

*Published under the Sanction of the Science and Art Department.*

STUDIES FROM THE MUSEUMS.

HAND-MADE LACES

FROM THE

SOUTH KENSINGTON MUSEUM.

EDITED BY

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## HAND-MADE LACES.

THE accompanying photographs have been made from hand-made laces, which have been selected for their beauty and completeness, as characteristic specimens from the comprehensive and representative collection in the South Kensington Museum. They also illustrate typical methods of lace making, and are, therefore, referred to in the following remarks upon various distinctly marked branches of lace-making.

Briefly described, lace making is the twisting, plaiting, and looping together of threads into an ornamental textile, the principal effect of which is secured by the contrasting of close textures with open spaces. Net might be instanced as the simplest lace, for it consists of threads twisted and looped or knotted together in such a way as to form a succession of cross lines, and so give the effect of a series of perforated or open diamond, circular, or hexagonal shapes. Again, although a fringe of loose separate threads is clearly not a lace, its threads may be intertwined or knotted together into various cross line or trellis patterns, with the result that we get a simple lace-like fabric. From the earliest historic times, such as those of the Egyptians, the Assyrians, the Greeks and the Romans, different nettings and plaited and knotted fringes have been known. But apparently for such things no ornamental effects other than the simple ones produced by crossed threads or cords, were sought for by those nations. And it is not until the sixteenth century that the methods above alluded to come to be employed in the service of more elaborate ornaments suited for use as dainty trimmings to costume and household linens, &c. As a specialised art, therefore, lace making was not practised until the sixteenth century. From that period onwards we become supplied with renderings in twisted, plaited, and looped threads of all sorts of ornamental compositions, into which scrolls, floral, human and animal forms are introduced.

The laces thus made are ornamental thread work of a character quite distinct from that of embroidery upon a given material. There are, however, classes of embroidery the ornamental effects of which are similar to those of laces. As an example of a *lace-like* work, let us refer to Plate II; this gives us a bed cover composed of a number of squares of net separated from one another and framed with bands of linen. The net has served as the foundation into which patterns have been darned with a needle. The bands of linen have somewhat of a lace appearance, for the pattern in them consists of interstices made by cutting out little pieces from the linen. In both cases, however, a woven material, a net and a linen, is the basis of the operations. Let us now turn to Plate I; here we have a series of rosettes, small scrolls, tulips and other flowers made quite independently of any ground work like a woven material. The threads fastened together to make these various devices are coloured silk gimps, and metallic threads. This specimen is a true representative of *guipure*, and I call attention to this because the word *guipure* is familiarly used by lace amateurs to describe other quite different classes of lace.

Plate III gives us a linen table cloth variously embroidered, but further enriched with insertions of narrow bands of geometrical pattern, and with a scalloped edging. Now the band of insertion and the scalloped edging are laces in the sense already defined. They differ in make from the *guipure* of Plate I. They also differ in make from one another. The bands of insertion are made with a needle and principally by means of button hole stitches. The scalloped edging is of threads twisted and plaited together, but not with a needle. We have, in this specimen, therefore, two distinct methods of making lace; and it is upon these two distinct methods of work that the classification of laces into needlepoint and pillow or bobbin laces, depends. And here may be given short descriptions of the methods of making needlepoint and pillow or bobbin laces.

### NEEDLEPOINT LACE.

For needlepoint laces the pattern is drawn in outline upon a piece of parchment or stout paper: the parchment is then fastened to a corresponding bit of linen: it is then ready for the lacemaker, who begins by fastening a thread along this outline, and so constructs a skeleton thread pattern on the surface of the paper or parchment. The thread skeleton pattern is held down to the face of the parchment by small stitches taken through the parchment and linen. The thread skeleton pattern is then closely overcast with fine threads in button hole stitch and its variations; and the intervening portions of the skeleton pattern are filled in according to the indications on the pattern by overcasting threads in a similar way. When the entire design has been thus constructed in needlework, it is turned over on to its face; between the parchment and its linen backing a razor or knife is passed so as to sever the threads used in fastening the thread skeleton pattern to the face of the pattern. This operation consequently releases the completed lace work from the parchment pattern, which is available for use in making another similar bit of lace. It is impossible within the present prescribed limits to write in detail of the numerous modifications of this needlework process, which have been invented by lacemakers in order to produce such rich and solid laces as those shown in Plates VII to XIV, or such filmy laces as those in Plates XV, XX and XXI. The modifications arose and were perfected in the course of years of labour throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, as degrees of ingenuity and skill possessed by lacemakers of different countries successively acted and re-acted upon one another.

The first needlepoint laces were produced in Italy early in the sixteenth century. They were termed "*punto in aria*," or points in the air. This designation is to be found in Venetian pattern books of that period, and possibly the first use of the title "*punto in aria*" occurs in the patterns for all sorts of needlework published in 1528, by Antonio Tagliente. An apparently obvious interpretation of "*punto in aria*" is needlepoint work done independently of a material foundation—done, in picturesque language, in the air. The ornamental character of these, the earliest points in air, is geometric. The patterns for them are, according to the pattern books, open squares 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. This may be verified by an examination of one of the little squares in the bands of insertion to the table cloth of Plate III. Now, it is to be observed that this type of simple geometric ornament in thread work was also known some few years earlier, that is, at the end of the fifteenth century. It was called "*punto a reticello*," or "*reticella*," and was worked upon linen. The feature in this earlier phase of the production of geometric ornament in thread work, is the employment of linen as the starting foundation of the work. Threads were withdrawn or pulled out of the linen to form the open spaces which the "*reticella*" was to adorn. Samplers of the early part of the sixteenth century furnish instances of this drawn linen *reticella*. The undrawn threads, designedly left in the open square spaces, are overcast with buttonhole stitches. The effect of the work is identical with that of the geometric

patterned needlepoint lace, or early "*punt' in aria*;" and, as may have been gathered, the same "*reticella*" pattern are equally suited to both classes of drawn linen and needlepoint lace. The drawing out of the threads, by means of which the reticulations necessary for "*reticella*" patterns were produced, was possibly rather more laborious than the construction in threads of skeleton reticulations; but the transition from the one method of work to the other was effected in the ordinary course of things, without attracting peculiar attention. It is, however, important to note that the skilful needlemaker who constructed skeleton reticulations in threads upon a parchment, created the parent needlepoint lace from which the family is descended. The principal classes of needlepoint laces are as follows:—

