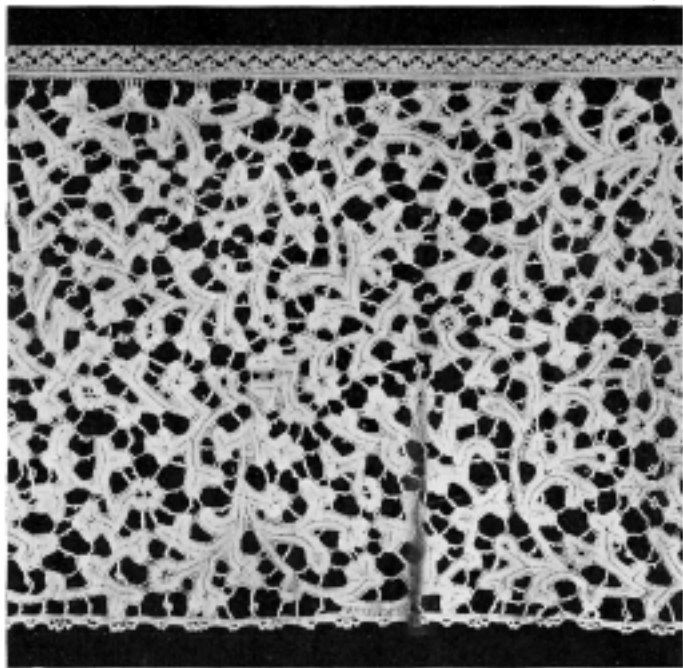


Fig. 8 — MILANESE BOBBIN
The method of using bobbin tapes is here clearly apparent.

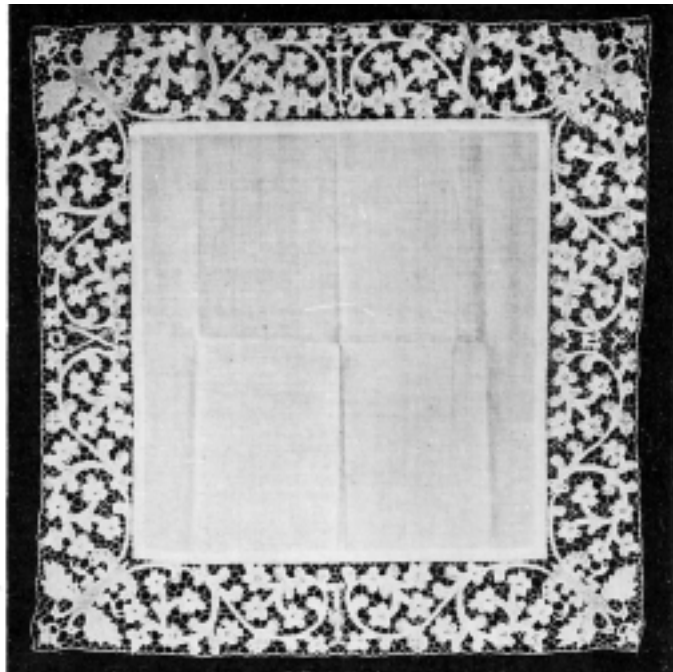


Fig. 9 — MILANESE BOBBIN (with needlepoint additions)
Chalice Veil. The brides are here reduced to a simple net work.

in flat stitches connected by rosaline brides and featuring in the center a marvelously worked "Christ on the Cross attended by Mary and St. John." (Frontispiece). This is one of the most distinguished examples of this character that has come to my attention. Later the workers attempted to use coral branches as a basis for their patterns. Indeed they produced an entire group of designs. Beautiful as these are, they exhibit very little sense of pattern; and often the effect is quite disorganized. The narrow edging reproduced in Figure 5 shows the character of this lace.

Eventually after success had established the French manufacture of lace, Venice tried to regain her position by copying French lace. Exquisite as are these eighteenth century pieces, they could not compete in price with the French home product. Seldom has anything more effective been produced in lace technique than the lappet reproduced in Figure 7. It will be seen in this piece that the net ground has triumphed and that the brides have, in consequence, entirely disappeared. This is a marked feature which helps in the determination of approximate dates.

