

CUT PAPER

FRENCH, XVIII CENTURY. MUSÉE DES ARTS DECORATIFS. THE PRECISION AND DELICACY IN THE RENDERING OF THIS LIVELY AND DELIGHTFUL DESIGN IS A TESTIMONY OF BEAUTY ATTAINABLE IN SUCH WORK.



FIG. 1 CUT PARCHMENT  
PROBABLY A DESIGN FOR ITALIAN NEEDLEPOINT LACE. MUSEUM OF ARTS  
DECORATIONS, COOPER UNION, N. Y.

### CUT PAPER WORK

THE Victorian paper lace valentine with its virtuous and sentimental message is a degenerate descendant of an art which in earlier times produced gems of delicate intricacy. For the nineteenth century, more concerned with virtue and mechanics than with art, found that designs, charming and ingenious in the days when they had been cut out of paper by hand with painstaking care, could be stamped and embossed to produce an effect elaborate in appearance, if mechanical in feeling. The especial charm of cut paper work which lay in the delicacy of design and the precision of the cutting was thus lost. Moreover, whereas once the inspiration for lace patterns, the cut paper work of the nineteenth century imitated with surprising, if not

commendatory faithfulness the appearance of French and Flemish laces.

But to realize the beauty of the earlier examples of this fragile art, one turns to a consideration of some of those which are still in existence today. While the origin of such work is unknown, one assumes that it came into being with the demand for inexpensive religious pictures, on the one hand, for lace and embroidery designs on the other.

In the past centuries it was customary to carry about a picture of one's patron saint as a protection against the agents of darkness and evil. Naturally poorer people could not afford panel paintings of St. Christopher or St. Anthony; moreover, such pictures were cumbersome to take about and too precious to be subjected to the exigencies of travel of those days. So, pictures were printed on paper from crude wood blocks and colored by hand. These could be bought at wayside shrines and at churches for a few pennies. Borders around the actual picture of the saint were frequently decorated with simple dots or scrolls printed or perforated. Among European peasants such religious pictures are used as memorial cards, or as souvenirs of special occasions even to this day. Fig. 2 is an illustration of one of those found in Austria. The connection with the paper lace valentine with which we are familiar is obvious enough.

At the same time cut paper work is definitely associated with the history of lace and embroidery designs. Because of the geometric character of reticello, and the linear precision of other early Italian laces, it would be natural to create such patterns by the folding and cutting of paper. Fig. 1, from a piece of cut parchment, is presumably a pattern for Italian needlepoint. Of course, later on, pin pricked patterns were used as guides in the making of lace as Fig. 4 shows. Like cut paper work, pin pricked designs were made as pictures without any thought of utility. In fact, the pin pricked picture, like the silhouette picture, achieved great popularity in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Some of the finest were probably made with the aid of the magnifying glass as the holes are so small as to make actual count of them impossible.

Among the examples of cut paper work which have come down to us, certain ones because of the clarity of the design, in spite of intricacy, and the deftness of the execution are particularly remarkable. A rare and charming work of about 1600 is a *Preces Latinae* (Fig. 5) dedicated to



FIG. 2 PAPER LACE  
FROM PEASANT ART IN AUSTRIA. COURTESY OF CHAS. HOLME.

Philip III of Spain by F. Diego de Berreda. The text, which is of Gothic letters cut out of paper has been executed with extraordinary care and delicacy. The insertion of colored silks between every two leaves, thus creating a background of color for the lettering and the floral borders produces an effect rivaling in its subtle richness the illuminations of earlier centuries. The cut parchment design (Fig. 6) in the collection of Mr. Paul Alfossa, also a work of the seventeenth century, is amazing in the accuracy with which a complicated design has been carried out.