1. *Punto in aria*, usually denotes the simpler patterned needlepoint laces, from 1528 until the seventeenth century.
2. *Punto tagliato a foliami*, is a term given to scroll and flowery patterns of the middle of the sixteenth century, wrought in embroidered and cut linen. Towards the end of the century and the beginning of the seventeenth century the patterns known as *punti tagliati a foliami* were also worked in needlepoint lace, and then became classifiable as—
3. *Venetian Rose, or Raised Points*, of which there are various degrees of bold and delicate work. The most delicate and elaborated of the Venetian rose point laces are fancifully called by the French, *Point Neige*, or Snow Point, on account of the massing of ranks or clustering of little loops upon the blossoms in the patterns. Venice was the principal producer of the foregoing three classes of needlepoint lace. In the seventeenth century the refinements in making needlepoint laces were adopted by the French, and about 1650 the Royal Manufacture of French laces was started at the instigation of Louis XIV and his Minister, Colbert, in various towns of France. The laces made at these towns were named after them, whence we have the *Points de Sedan; Points d'Alençon; Points d'Argentan*, &c. These laces exhibit many phases of design and variations of texture, the earlier pieces being more substantial than the later ones of the 18th century. As prototypes of these latter, we have a remarkably delicate and filmy lace made at Venice about the end of the 17th century, known as *Point de Venise à réseau*, as well as a sort of imitation *Point d'Alençon* called *Point de Burano*.

Needlepoint lace was made at Brussels in the 18th century, but generally that lace was partly of needlepoint and partly of pillow make, the meshed ground being of pillow work and the ornamental floral sprays of needlepoint work. These, briefly, are the notable needlepoint laces. Adaptations of one or other of them have been and are made at the present day at Venice and Burano, at Alençon, Bayeux in France, Ghent in Belgium, in Bohemia, in Devonshire and in Ireland. Where the industry of needle lace making has been carefully organized, local characteristics have arisen, and in this connexion one may mention the laces of Ireland made at Youghal, Kenmare, New Ross and Innishmaesaint.

## PILLOW OR BOBBIN LACE.

We now turn to the second class of lace making, namely: the bobbin or pillow lace making. For such lace, a pattern has to be first drawn in clear outline upon a piece of stout paper or parchment. The pattern is then pricked with pin holes, and fastened down to a cushion or pillow. These pin holes guide the lace maker where she should place the pins, around and between which she plaits and twists the threads of her bobbins. The loose ends of the bobbin threads are fastened at the upper end of the parchment, so that the bobbins hang over the parchment. The lace maker then commences to throw the bobbins one over the other, thus intertwisting the threads; and as she comes to the pin holes of the pattern she inserts pins so as to give the required direction to the various intertwistings. If we look into the scalloped edging (*Merletti à piombini*) to the table cloth on Plate III, we may gain a rough notion of the intertwistings required in producing such lace. But on turning to Plate VI, we may see that although the bars between the scroll forms might be made by intertwistings, such as were employed for the edging in Plate III, we find that a different character of intertwisting has been employed for producing the flat, bold scroll forms, the texture of which resembles fine cambric. Plate XVI, with its ground of meshes, suggests other modifications and adaptations of the intertwisting and plaiting operations; whilst subtleties of manufacture far beyond those of earlier pillow laces are to be seen in the examples given in Plates XVIII, XIX, XXII to XXIV and XXVI to XXVIII.

The meshed grounds of pillow or bobbin laces vary a good deal, and to appreciate this it is well worth while to study the different makes of them under a magnifying glass. Meshed grounds seem to have been invented—so far as pillow lace is concerned—about the latter half of the 17th century, and the rivalry between different lace-making centres in Flanders and France, such as Valenciennes, Mechlin, Brussels, Lille, engendered local or special makes of meshed grounds or "*roseaux*." Without diagrams it is somewhat difficult to describe the varieties of meshed grounds. That of Valenciennes consisted chiefly of a lozenge or diamond-shaped mesh, each of the four sides of which being of four threads plaited together five or six times. Mechlin ground consisted—indeed it consists at the present day—of hexagonal meshes, two opposite sides of which are of four threads plaited together three times; the other sides are each of two threads twisted once round one another. The Brussels meshed ground is similar to the Mechlin, with the difference, however, that the two plaited sides of the Brussels mesh are of four threads plaited together four (instead of three) times, thereby making the plaited sides of Brussels longer than the corresponding sides of the Mechlin mesh. The meshes of the Lille ground are of twisted threads only, no part of the ground being plaited. In pillow laces, plaiting and twisting threads are the characteristic features of their production, they are well defined in contradistinction to the buttonhole and looped work of needlepoint laces.