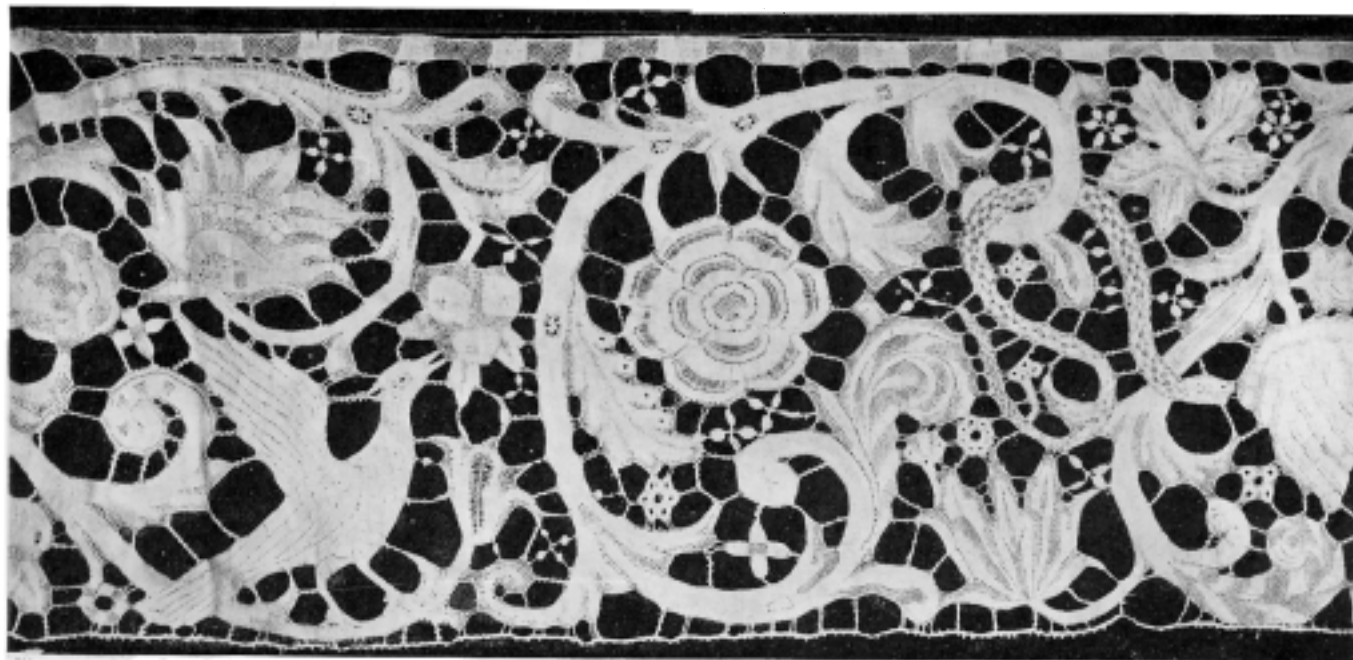


Fig. 10 — MILANESE BOBBIN
An unusually fine piece. The millet seed treatment of the brides suggest Genoese rather than Milanese origin.

Copied after French styles as it is, the example has acquired a most distinct individuality of its own. The net is much the same as that of Alençon, although the mesh is somewhat rounder, but that lace differs in having no cordonnet or raised outlining thread found in the typical *point Alençon*.

It is evident, then, that seventeenth century *Venetian point* divides into three general groups: first, *raised Venetian point* of which *rosaline point* is a variety; second, *flat Venetian point*, of which the *coralline lace* is the most characteristic type; and thirdly, *grounded Venetian point*, with a net ground and designs based on French models.

Late Italian Bobbin

Point lace has been considered first, for the sake of greater clarity; but the development of bobbin lace, along its own general lines, had proceeded with equal rapidity up to the seventeenth century. No bobbin characteristic of Venice came later, for her time was taken up instead with the making of point lace. Instead, a new center, Milan, came into its own in the seventeenth century; and for a century or more produced a bobbin lace which enjoyed universal popularity. It was a tape lace made on a pillow and then connected with brides or bars. Later, following the same evolution as in point lace, net grounds became the fashion and permanently supplanted the older style. This Milanese bobbin lace has been universally known as *punto di Milano*, a quite incorrect title as it is a bobbin lace. Figures 6 and 8 are probably earlier patterns of the type, as they have none of the organization of motif which marks the usual examples.

Of quite exquisite quality is the chalice veil (Fig. 9.) This piece shows the beginning of the tendency toward the use of net grounds. The piece was originally entirely of bobbin, but certain details on the eagles, the centers of the leaves, and the symbols of the Passion have been later added in needlepoint.

Another extraordinary piece of bobbin lace is the flounce

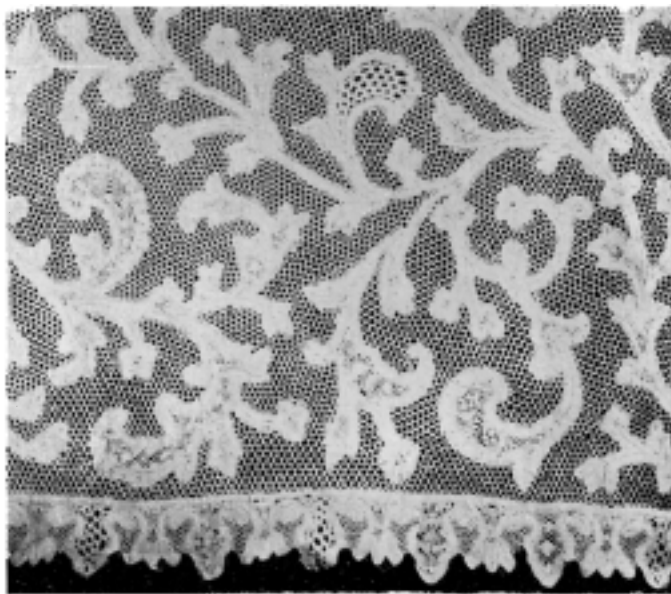


Fig. 11 — MILANESE POINT
Needle embroidery on a net ground.

shown in Figure 10, which was probably used as a decoration around the bottom of a priest's alb. This magnificently designed piece has the figures of a bird and a snake worked out with great finesse. It must have been made in Italy, but it has not pure Milanese characteristics. The use of the millet seed suggests a Genoese provenance.

Finally, two flounces show *punto di Milano* with the net ground. One, (Fig. 11), has a magnificent all-over pattern with ornamental *à jours*, or openings, filled with a variety of designs, while Figure 12 shows a flounce with figures relating the story of Joseph.

These pieces bring bobbin lace down to the eighteenth century and mark the close of the era of great bobbin lace in Italy. France, and more especially Belgium, were to carry this technique to its further triumphs.



Fig. 12 — MILANESE POINT
The story of Joseph richly worked on a background of net. Floral pattern of the scroll and introduction of bird and animal forms are significant.