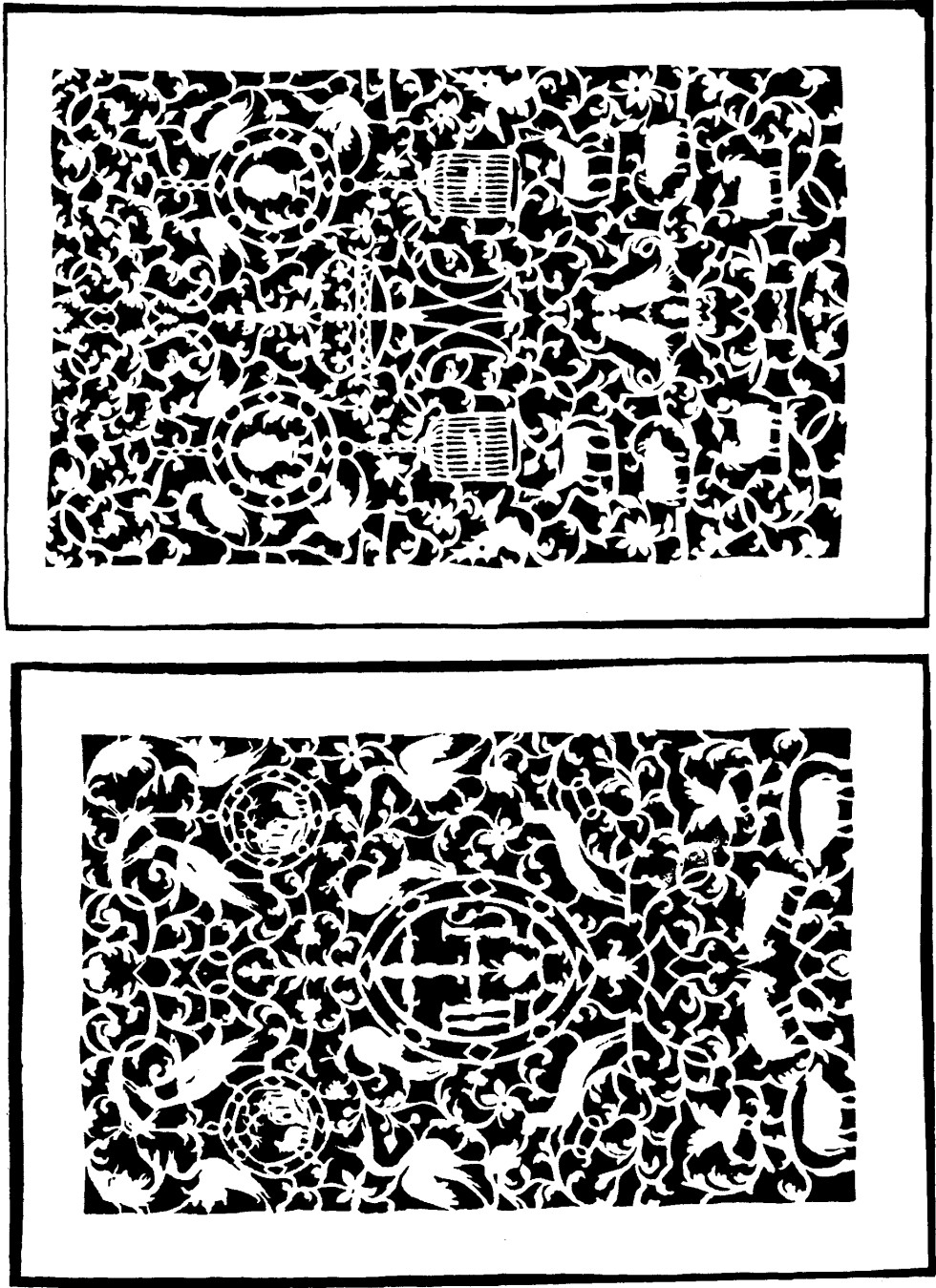


FIG. 3  
CUT PAPER DESIGNS  
FOR LACE AND EMBROIDERY, EIGHTEENTH CENTURY. FROM PEASANT ART IN ITALY. COURTESY OF CHARLES HOLME.