The principal pillow or bobbin laces may be enumerated thus:—

1. *Merletti à piombini*.—Simple Vandyke wiry looking trimmings of plaited and twisted threads, made in the 16th century, with 12, 24 and 26 *piombini* or bobbins to a piece 6 or 9 inches in length.
2. *Flemish and Italian* pillow or bobbin laces of the 17th century, in which the texture of the holder forms in the pattern is of woven or cambric character, the ground between the patterns usually consisting of small bars or ties. Bobbin-made laces of this class are frequently called *guipures*. The so-called *guipures* of Milan, Bruges, Brussels and Honiton are well known. The same patterns as were used for the *guipures* would also be employed, with a meshed ground instead of one of small bars or ties; and such laces were known as laces "*à réseau*." Differences small as these were sufficient to characterize historic classes of laces like the *points de Flandres* and the *points d'Angleterre*. The *points de Flandres* were termed *guipures*, the *points d'Angleterre* were laces *à réseau*. The former were made chiefly for French and Flemish wearers, the latter for English.

Soon after the middle of the seventeenth century the laces with meshed grounds, made with hundreds of bobbins, became more common, and it is at this time that the Valenciennes, Brussels, Mechlin and Lille pillow laces come to the fore.

## PATTERNS.

Notwithstanding the two distinctive methods of making laces, the patterns for both needlepoint and pillow laces are often much alike, not only in respect of scheme but also in detail. Now the development of lace patterns from those in which very simple forms occur, to others in which more ornate and elaborate shapes are noticeable, is an interesting study. The vagaries of fashion in devising uses for laces exerted as considerable an influence in the pattern development as did the intricacies in the making of the laces whether by the hobbin or by the needle. The possibilities of a pattern were naturally more important, when it was a question of a large altar frontal or a deep flounce, than when, at an earlier period, it would only be a question of an inserted band or Vandyked or scalloped bordering an inch or two wide. Refinements in spinning threads, in making pins, &c., concurred in stimulating ingenious devices on the part of the lace maker.

It is often said that the maker of laces has been or should be also the designer of the patterns for the laces. But, however true this may be in respect of the simplest patterns, it is not so as regards involved patterns. From the 16th century forward, patterns of ornamental beauty have always been designed by ornamentists having knowledge of the composition of ornament, and of the materials for which they were called upon to design. Lace pattern books were published in considerable quantities in Italy, France, and Germany, during the 16th and 17th century, and from these the lace makers worked. In the 17th and 18th centuries, when lace patterns became much more elaborate, amongst the French designers of them, there were such ornamentists as Berain and Le Brun. In a measure the designers are to the lace makers what authors are to printers. Few publishers would try and drive a trade in the sale of literature by relying upon what their printers chose to write. And on the other hand, few authors would turn their untraded hands to setting type and pulling from it editions of their own writings.

In earlier examples of laces—such for instance, as the bands of insertion and the scalloped border in Plate III—the principal ornamental devices are geometric in character, and consist of squares, circles, and such like. The details are not distinct from a ground—as is the case in laces like those in Plate VI, where the scroll forms and the bars of the ground between them, are distinct one from the other. The lower specimen in Plate VII gives us another example of this phase in patterns. Here we have a ground composed of a series of cross lines or trellis. The development of such features may be followed in succeeding plates. In some other phases of pattern development are notable as, for instance, scroll and blossom forms in Plates XIII and XIV. Others such as Plate XI give us development in both scroll and ground work. With a pattern like that of Plate XVI, we have entered upon an altogether fresh stage of lace designing, the ground having become more like an even meshed net, the details of the ornament are fanciful in shape, some of them being close imitations of flower and leaf forms. These forms led to the use of ornamental fillings, employed to enrich a leaf or a blossom, as may be noted in the two outer specimens of Plate XV. Often, too, such fillings were placed in panels or spaces intervening between floral devices; see centre specimen Plate XX and left hand lappet on Plate XXVI. Thus, from geometric figures, the pattern designer passed to scrolls, and from scrolls to naturalistic plant ornaments. Broadly speaking, the geometric patterns for lace belong to the 16th century, the conventional scrolls to the 17th, and the floral ornamentation to the 18th century. Apart from recognizing these more salient characteristics of classes of lace patterns, the student of such patterns does not of course omit to analyze and understand the plan or scheme of each pattern. Some involve merely the regular repetition of the same device, others consist of various groups, interchanged and balanced, the details in each group being arranged according to some predetermined plan. As with any composition, musical, literary, artistic, so with designing patterns for lace, certain rules must be known or felt before success in it can be approached.

## DESCRIPTIVE TERMS OF DETAILS IN LACES.

The component parts of a piece of lace, irrespectively of its special make, have distinguishing names, and the following explanations of the more important, including the French terms in some instances, are now given.

**Bride.**—A small bar or tye, which serves to hold the details of a pattern together when an intervening ground of meshes or ornamental fillings is not used. (See varieties of bars in Plates VI, VII, XI, &c.)

**Cordonnet.**—The outline to ornamental forms consisting of (1) a single thread (as in Mechlin pillow lace, see Plate XXIII); or (2) of several threads plaited together (as for certain leaves and flowers in Brussels pillow lace, see Brussels specimen on Plate XXIII); or (3) of a compactly worked and slightly raised line (as in Points d'Alençon, needlepoint work, see Plate XX).

**Clothing or gimp—toile** in French.—The close cambric-like portion of a lace pattern (see, for instance, Plates VI, XIV, XV, XVI, &c.). The *Punti a relicella* and the *merletti a piombini* (Plate III) have no clothing.


**Fillings—modes**, in French.—The earliest forms of these are to be seen in the Italian needle-point laces, the *punti tagliati a foliageami*, where they are used to fill the centre of a flower or part of a leaf (see, for instance, such details in cuff on Plate XII). More elaborate fillings will be found in the specimens on Plate XV. The centre and right hand lappets of Plate XXI display the use as a ground of a *mode* such as sparingly occurs in centre lappet of Plate XX. *Modes* are also used freely in specimens on Plate XXII.

**Picots.**—Minute loops worked on the edge of a *bride* or tye, as on those in specimens of Plate XII. Similar Picots are used for enriching other parts, such as blossom devices of raised lace, as in Plates X and XI.

**Réseau.**—Ground of meshes in contradistinction to a ground of *brides* or tyes, see, for instance, Plate XV, Plate XVII and Plate XXVI, &c.

## USES OF LACE.

There is one further aspect of laces to be alluded to, and that is the uses to which they have been put. At first they were but narrow bands of insertion and scalloped or Vandyke edgings, for cuffs and high standing and wide spreading ruffs. It was then customary to speak of the indented edgings as "points," and in France as "dantelles." Shapes of ruffs changed, and falling collars superseded the ruffs. This is especially the case about the time of Louis XIII of France and our Charles I. At this time, too, the lace trimmings were introduced into the bodies and flounces of women's dresses. As the texture of the laces grew lighter so laces came to be used more abundantly as fabrics for making complete flounces, loose ample sleeves, veils, lappets, and so forth. Corresponding changes may be noted in the ecclesiastical, as distinct from the lay, use of laces for costumes. Laces have also largely been used for house purposes, as in table cloths, napkins, coverlets, and curtains, and a notion of the later extravagant uses of lace in this direction may be gathered from such an instance as that quoted about a typical French Duchess and *grande dame* of the early eighteenth century, whose coverlet was of *Point de Venise*, whilst the lengths of *Points d'Argentan* for her sheets were worth at least 40,000 crowns. There is a marked change now-a-days in quality of texture and make of much so-called lace. What dwelling, palace, or cottage is without its Nottingham machine-made curtains? These, indeed, whilst possessing an effect of hand-made lace are not to be mistaken for it any more than a chromo-lithograph is to be mistaken for the work of the painter. But with machine-woven laces this publication has no concern, the production of such fabrics is an industry of itself, thriving under conditions distinct from those of lace-making by hand.



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ITALIAN—17th Century.



TABLE COVER, made of coloured silk gimps, and gold and silver thread. The pattern of the main portion of this Cover is composed of two varieties of blossom device, repeated in alternations. The edging around the Cover consists of scallops or Vandykes, in each of which is a floral spray, or tulip, or carnation, or rose, &c.

Length, 3 ft. 7½ in. Width, 2 ft. 5½ in. South Kensington Museum.

Reg. No. 57.—'69.

## ITALIAN—16th Century.



BED COVER, composed of a series of squares of "laci," (*punto a maglia quadra*) or netting darned with representations of the months of the year, male and female heads, figures, and groups; between the squares and forming the outer border are bands of linen, with simple ornaments repeated and cut into them. The designs for the darning on net are similar to those published by F. Vinciolo, who was employed at the

French Court at the time of Catherine de Medicis.

Length, 6 ft. 7 in. Width, 4 ft. 7 in. South Kensington Museum.

Reg. No. 109.—84.



TABLE CLOTH of linen, with a deep border of "*lavis*," set between linen embroidered, with unbleached thread, in feather and satin stitches. Narrow insertions of "*Reticella*" needle-point lace run along each side of the border of "*lavis*." Beyond the outer band of linen embroidery is a scalloped edging of plaited and twisted threads, "*Merletti a piombini*."

Length, 5 ft. 7 in. Width, 3 ft. 5½ in. South Kensington Museum.  
Reg. No. 1,041.—71.



GERMAN-17th Century.



Part of a HANGING of "netz," or netting darned with ornament grouped in vertical panels, which have been joined together, and so form a well-distributed and balanced pattern, the main features of which are boldly curving decorated stems, inclosing pointed oval compartments, up the centre and on each side of which are narrow bands of scroll ornaments. Within the spaces bounded and intersected by these stems and bands are leafy and blossoming sprays, sportsmen, birds and animals of the chase, harpies, &c.

Length, 5 ft. 10 in. Width, 2 ft. 11 in. South Kensington Museum.  
Reg. No. 252.-86.

GERMAN—17th Century.