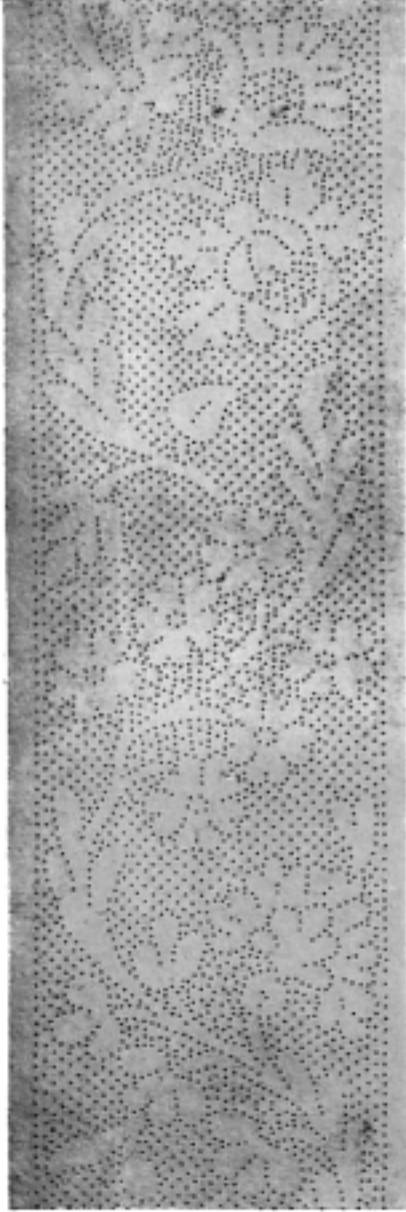


FIG. 4 FROM THE COLLECTION OF MRS. DE WITT CLINTON COHEN, NEW YORK

1. WHITE PAPER PRICKING, WITH DATE INDICATING THAT THE LACE HEREWITH WAS BEGUN IN 1775 AND FINISHED IN 1782.
2. BINCHE LACE WITH CINQ TROUS GROUND, PRESUMABLY EXECUTED UPON A STRONG PARCHMENT, OF WHICH THE ABOVE PRICKING IS A MODEL THAT MIGHT BE USED EITHER IN PRODUCING A NEW PRICKING WHEN THE PARCHMENT SHOULD BECOME TOO PIN-WORN; OR TO SHOW CUSTOMERS WHEN SOLICITING ORDERS.

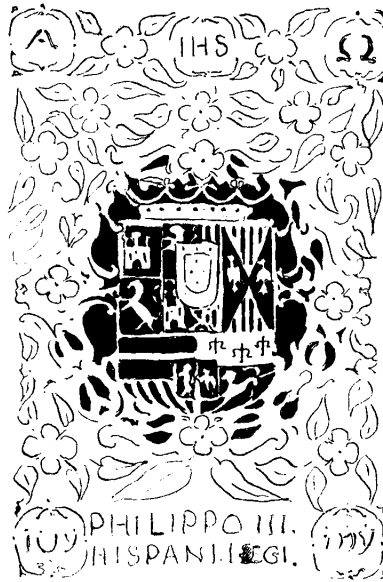


FIG. 5

FIRST PAGE OF PRECES LATINÆ  
 DEDICATED TO PHILIP III OF SPAIN  
 BY F. DIEGO DE BARREDA, CIRCA, 1600.  
 FROM CAXTON HEAD CATALOGUE.

It is, however, the eighteenth century which witnesses the refinement and delicate perfection to which such fragility may be exalted. To the artful creations of fans, snuff boxes and other bibelots that lent a sparkle to the fragility and capricious charm of eighteenth century society one must add such work as the Frontispiece illustrates. Unrivalled in careful execution, in the lighthearted freedom of the design is this cut paper picture in the Musée des Arts Decoratifs in Paris. The ease and grace with which the animals and flowers are drawn find their like only in the drawings of Huet made familiar in his designs for Toiles de Jouy. From such imaginative conceptions to Victorian imitations is a lamentable step. But not, after all, as sad as the contemplation of the survival in our own day of these delicate and finely wrought caprices, in inelegant shelf paper and the lacy edged paper doily.



FIG. 6

CUT PARCHMENT, FRENCH, DATED 1697  
FROM THE COLLECTION OF PAUL ALFESSA.