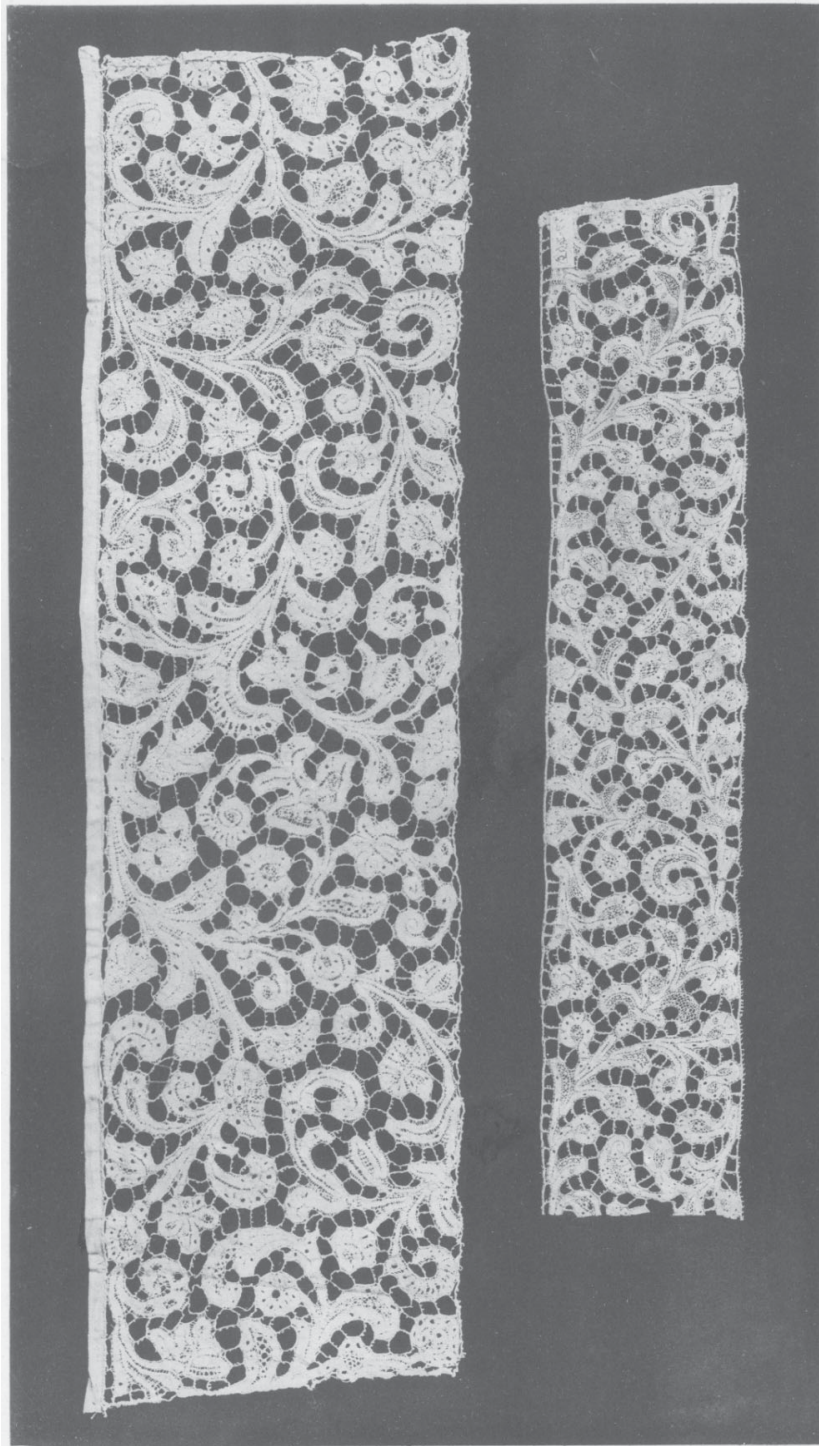


BORDER for a Cloth, of "laels," or netting darned in white and toned threads, with pattern of conventional flowers and other devices.

Length, 5 ft 1 in. Width, 14 in. South Kensington Museum.

Reg. No. 723.—75.

FLEMISH—17th Century.

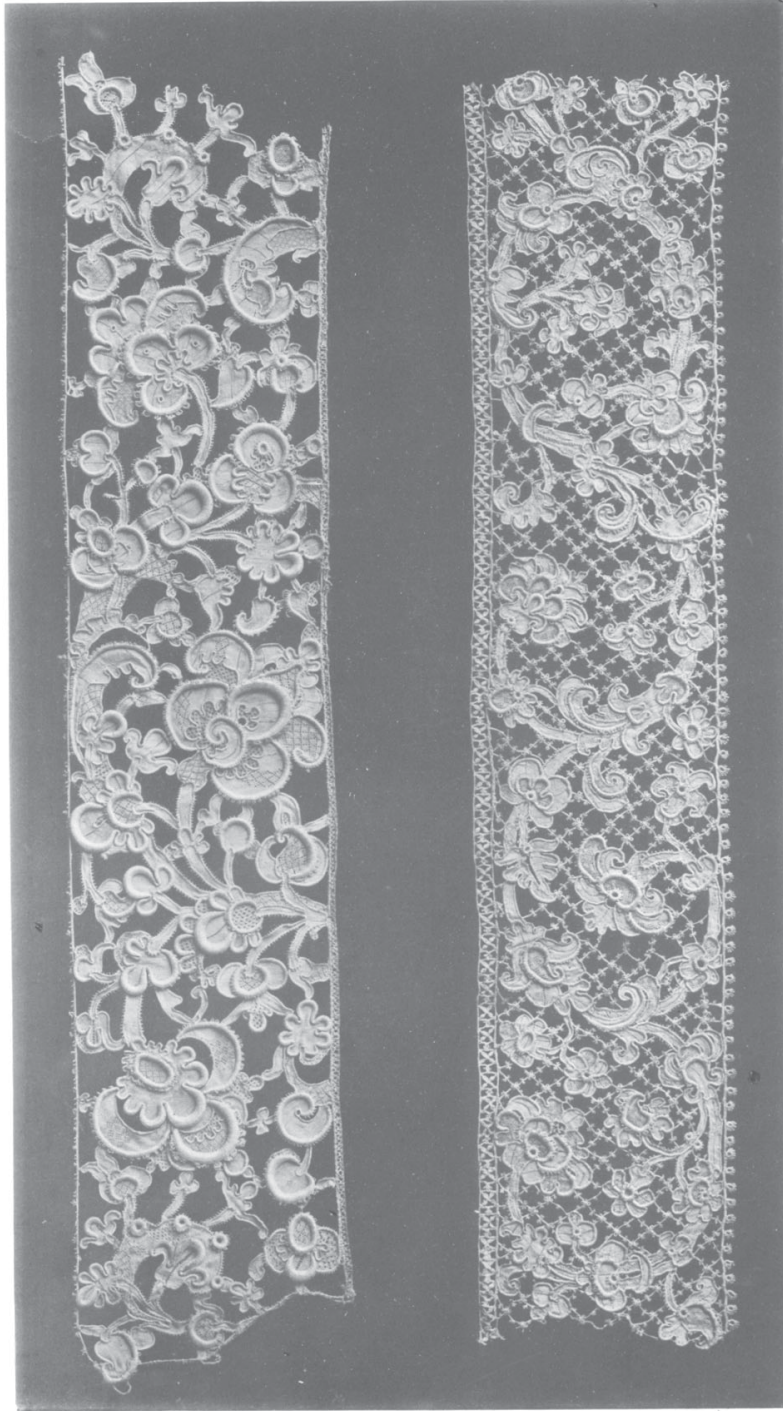


BORDERS of pillow-made Lace, with conventional scroll pattern held together by bars or "*brides ptoises*."  
This sort of lace is usually known as "*Gulpeur de Landres*," and much of it was made at Bruges in the 17th Century.

Length, 2 ft. Width, 7½ in. South Kensington Museum. Length, 1 ft. 6 in. Width, 4½ in.

Ref No. 1,563 -'72. Ref No 592 -'64.

VENETIAN—17th Century.



BORDERS of raised needle-point lace, known as "*Punto tagliato a foliami*," and "*Point de Venise*." Besides the grace and richness of the forms in the upper specimen, which, however, is but a part of a wider lace, its workmanship is of a high order, securing crispness to the compact reliefs, and a noticeable regularity of texture throughout. The lower piece is remarkable for the ground of cross-barring, not frequently to be seen in this class of lace.

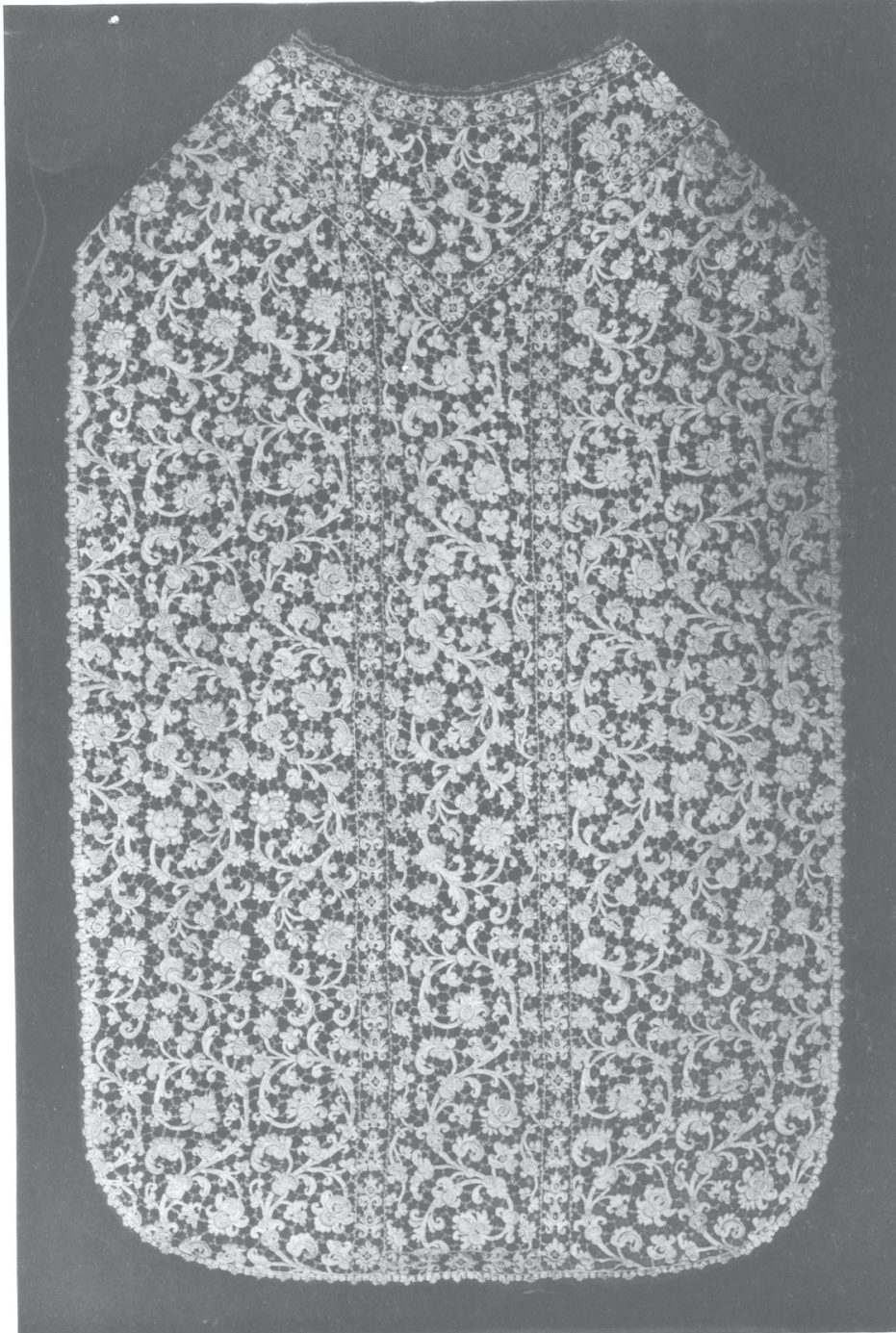
Length, 2 ft. Width, 4½ in. South Kensington Museum.

Reg. No. 847.—53.

Length, 2 ft. Width, 4½ in. South Kensington Museum.

Reg. No. 516.—83.