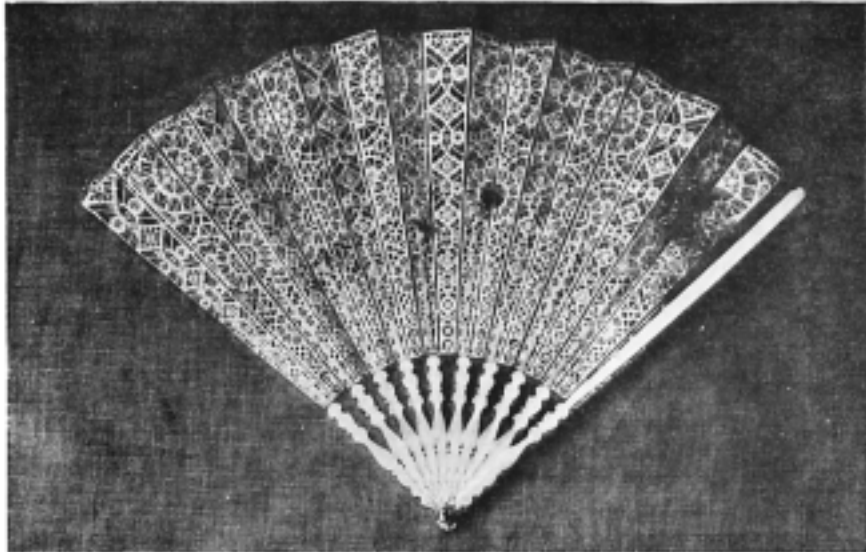


FIG. 7a PIERCED PAPER FAN

PIERCED AND SCULPTED OF HEAVY CARDBOARD, WITH COLOR INSERTED IN EVERY LEAF. SIMILAR TO THE ONLY OTHER KNOWN ONE, AT PRESENT IN THE CLUNY MUSEUM, PARIS, WHERE IT IS CLASSIFIED AS ITALIAN 16TH CENTURY.

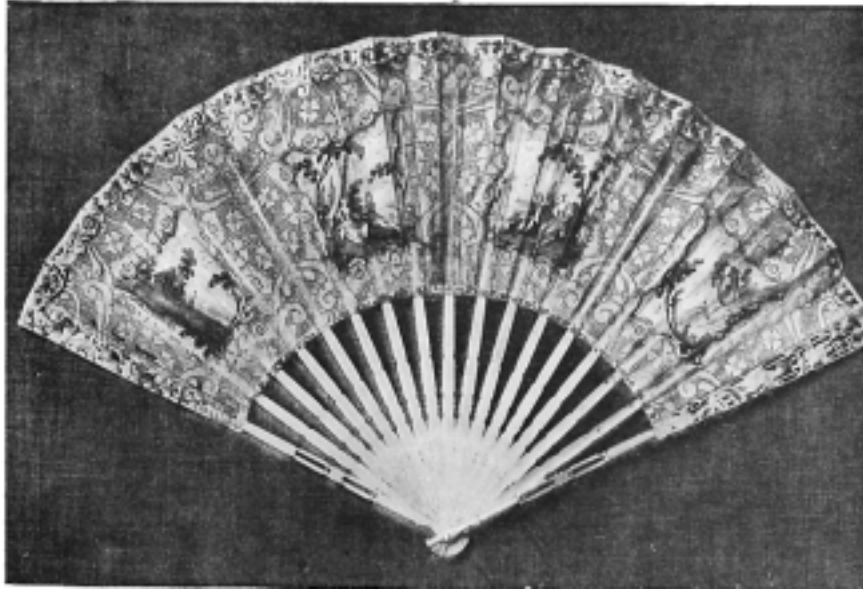


FIG. 7b PIERCED TOILE AND PAINTED FAN

THE MINIATURES ARE EXQUISITELY FINE. THE PATTERN, RESEMBLING THE EARLY ENGLISH PIERCED PAPER FANS, IS EVIDENTLY MADE BY WETTING THE TOILE, PINNING THE PATTERN, WHILE WET, TO A BOARD, AND WHEN DRY, EXTRACTING THE PINS, THUS GIVING THE PIERCED PAPER EFFECT. UNUSUAL. FRENCH, EARLY 18TH CENTURY.



FIG. 8

FAN

FRENCH, LATE XVIII CENTURY. FROM THE COLLECTION OF MRS. DE WITT CLINTON COHEN.  
LOUIS XVI FAN WITH PAPER PERFORATED MOUNT



FIG. 9

LADY WITH A HARP

PRICKED PAPER. ENGLISH, END OF THE XVIII CENTURY. REPRODUCED BY PERMISSION FROM LOCH'S PINS AND PINCUSHIONS, PUBLISHED BY LONGMANS, GREEN & CO. AN EXCELLENT EXAMPLE OF THE DILIGENCE AND PATIENCE EXPENDED ON A PASTIME.



FIG. 10                      PAPER HANDKERCHIEF  
FRENCH, XIX CENTURY. METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART. THE FLORAL DESIGN  
IN THE CORNER HAS BEEN STAMPED ON IN COLORS, WHILE THE BORDER HAS  
BEEN PERFORATED IN OBVIOUS IMITATION OF LACE EDGING.



FIG. 11 PAGE WITH PAPER LACE BORDER  
FROM "LES JOYAUX," ILLUSTRATED BY GAVARNI, PARIS, C. 1845