## VENETIAN—17th Century.



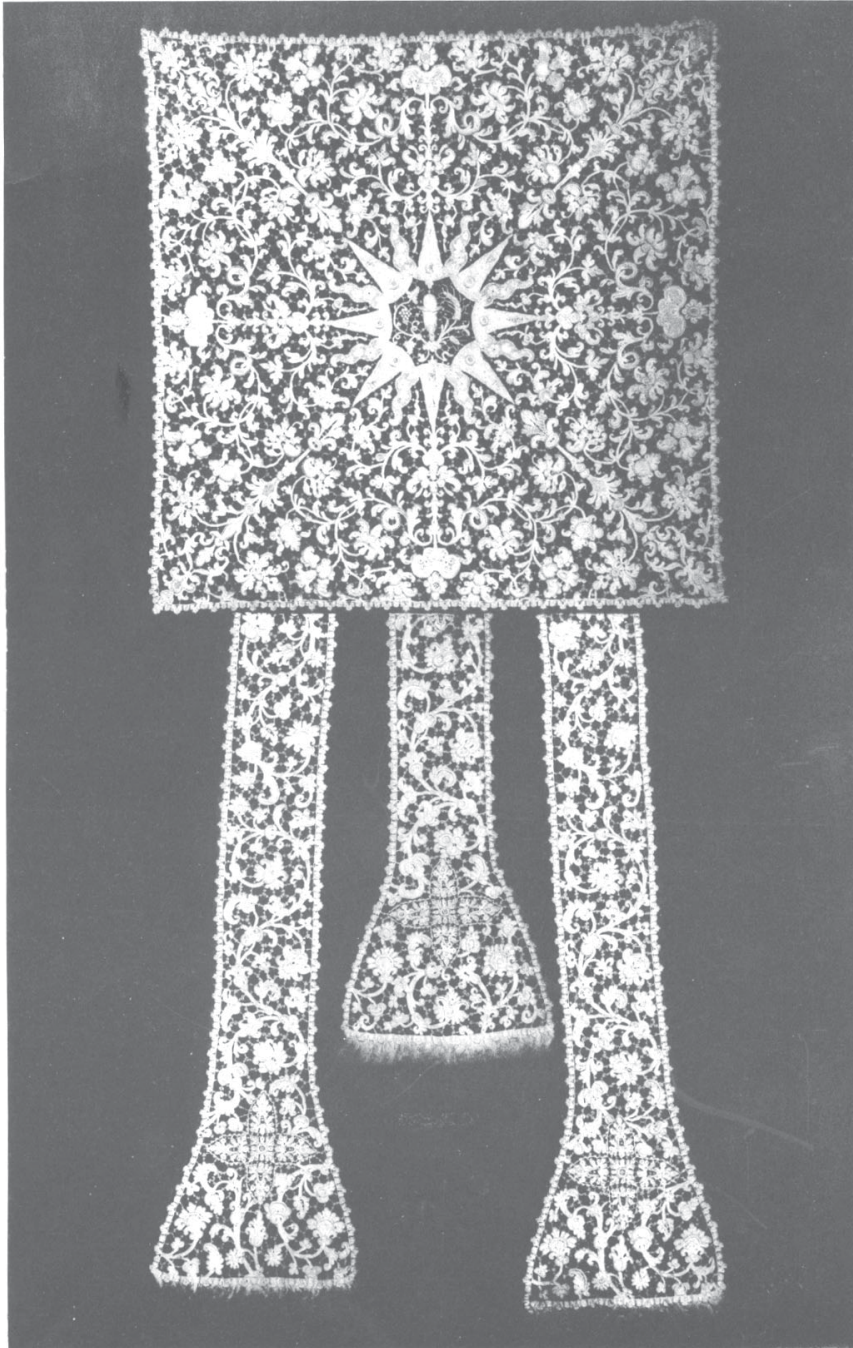
CHASUBLE of raised needle-point lace "*Punto tagliato a follami*," and "*Point de Venise*." The back and front of this vestment are of similar design. A centre band of scroll work is placed between two broader pieces of similar design, shaped to the form of the vestment. The free use of "*plots*," or minute loops, upon the raised portions as well as upon the "*brides*" or bars between the scrolls of the lace, is noticeable.

Length, 3 ft. 5 in. Width, 2 ft. 3½ in. South Kensington Museum.

Reg. 743.—'70.

(See also No. IX.)

VENETIAN—17th Century.



CHALICE COVER. 2 ft.  $\frac{1}{2}$  in. square. Reg. No. 746.—'70. STOLE. Length, 7 ft. 2 in. Width at ends, 9 in. Reg. No. 744.—'70. MANIPLE. Length, 3 ft. 1 in. Width at ends, 9 $\frac{1}{2}$  in. Reg. No. 745.—'70.

These with the Chasuble (No. VIII) form a remarkable and rare set of ecclesiastical vestments of raised needle-point lace, "*Punto tagliato a fogliami*," and "*Point de Venise*." In the centre of the chalice cover will be noticed the chalice and wafer, grapes and wheat ear, surrounded by a halo of tongues of fire and star rays. The planning of the ornament is noticeable and well worth careful study.

South Kensington Museum.

(See also No. VIII.)

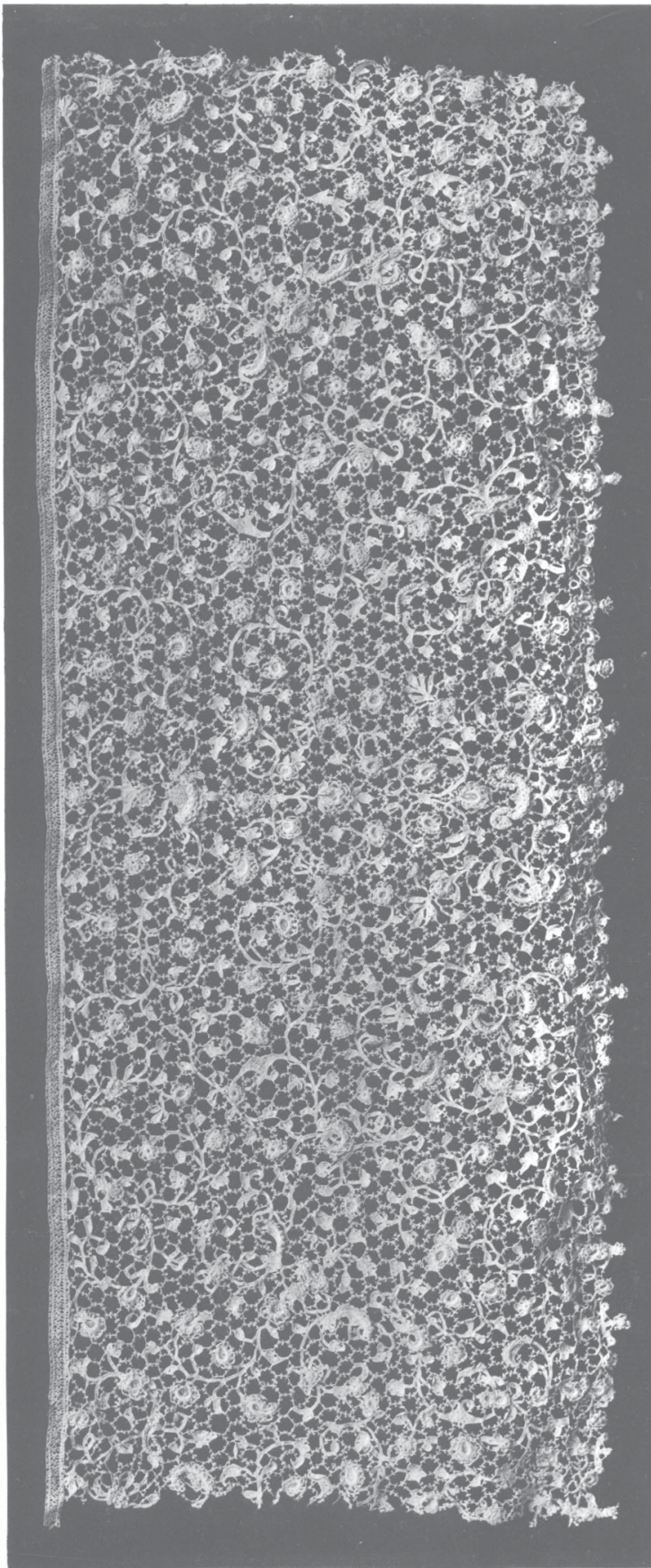
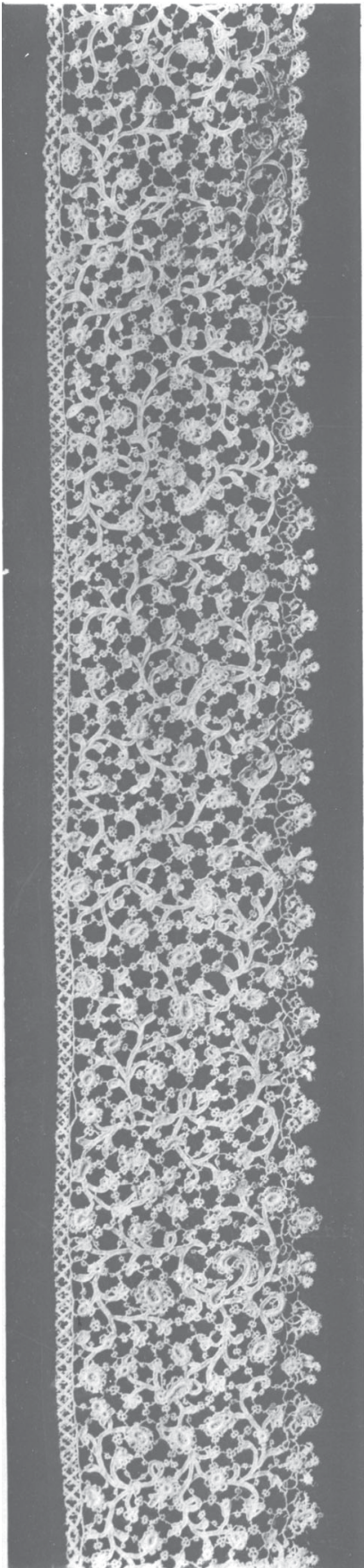
VENETIAN—Second half of 17th Century.



JABOT or COLLAR of raised needle-point lace, "*Punto tagliato a foliami*," and "*Point de Venise*." Fringes of "*pleats*" enrich almost all the raised portions of the work and much of the stems. This specimen ranks with a somewhat similar collar preserved in the Musée de Cluny, Paris.

Length, 3 ft. Width, 7 in. South Kensington Museum.

Reg. No. 848.—'53.



FLOUNCES or BORDERS of raised needle-point lace, of smaller pattern than that of those in Nos. VII, VIII, IX, and X. On account of the profuse clusterings of "points," this class of "*Point de Venise*," is also known as "*Point Neige*," or snowy lace. The ground of hexagonal meshes in the wider specimen is remarkable, and is similar in decorative intention to the ground of smaller hexagons in the flounce of No. XVI.

Length, 17½ in. Width, 7 in. South Kensington Museum.  
Reg. No. 167.—'87.

Length, 16½ in. Width, 3½ in. South Kensington Museum.  
Reg. No. 136.—'68.